

# INDIA FOUNDATION JOURNAL



## Editorial

- Addressing Internal Fault Lines:  
The Need for Societal Awareness - Dhruv C. Katoch

## Focus : G20

- The Group of Twenty Today:  
India's Opportunity to Lead - Rajiv Bhatia &  
Manjeet Kripalani
- India and the G20 Presidency:  
Its Priorities and Challenges - Bhaswati Mukherjee
- Global Climate and Energy Transition:  
A Proposed Agenda for India's G20 Presidency - Jagjeet S. Sareen
- What G20 can do to get the Multilateral  
Institutions in Shape: India's Key Challenge - Subhomoy Bhattacharjee
- The Role of Digital Democracies:  
What India's G20 Presidency Must Underline - Hindol Sengupta
- G20 and Inclusive Green Growth:  
Can India Take It Forward? - Rajeesh Kumar
- The R20: An Inter-Faith Platform in the G20 - Côme Carpentier de Gourdon

## Law and Society

- Cultural Nationalism: Indian Scenario - S R Bhatt

---

## Editorial Board

---



**Swapan Dasgupta**  
Member of Parliament,  
Rajya Sabha



**Sunaina Singh**  
Vice Chancellor,  
Nalanda University



**Shaurya Doval**  
Managing Director, Zeus Caps



**Jagjeet Singh Sareen**  
Director,  
International Solar Alliance



**Mohan Malik**  
Professor of Strategic Studies,  
UAE National Defense College



**Saket Mishra**  
CEO, Venus India Asset  
Finance Pvt. Ltd.



**Come Carpentier**  
Noted Author,  
Distinguished Fellow  
India Foundation

---

## Table of Contents

### Editorial

Addressing Internal Fault Lines: The Need for Societal Awareness .....	<b>Dhruv C. Katoch</b>	3
--	------------------------	---

### FOCUS: G20

The Group of Twenty Today: India's Opportunity to Lead .....	<b>Rajiv Bhatia &amp; Manjeet Kripalani</b>	6
---	---	---

India and the G20 Presidency: Its Priorities and Challenges .....	<b>Bhaswati Mukherjee</b>	15
---	---------------------------	----

Global Climate and Energy Transition— A Proposed Agenda for India's G20 Presidency .....	<b>Jagjeet S. Sareen</b>	24
---	--------------------------	----

What G20 can do to get the Multilateral Institutions in Shape: India's Key Challenge .....	<b>Subhomoy Bhattacharjee</b>	34
---	-------------------------------	----

The Role of Digital Democracies: What India's G20 Presidency Must Underline .....	<b>Hindol Sengupta</b>	41
--	------------------------	----

G20 and Inclusive Green Growth: Can India Take It Forward? .....	<b>Rajeesh Kumar</b>	44
---	----------------------	----

The R20: An Inter-Faith Platform in the G20 .....	<b>Côme Carpentier de Gourdon</b>	53
---	-----------------------------------	----

### Law and Society

Cultural Nationalism: Indian Scenario .....	<b>S R Bhatt</b>	57
---	------------------	----

---

## India Foundation Journal

Vol. III  
Issue No. 6

November-December 2022

Editor  
**Maj Gen (Dr) Dhruv C Katoch**

Copyright © India Foundation Journal

Printed on behalf of India Foundation

Printed at Pearl Printers, C-105,  
Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I,  
New Delhi-110020

Published at India Foundation,  
J-1 and H-1, Ground Floor,  
Upasana Building, 1 Hailey Road,  
Near K.G. Marg, New Delhi - 110001

RNI No.- DELENG/2020/79244  
ISSN 2347-1522

Annual Subscription - Rs.3000/-  
Single copy - Rs.500/-

For advertising details contact  
Phone: 011- 41654836 / 43012351,  
[journal@indiafoundation.in](mailto:journal@indiafoundation.in)  
[www.indiafoundation.in](http://www.indiafoundation.in)

## About India Foundation

*India Foundation is an independent research centre focussed on the issues, challenges, and opportunities of the Indian polity. The Foundation believes in understanding contemporary India and its global context through the civilizational lens of a society on the forward move. Based on the principles of independence, objectivity and academic rigour, the Foundation aims at increasing awareness and advocating its views on issues of both national and international importance.*

*With a team of dedicated professionals based at its office in New Delhi, the Foundation works with partners and associates both in India and overseas to further its stated objectives.*

## About India Foundation Journal

*The India Foundation Journal is led by an Editorial Board of eminent scholars and leaders from various spheres of Indian public life. The bi-monthly journal covers a wide range of issues pertinent to the national interest, mainly focusing on international relations, national security, legal and constitutional issues and other issues of social, religious and political significance. The journal seeks articles from scholars with the intent of creating a significant body of knowledge with a nationalist perspective and establish a recognised forum for debates involving academicians and policymakers.*

---

## **Addressing Internal Fault Lines: The Need for Societal Awareness**

Dhruv C Katoch\*

---

**T**he information age has truly empowered the individual to levels which were unimaginable even at the turn of the century, barely two decades ago. Today, even individuals at the lower end of the economic spectrum carry out digital financial transactions with consummate ease, converse in social groups such as FaceBook and WhatsApp and are reasonably well informed of current happenings in their immediate neighbourhood as well as on issues which impact the country. The digital revolution has also empowered people through schemes such as the 'Jan Dhan Yojana,' which has led to financial inclusion for millions of households who earlier had no access to banking facilities.<sup>1</sup> "Ayushman Bharat," a flagship scheme of Government of India that was launched in 2017, is focussed on providing Universal Health Coverage (UHC) to the masses, with a commitment to "leave no one behind."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, India's Covid vaccine programme is based on digital technology, through the digital platform, 'CO-WIN'. This user-friendly mobile app for recording vaccine data is working as a beneficiary management platform having various modules.<sup>3</sup>

The benefits of digitisation are immense especially in the field of governance. However, just as the smart phone and the internet have empowered the individual, the ubiquitous nature of information technology has also thrown up a range of opportunities for their misuse through disinformation, distortion of the truth, false flag

operations, spoofing, spam mail, and the like, to create divisions and turmoil within society. The Information Environment (IE) is truly global in nature, with information flows cutting across physical and artificial boundaries and impacting all segments of society. This is both enabling as well as has potential for misuse. The wide range and diversity of actors in the global IE has great aggregate influence, much akin to that of a state and more often, even far in excess of what the modern state exercises. Non-state actors have also made their presence felt and seek to create influence in furtherance of their objectives. Towards this end, influencers are used, who unwittingly or otherwise lend their name to a social cause or movement, sometimes unknowing of the real intent of the provocateurs and at others, because of monetary inducement or being ideologically aligned to the cause. Non-state actors also use the media and exploit advances made in information communication technology to undermine governments and exert influence in furtherance of their aims.<sup>4</sup>

An example of the above is the efforts made by interested groups to undermine the BJP led NDA government ever since it won the Lok Sabha elections in 2014. A concerted campaign was launched by motivated groups in the months following the 2014 elections to showcase India as an intolerant nation. Here, an attempt was made to create religious discord by highlighting certain

---

*\*Major General Dhruv C Katoch is Director, India Foundation and Editor, India Foundation Journal.*

---

isolated incidences of vandalism that had taken places in churches as deliberate targeted attacks, when in fact they were nothing more than cases of petty theft, the likes of which were routine and had taken place in earlier years too. When viewed holistically with data analysis over the past ten years, there was no upward spiral of such cases, as alleged.<sup>5</sup> Such incidents had also happened with Hindu places of worship but that fact was glossed over. By the time the truth finally came out, India's image stood tarnished, with even the then US President, Mr Barack Obama, who had come to India as the Chief Guest for the 2015 Republic Day Parade, making remarks on 'religious intolerance' and repeating the same on his return to Washington. The vicious attacks against India were motivated and designed to pressure India on its foreign policy and domestic policy options, with religious intolerance being used as a tool to make India conform to Western dictates.

The subsequent years saw protests on various issues, fanned by interested groups exploiting the social, audio-visual and print media. The year 2016 witnessed a series of agitations by student groups, who shouted slogans in support of a terrorist who was convicted for his role in the attack on India's Parliament in 2001 and who was executed in 2013! The agitating students, supported by left wing and islamist groups, raised slogans seeking the break up of India and calling the act of execution of the convicted terrorist an act of murder. Similar agitations continued on various pretexts over the next two years. Then in 2019 there were huge protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which brought parts of the nation's capital to a standstill, peaking in February 2020, to tarnish the nation's image when US President Donald

Trump was visiting India.<sup>6</sup> And in September 2020, massive protests broke out against the three farm laws passed by Parliament, which peaked during the Republic Day celebrations in 2021. In all these protests there was a hidden agenda of undermining the elected Indian government, India's democratic framework as well as India's composite cultural ethos. Information was weaponised and used to draw crowds to disrupt normal life. This remains part of the agenda of external forces to exacerbate internal issues and fault lines. In this, segments of the opposition parties within India lend a helping hand in their bid to get back to power. In the end, it is the people of India who suffer.

The desire to shape opinions remains the key motivator for organising mass movements against the elected government. This suits the agenda of foreign powers who view India's rise as a potential threat to their economic interests. It is therefore incumbent on the state to preempt hostile agendas by anticipating what disruptors might do and taking preventive action well in time. This can be done by shaping public perceptions through a long-term vision and with strategic patience.

A potential flashpoint is the current controversy created by the Muslim clergy wherein they seek an alteration to the rules with respect to wearing of school uniforms, so as to allow Muslim girls to wear the hijab. This is a clever ploy by the Muslim clergy to keep Muslim women under subjugation, by invoking their right to study and also invoking their constitutional right to religious freedom. The narrative being spun is that Muslim girls are being denied their right to wear the hijab. This is patently false as there are no restrictions on Muslim women to wear any dress they choose. The restriction is only in the classrooms where the

---

children have to abide by the school dress code. Comparisons with a Sikh male child who wears a turban in class are frivolous as the hijab is not mandated by the Quran to be worn by women and is also not an essential religious practise. The larger danger in interfering with school dress code rules is that if the hijab is permitted, then the Muslim girl child will lose her right of choice, as the clergy will use the power of religious coercion to force her to wear the hijab as a necessary condition to be accepted in their society. This is retrograde and a push back to medievalism.

Another social media favourite of certain groups of people is targeting Diwali and other Hindu festivals. The former always comes up for attack on grounds of pollution, with claims that firecrackers pollute the air. What they fail to address is the poor air quality throughout the year, which has nothing to do with Diwali. Throughout the year, the air quality index (AQI) levels in Delhi and the NCR remain in the poor to very poor category. Diwali is celebrated only on one day and is not a contributory factor to the year long pollution, though the AQI levels do rise for a day after Diwali. Attacks on Diwali are thus motivated and designed to create communal friction. The pollution causing factors which should be addressed are construction activities and vehicular traffic which account for

most of the pollution throughout the year. As a long-term measure, an efficient bus service within Delhi and the NCR can reduce the use of private vehicles by about 50 to 75 percent. For that, perhaps an additional five thousand buses need to be added to the existing fleet. This preferably should be run by the private sector and not the government. A long-term ban on new residential construction would also be useful on two counts. One, it would mitigate to a great extent, the particle pollutants that escape into the air. Two, it would halt the unchecked population growth in the NCR through migration, which is creating a severe strain on the existing infrastructure. Population control has also to be a part of the larger picture to control pollution levels as human beings are the only polluters in the planet. Suitable narratives which are gender neutral and religion and caste neutral need to be propagated to get wide acceptance from all segments of society and to change behaviour patterns. A proactive stance in shaping perceptions will go a long way in reducing friction and in addressing societal fault lines to prevent internal and external hostile forces from creating disruptions in society. This assumes importance as the spotlight will be on India for the coming year, when it takes on the Presidency of the G20 this December.

### **References:**

---

- 1 <https://pmjdy.gov.in>
- 2 <https://nha.gov.in/PM-JAY>
- 3 <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1679181>
- 4 <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/making-sense-information-environment>
- 5 <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/false-church-attack-claims-to-humiliate-bjp-govt-says-vhp/>
- 6 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/us-president-donald-trump-in-delhi-key-points/articleshow/74296423.cms>



## The Group of Twenty Today: India's Opportunity to Lead

Rajiv Bhatia\* and Manjeet Kripalani\*

### Introduction

India is readying to commence its year-long presidency of the influential Group of Twenty (G20) nations on 1 December 2022, and public interest in all matters relating to the multilateral economic governance institution has begun to grow. What is this group, how did it gain prominence, and why is India's presidency in 2022-23 so important?

The G20 is the premier global forum for dialogue and cooperation on global economic and financial issues. It is over two decades old and holds the attention of experts and students alike for its intricate interaction between the geo-economics and geopolitics of the contemporary world. It is a unique grouping in which developing and developed countries come together with equal status. Understanding its mission, past trajectory, institutional mechanisms, work methods, and the multiplicity of challenges it addresses, is critical today and requires a serious examination.

What is and what is not the G20, therefore, is relevant. The G20 is "not a treaty-based multilateral organisation capable of taking legally binding decisions, much less implementing them," says Stewart M. Patrick, Director of the International Institutions and Global Governance programmes at the Council on Foreign Relations, New York. "It is a consultative forum that allows the world's most important advanced and emerging economies

to harmonise their approaches, when so inclined, to the world's biggest challenges."<sup>1</sup> The G20 today represents 85% of global GDP, 75% of international trade, and 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the world's population."<sup>2</sup>

This essay traces the emergence and evolution of G20 as a global forum of vital importance; explains how it works through its two principal tracks and hundreds of meetings of ministers, officials, and non-governmental experts as well as the annual Leaders' summits, and finally, decodes the context, implications, priorities, and challenges for the forthcoming Indian presidency.

### Creation and Evolution

The G20, at the summit level, came into being after the western financial and sub-prime crisis of 2008 when the advanced economies led by the Group of 7 (G7) had to be bailed out of a potential bankruptcy by the developing countries, particularly India and China. That gave these two emerging economies and some other key developing countries (Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia) a seat each in the decision-making councils on global economy and finance so far dominated by the advanced economies. It reflected the shift of a chunk of economic power and influence from the west and the north to the east and the south. It was an admission that developed countries by themselves were unable to resolve the global economic

*\*Amb. Rajiv Bhatia is a Distinguished Fellow at Gateway House, the author of three books, and a former ambassador who writes regularly on multilateral governance.*

*\*Manjeet Kripalani is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Gateway House.*



---

problems, and desperately needed the cooperation of countries such as India, China, Russia and Brazil among others, for this vital task.

*Before the G20, there were the G7 and the G77*

The G7 was established in June 1976, although its origin is traced to an informal meeting of four finance ministers viz. US, France, West Germany, and the UK, held in March 1973 amid the oil crisis. Canada, Japan, and Italy were added thereafter. Later, the G7 admitted Russia, thus transforming itself into the G8 in 1997. However, after Russia was expelled in March 2014 in the wake of its annexation of Crimea, the G7 resumed its original composition. It continues to be powerful and united, and its latest summit was hosted by Germany in June 2022.

Preceding the G7 was the forum of developing countries – G77 – established in June 1964. It has 134 members now but retains its old name. It is known as ‘G77 and China’ when it holds meetings jointly with China. It is much less influential today than it was during the Cold War. A smaller grouping of developing countries – G15 – comprising select developing countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America was set up in September 1989. The aim was to foster cooperation in trade, investment, and technology within the South and provide inputs to G7 and the WTO. Later, its membership rose to 18, but the name remained unchanged. Regular summits were held during the 1990s and subsequently. The last summit was held in 2012.

The G20’s origins were in the Asian-turned-global financial crisis of 1997–1999, which the G7 was unable to resolve by itself. Paul Martin, the

Canadian finance minister, and Larry Summers, the US treasury secretary, convened a meeting of select finance ministers and governors of the central banks in December 1999. The G20 functioned at that level for nearly a decade. When the financial crisis struck the US in 2008 and quickly turned global, G20 was elevated to the summit level, with the presidents and prime ministers holding regular bi-annual and later annual confabulations with the single goal of preventing another global financial crisis. But like most well-meaning initiatives, it began to expand its scope, including the areas of development. The crisis in Syria led to a migration crisis in Europe, making the shift to this issue inevitable, which was included in the G20 economic agenda.

The engagement of the highest political leaders legitimised the progressive expansion of the G20 agenda beyond finance, fiscal and monetary policies. The grouping now represents a ‘whole of the government’ approach. This was on display when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world in early 2020, threatening lives and health security, livelihoods, and economic stability and growth. The G20, more than the UN, was tasked with finding solutions to the economic and health problems during Saudi Arabia’s G20 presidency year.

The composition of G20 is varied. For instance, different segments of the G20 should be carefully noted, as below.

- All G7 countries are its members: the US, Japan, Germany, France, the UK, Italy, and Canada.
- All BRICS members are included in it: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

- 
- All the P-5 (Permanent Five) members of the UN Security Council are in G20: the US, the UK, France, Russia, and China.
  - The members of the new MITKA group have also been included: Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia.
  - Two countries not covered by any of the above groups, namely Saudi Arabia and Argentina, are also members of G20.
  - The original plan was to include Nigeria, but it was dropped. Instead, the European Union (EU) was included.
  - Besides the 20 members, the IMF and World Bank, Financial Stability Board, the UN, ILO, WTO, and WHO attend the G20 meetings. Spain is a permanent guest and so are the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In addition, the country holding the presidency has the privilege of inviting guests of its own. Singapore and the Netherlands are almost always invited.

## How it works

The G20 has two clear goals before it: i) to promote financial stability and economic growth, and ii) to make globalisation work for the benefit of all by devising consensus in policymaking on a wide spectrum of government issues. "Both directly reflect the intense connectivity that defines the 21st-century world."<sup>3</sup>

## Official Fora

This grouping has a rotating presidency and

does not have a permanent secretariat. That role is played by the country which holds the presidency. It is assisted by the Troika, comprising the past, present, and future presidency countries, much like the Rotary Club. As a legacy of the era when the G7 ruled the roost, OECD continues to provide considerable intellectual and policy advisory support to the presidency, keeping the influence of the G7 intact.

The G20 works on the Finance Track and the Sherpa Track. The first deals with economic, financial, and monetary issues through regular meetings of the finance ministers and governors of the central banks. It has eight workstreams: Global Macroeconomic Policies, Infrastructure Financing, International Financial Architecture, Sustainable Finance, Financial Inclusion, Health Finance, International Taxation, and Financial Sector Reforms.

The rest is handled by the Sherpas. Each country has a 'sherpa' who is the main interlocutor and coordinator of the G20 leadership. They prepare the ground and ensure the harmonisation of numerous Ministerial Meetings and Working Groups. The Sherpa Track has 12 workstreams: Anti-corruption, Agriculture, Culture, Development, Digital Economy, Employment, Environment and Climate, Education, Energy Transition, Health, Trade and Investment, and Tourism.

## Engagement Groups

Beyond the governments, the G20 benefits from wide-ranging discussions and studies undertaken by 10 Engagement Groups of the private sector, civil society, and independent bodies. These are: Business 20, Civil 20, Labour 20,

---

Parliament 20, Science 20, Supreme Audit Institutions 20, Think 20, Urban 20, Women 20, and Youth 20. Each sub-forum has its meetings and its summits, resulting in a crowded and busy annual agenda for the host country and other members.

Of these engagement groups, the two most important are the Think 20 and the Business 20.

**Think 20** (T20) is a network of think tanks from G20 countries that provide intellectual support to G20 leaders through research-based policy recommendations. It is often called the “ideas bank”<sup>4</sup> of the G20 process. The first T20 summit was held during Mexico’s G20 presidency in 2012 and has since become a constant feature in the G20 process. Members of the T20 are leading think tanks from across the globe. Hence, the T20 ‘thinks’ for the G20, and provides constructive evidence-based solutions to various global challenges.

Akin to the G20 leaders’ format, engagement groups also follow the *Sherpa* system. In the case of the T20, think tanks and research institutions from G20 states are nominated as Sherpas. The Chair-Sherpa is a leading think-tank from the G20 host state and acts as the nodal point of coordination for the T20. Some countries like Indonesia appoint a single think tank sherpa, but others like Japan, appoint more than 10 sherpas for their presidency year.

Every year sees two priority areas: one, which is a continuous G20 agenda, and the other which is identified by the G20 president country’s chosen agenda. For example, Indonesia’s G20 presidency focussed on three priorities: 1) Global Health Architecture, 2) Digital Transformation, and 3)

Sustainable Energy Transition,<sup>5</sup> and the same was reflected in the T20 agenda as well.<sup>6</sup> Through task forces, each focus area is further explored in a cross-disciplinary manner.

The main outcome of T20 is the communique, a vision document that is released by the chair at the T20 summit. The T20 communique lists proposals and recommendations for G20 leaders to consider during the summit. Some of these salient proposals eventually make their way into the G20 Leaders’ communique.

**Business 20** (B20) is an exclusive G20 engagement group created for greater interaction with the global business community. As the corporate face of the G20 framework, the B20 strives to accommodate business interests within the broader global economic agenda. The B20, therefore, is a dialogue platform for leaders of business and industry to present, share and suggest policy options to the G20 leadership.

The B20 was the first engagement group founded within the G20, and its first meeting was held during the presidency of South Korea in 2010.<sup>7</sup> However, the concept of B20 was formally introduced during France’s G20 presidency in 2011.

The B20’s usual focus includes international trade reforms, financial regulation, monetary system, global financial architecture, energy efficiency, sustainable investment, and digitalisation. For each focus area, a task force is constituted comprising industry leaders. The B20 network comprises business and trade organisations. Each G20 country is represented by trade organisations/associations that are nominated as Sherpas by their respective governments. While the apex chamber is usually appointed as the business sherpa,

---

sometimes other chambers are too are given this designation. For instance, during the Turkish presidency in 2015, seven business chambers were assigned the work of the B20 Sherpa and focused on Small and Medium Enterprises and entrepreneurship.

From Bill Gates to Jack Ma, the B20 has witnessed the participation of prominent corporate leaders in the past, and their attendance speaks volumes. From India, business magnates such as Anil Ambani of Reliance Industries, Adi Godrej of Godrej Industries, Sunil Mittal of Bharti Enterprises, and others have been part of various B20 task forces/meetings in the past. Apart from the corporate world, policymakers, scholars from academia, and think tanks are also invited to participate in the B20 forum. The World Economic Forum and the International Chambers of Commerce are usual invitees and participate in the B20 network.

Besides the official engagement groups, there are unofficial engagement groups like the Young Entrepreneurs Alliance, the Girls20, and the Interfaith Dialogue.

The most important document that emerges from the presidency country each year is the ‘Leaders’ Declaration’, issued at the conclusion of each summit. It is backed by and is based on joint statements that are issued by the Ministerial and other meetings. The G20’s formal work through an expanding agenda is significant. Equally important is the opportunity the annual summit affords to the top leaders of member countries to meet, interact, and build personal relationships and “recast bilateral ties.”<sup>8</sup>

## **Trajectory so far**

The journey of the G20 may be classified into three periods: i) 1999–2008, ii) 2008–2019, and iii) 2019–2022.

### **1998-2008:**

The first decade comprised regular meetings of the finance ministers and governors of the central banks. The agenda for their discussions extended progressively, to include financing for terrorism in the wake of the war in Afghanistan. A major focus was the reform of IMF which resulted from the decision to give the emerging economies a proportionately bigger share in the vote of its executive board.

### **2008-2019:**

The second decade began with the global financial crisis raging in the West, which necessitated the G20’s elevation to the summit level. The first Leaders’ summit was held in November 2008. From 2009 to 2010, two summits a year were held. Then the grouping followed the practice to hold an annual summit until 2019. The UK, Canada, South Korea, Russia, China, Argentina, and others got the opportunity to host the summit. The G20 thus became an integral part of international economic governance. A few presidencies left a longer-term impact such as those of South Korea for pushing the cause of South-South cooperation, and Germany for advancing the ‘Compact with Africa’.

### **2019-2022:**

The third period began with the Covid-19 era. Two summits were convened by Saudi Arabia in

---

2022 to address the unprecedented challenges created by the pandemic. The Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) proved a major achievement. Three summits were held in 2021 under the Italian presidency to tackle the continuing problems of Covid-19, the US-NATO handover of Afghanistan to the Taliban in August 2021, and the normal Leaders' summit.

The Indonesian presidency of 2022 with its mission of 'Recover Together, Recover Stronger' had barely begun when the Russia-Ukraine conflict flared up in February 2022, resulting in new geopolitical tensions. If there was a hope of keeping geopolitics away from the G20 agenda, that was disbanded as positions hardened, and complexities rose. President Joko Widodo attempted to play a mediatory role, securing limited success and assurances from the leaders of Russia and China to attend the summit in Bali in October 2022. The Russian annexation of four regions of Ukraine in September 2022, however, raised serious question marks over the prospects of the Bali summit.

Scholars interpret the nature and degree of success of the G20 summits in different ways. V. Srinivas, a senior Indian official who studies the G20, says that G20 has usually been upbeat. "In the past, G20 has witnessed several major successes in multilateralism, and there is optimism that renewed multilateralism efforts can succeed."<sup>9</sup>

John Kirton of the University of Toronto's G20 Centre has studied the past work of the G20 and suggests that the grouping be judged by six criteria comprising i) domestic political management, ii) deliberation for the collective conclusion, ii) principled and normative direction-setting, iv)

collective commitments, v) compliance with commitments, and vi) institutional development of global governance. His macro verdict over two decades of the G20: "Charting G20 performance on these dimensions at each of its 16 summits shows the G20's comprehensive rise to an impressive performance at Hamburg in 2017, then a substantial decline, and a revival at Rome in 2021."<sup>10</sup>

Spelling out three key economic priorities for G20 in mid-2022, Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of IMF, highlighted the need for reduction in inflation, tightening of fiscal policy, and imparting of a fresh impetus for global cooperation – "led by the G20."<sup>11</sup> Today, the economic challenges facing the world are as pressing as they were in 2008 which led to the G20's elevation to the highest political level. Worrisome for the hosts of the G20 summits this year and the next i.e., Indonesia and India, is the deteriorating state of geopolitics, casting a dark shadow on this largely economic forum.

## India's Presidency

India's presidency of the G20 comes at a critical time, both for India and the G20 countries. Due to last for a year from 1 December 2022, it coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup> year of India's Independence. The G20 summit will be a major milestone for the country's democracy and diplomacy, bestowing a key leadership role on India on the world stage. But the stage is strewn with thorns on both the economic and geopolitical fronts. The Bali summit, followed by the Delhi summit, will demonstrate if the world – and the two host countries – can tackle the immediate issues of war

---

and conflict as well as focus attention on the need for financial stability, peace, and sustainable development.

Handling it with finesse and balance is particularly important as the G20 has an unprecedented opportunity: it will be led by four developing countries in a row, starting with Indonesia in 2022, India in 2023, and Brazil and South Africa in 2024 and 2025 respectively. It is a chance to show whether the G20, a forum of the North and the South, can do justice to the needs and expectations of both the developed and developing countries as well as those outside the G20 family, in an equitable measure.

India will host the 18<sup>th</sup> summit of G20 in New Delhi on 9 and 10 September 2023. Nine country guests have already been invited: Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain, and the UAE. In addition, the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are invited as Guest-International Organisations (IOs)

India is expected to host over 215 events at 55 different locations across the country. At most of these meetings, the G20 world will be represented by 42 delegations of ministers and officials. The summit in September 2023 will bring nearly 12,000 international delegates, media, security, and associated personnel to Delhi.

The summit's theme and priorities may be announced formally in December 2022. But the following media statement made by the Ministry of External Affairs on 13 September reflects the present official thinking:

*Whilst our G20 priorities are in the process*

*of being firmed up, ongoing conversations inter alia revolve around inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth; LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment); women's empowerment; digital public infrastructure and tech-enabled development in areas ranging from health, agriculture and education to commerce, skill-mapping, culture and tourism; climate financing; circular economy; global food security; energy security; green hydrogen; disaster risk reduction and resilience; developmental cooperation; fight against economic crime; and multilateral reforms.*<sup>12</sup>

While speaking at the UN General Assembly on 25 September, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar observed, "As we begin the G-20 presidency this December, we are sensitive to the challenges faced by developing countries. India will work with other G-20 members to address serious issues of debt, economic growth, food and energy security, and particularly, of the environment. The reform of the governance of multilateral financial institutions will continue to be one of our core priorities."<sup>13</sup>

India's presidency will be stamped by its past contribution to the deliberations and decisions of the G20. India's leaders - finance ministers, Reserve Bank governors, former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi – have been proactive and influential in shaping the outcomes of the meetings and summits in the previous years. India has used the G20 forum to address its concerns on terrorism financing well. PM Modi addressed all the summits from 2014–21 and articulated the country's concerns on black money and tax avoidance;

---

countering international terrorism; effective measures against fugitive economic offenders; the need to maximize digital technology for social benefit; and the imperative to make available ample climate finance for developing countries.<sup>14</sup>

Guided by a mix of motivations – to promote its national interest, leave a mark on the G20, maintain the forum’s primacy as an effective instrument of global governance, and insulate it from rising geopolitical tensions, India has four choices:

- First, it can be content with a unique branding opportunity offered by the presidency i.e., to project India’s success as a democracy that delivers on development.
- Second, as part of a four-country chain (Indonesia, India, Brazil, and South Africa) that holds the presidency during 2021–25, India can consolidate their synergy and solidarity to advance the interests of the Global South.
- Third, the three IBSA countries (India, Brazil, and South Africa) will chair the forum from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2025, thereby giving this trinity, somewhat somnolent at present, a chance to promote the interests of democracies moving on the development path and fulfill

the G20 promises made by the advanced economies to developing countries.

- Four, as the chair of the G20, India can (and should) take a broader view of its global responsibilities and attempt to coordinate and synthesize diverging perspectives of different constituencies within the G20 family and beyond.

A sober and balanced view suggests that these four choices are not mutually exclusive. “It is possible to weld them together to create a holistic and comprehensive approach for the Indian presidency.”<sup>15</sup> India’s performance and ability to lead the G20 will be judged, above all, on this specific score.

Finally, India must invest in the G20 by putting more of its best resources into it, so that developing countries and advanced economies stand at the same level, making equal contributions. As Dr. Raghuram Rajan, former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, told Gateway House in 2015, “We must, across the emerging world, realise that some of the reasons why global governance seems to be sort of against us are because we are not putting enough resources into this... It makes a big difference who has the pen. Because what you write is very different [from what industrial country markets do].”<sup>16</sup>

## References:

- 1 Stewart M. Patrick, ‘The G20 Was Made for Moments Like This’, Council on Foreign Relations, 25 October 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/g20-was-made-moments>
- 2 ‘India @2023, G20 Presidency’, PowerPoint presentation by Harsh Vardhan Shringla, India’s Chief Coordinator for G20 at a business conference in Mumbai, 5 September 2022.
- 3 James McBride and Anshu Siripurapu, ‘The Group of Twenty’, Council on Foreign Relations, 15 November 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/group-twenty>

- 
- 4 See, Multiple Authors (2012). *Think-20 Meeting: Report to Sherpas*. URL. [www.g20.utoronto.ca/t20/2012-FINAL\\_Think-20\\_Report\\_to\\_Sherpas.pdf](http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/t20/2012-FINAL_Think-20_Report_to_Sherpas.pdf)
  - 5 Issue Priorities (2022). G20 Indonesia 2022. URL <https://www.g20.org/g20-presidency-of-indonesia/#priorities>
  - 6 Indonesia had 9 T20 task forces roughly covering sustainable investment, digital connectivity, energy transition, food security and sustainable agriculture, inequality and human capital, global health security, global SDG financing, infrastructure resilience, international finance, and economic recovery.
  - 7 For details see Rajiv Bhatia, “The G20’s virtual year” in *India in the G20: Rule-taker to Rule-maker* (Manjeet Kripalani ed.), Routledge.
  - 8 James McBride and Anshu Siripurapu, ‘The Group of Twenty’, Council on Foreign Relations, 15 November 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/group-twenty>
  - 9 V. Srinivas, Talk on G20@2023: The Road Map to Indian Presidency, New Delhi. ICWA, 2 August 2022. P. 10.
  - 10 John Kirton, ‘The G20’s Growing Governance, 2008–2022’, [http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/biblio/Kirton\\_G20\\_Governance\\_UPH\\_220224.pdf](http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/biblio/Kirton_G20_Governance_UPH_220224.pdf)
  - 11 Kristalina Georgieva, ‘Facing A Darkening Economic Outlook: How The G20 Can Respond’, IMF Blog, 13 July 2022. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/07/13/blog-how-g20-can-respond>
  - 12 ‘India’s forthcoming G20 Presidency’, 13 September 2022, Ministry of External Affairs. [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias\\_forthcoming\\_G20\\_Presidency](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias_forthcoming_G20_Presidency)
  - 13 ‘India’s Statement delivered by the External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the General Debate of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly’, Ministry of External Affairs. 25 September 2022. [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/35757/Indias\\_Statement\\_delivered\\_by\\_the\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_at\\_the\\_General\\_Debate\\_of\\_the\\_77th\\_session\\_of\\_the\\_UN\\_General\\_Assembly](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/35757/Indias_Statement_delivered_by_the_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_General_Debate_of_the_77th_session_of_the_UN_General_Assembly)
  - 14 For details, see: V. Srinivas, Talk on G20@2023: The Road Map to Indian Presidency. Pp. 13–17.
  - 15 Rajiv Bhatia, ‘The G20 and New Delhi’s choices’, *The Hindu*, 25 August 2022.
  - 16 ‘T20 Mumbai Keynote by Dr. Raghuram Rajan’, 19 October 2015. <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/raghuram-rajans-t20-mumbai-keynote/>





## India and the G20 Presidency: Its Priorities and Challenges

Bhaswati Mukherjee\*

### Background

Created in the aftermath of the devastating World War II, it is important to underline that the United Nations and its Security Council as well as the Breton Woods institutions and the G7 reflect the world order which prevailed immediately after the World War II as well as the new power balance created by its victors. The G20 is a reflection of an emerging order, which brings the G7 together with other major economies as equal partners. It also includes the P5 with other major emerging economies.

Conceived as an international mechanism for governance of the global economy, the G20, which includes all the major economies, has evolved over time into one of the most powerful economic and financial groupings. At present, it comprises 85% of global GDP, 75% of international trade and two-thirds of the global population. It represents the world's key body for handling global economic and developmental issues.

Held under a rotational Presidency on an annual basis since 2011, the G20's initial focus was on broad macro-economic policy. Formally known as the "Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy", the G20 has made continuous efforts until the pandemic toward achieving robust global economic growth. It re-doubled its efforts after the pandemic. More recently, the G20 focus shifted to include a wide range of global issues including

climate change and energy, health, counter-terrorism and migration.

What is the composition of the G20? It comprises 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, UK and USA) and the European Union (EU). It has become a relevant and influential global grouping. The regular participation of international and regional organisations such as the African Union, NEPAD and ASEAN as invitees in the G20 process makes it both inclusive and representative.

The G20's initial focus was on financial and socio-economic issues. Since it was raised to the level of Heads of State and Government, the G20 has evolved to address every contemporary issue and challenge. There are 20 Working Groups between the Sherpa and Finance Tracks and 10 Engagement Groups, which bring together the civil societies, think tanks and other key stakeholders of the member countries.

### Existing G20 Tracks

The G20 currently comprises several tracks including:

- 'Finance Track', with 8 work streams (Global Macroeconomic Policies, Infrastructure Financing, International Financial Architecture, Sustainable Finance, Financial Inclusion, Health

\*Amb. Bhaswati Mukherjee is a career foreign service officer. She is one of the most experienced diplomats on Indo-EU relations. In a distinguished career of over 38 years, she has been the Indian Ambassador to The Netherlands as well as India's Permanent Representative to UNESCO in Paris.

---

Finance, International Taxation, Financial Sector Reforms).

- ‘*Sherpa Track*’, with 12 work streams (Anti-corruption, Agriculture, Culture, Development, Digital Economy, Employment, Environment and Climate, Education, Energy Transition, Health, Trade and Investment, Tourism). Shri Amitabh Kant is the Indian Prime Minister’s Sherpa for this period.

- ‘*10 Engagement Groups*’ of private sector/ civil society/independent bodies (Business 20, Civil 20, Labour 20, Parliament 20, Science 20, Supreme Audit Institutions 20, Think 20, Urban 20, Women 20 and Youth 20).

## India’s Presidency

India has been a member of the G20 since its inception in 1999. As an important member of the grouping, India ensured that its perspective on issues of vital national importance did not go unheard in the global financial narrative. India will be assuming chairmanship of the G20 for one year from 01 December 22.

India’s Presidency comes at a watershed moment coinciding with a period of flux, internationally. The global community is facing multiple challenges, politically and economically. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has vitiated relation between Russia and the industrialised Western countries, most of which are members of the G20. The conflict and the resulting unilateral sanctions imposed by the West has upset the post pandemic global recovery, sharply impacted oil and gas prices as well as food availability. As always, the impact is felt most sharply by the most vulnerable, the developing countries and LDC’s.

India would, in the true spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family), seek to find pragmatic global solutions for the well-being of all. India’s vision for the global development agenda is shaped by the rapid transformation of its economy and society launched by the Prime Minister, particularly green and digital transformations. The after-effects of the pandemic are also of importance, as it underlined the importance of resilient healthcare and global co-operation.

PM Modi has transformed India’s foreign policy to focus on the ‘global common good’. Through its G20 leadership, India hopes to extend this principle towards finding sustainable solutions to some of the key global challenges emerging out of the interconnectedness of the world, such as climate change, new and emerging technologies, food and energy security, etc. As the incumbent G20 President, India will set the agenda, identify the themes and focus areas, conduct discussions and deliver the outcome documents. India will identify, highlight, develop and strengthen international support for priorities of vital importance in diverse social and economic sectors, ranging from energy, agriculture, trade, digital economy, health and environment to employment, tourism, anti-corruption and women’s empowerment, including in focus areas that impact the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

India is currently part of the G20 Troika (current, previous and incoming G20 Presidencies) comprising Indonesia, Italy and India. From December 22, during India’s Presidency, Indonesia and Brazil along with India would form the Troika. This would be the first time when the Troika would

---

consist of three developing countries and emerging economies. It is hoped that as a result there would be a shift in the balance of power within the G20. It is time for emerging economies to have a greater share in decision making at this grouping.

India will host the G20 Leaders' Summit at the level of Heads of State / Government on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> September 2023, in New Delhi. Under its Presidency, India is expected to host over 200 G20 meetings across India, commencing from December 2022. India is preparing to hold up to 190 G20 meetings on a pan-India basis. In our effort to organise an Impeccable and Uniquely 'Indian' G20, we strive to take this mega event closer to the lives of the people of India making it 'People's G20'.

### **Establishment of G20 Secretariat**

A G20 Secretariat has been established with Cabinet approval. Former Foreign Secretary Harsh V. Shringla has been appointed as India's chief G20 Coordinator at Secretary Level. His tenure commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> May 22 till 31<sup>st</sup> December 23. The G20 Secretariat will be responsible for implementation of overall policy decisions and arrangements needed for steering India's Presidency.<sup>1</sup>

The Secretariat will be responsible for smooth transition from the previous Presidency, preparations and conduct of all G20 meetings during the year, consultation and coordination with stakeholders and finally handing over to the next Presidency in December 2023. The Secretariat will also enable capacity building, including knowledge and expertise, for supporting India's leadership on and contribution to global issues in

multilateral forums in the years ahead.

The Secretariat will handle work relating to knowledge, technical, media, security and logistical aspects of the Presidency. The Cabinet Secretariat said in a statement: "It will be manned by officers and staff from the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and other relevant line Ministries/Departments and domain knowledge experts. The Secretariat will be functional till February 2024".

The India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) has almost completed re-development of Pragati Maidan for setting up of a world class Integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC) at a cost of Rs 2254 crore. It is the venue of the Summit.<sup>2</sup> The Government has commenced the process of recruitment to the Secretariat. In a tweet citing a tweet by Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi confirming that recruitment had started, Prime Minister tweeted: "This is an exciting opportunity..."<sup>3</sup>

In accordance with past tradition, the Presidency usually invites some 'Guest' countries and International Organisations (IOs) to its G20 meetings and Summit. MEA has announced that as President, India will invite Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and UAE as 'Guests'. Bangladesh is the only South Asian neighbour invited as 'Guest' to the Summit.

Further, in addition to regular International Organisations (UN, IMF, World Bank, WHO, WTO, ILO, FSB and OECD) and Chairs of Regional Organisations (AU, AUDA-NEPAD and ASEAN), India, as G20 Presidency, will be inviting as 'Guest IO's' the ISA (International Solar

---

Alliance), the CDRI (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure) and the ADB (Asian Development Bank).

### **Priorities of the Presidency**

What would be the priorities of the Indian Presidency? According to MEA: “Ongoing conversations...revolve around inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth; LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment); women’s empowerment; digital public infrastructure and tech-enabled development in areas ranging from health, agriculture and education to commerce, skill-mapping, culture and tourism; climate financing; circular economy; global food security; energy security; green hydrogen; disaster risk reduction and resilience; developmental cooperation; fight against economic crime; and multilateral reforms.”<sup>4</sup>

Among its key priorities are climate, digital and health. The Presidency provides an opportunity to showcase India’s leadership inter-alia in climate action and climate commitments. Prime Minister Modi has pointed out that India’s dedication to climate commitments is clear. India has achieved the target of 40% energy capacity from non-fossil sources, nine years before the deadline. At the COP26 Summit last year, Mr Modi announced the ‘Panchamrit’ or five major areas of climate action commitments by India, including creating a net zero economy by 2070. Access to climate finance and technology would be critical in facilitating these ambitious goals particularly for developing countries.

Prime Minister emphasised the importance of behavioural change for catalysing climate action and highlighted the need for collective action by

the global community as part of a movement called LIFE - Lifestyle for Environment. These are most relevant for the G20 today. On digital, India hopes that our start-up sector and our proven capabilities to create tech models that balance the need for global integration and priorities at a national level can be internationalised. Digital India would go global. A new tech order must combine cross-border flows of technology and investment with development and growth aspirations.

On health, India has demonstrated new and innovative approaches to tackle complex challenges including Covid 19. India’s efforts to track the COVID pandemic’s spread relied on the success of the Aarogya Setu digital platform. India’s successful vaccination campaign which saw 2 billion vaccines administered across our populace, was underpinned by the Co-WIN digital platform. Under India’s Presidency, efforts would be made with other G20 partners to create mechanisms that strengthen the capacity of developing countries to tackle health crises like the Covid19 pandemic.

### **The Indian Sherpa**

The Sherpa plays a crucial role in ensuring that the priorities of the Indian Presidency under P M Modi are supported by G20 member states. India’s G20 Sherpa, Amitabh Kant, is an officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), who headed the NITI Aayog for last month six years before his selection as Sherpa by PM. He is supported by the G20 Secretariat.

Kant led an official Indian delegation to the third G20 Sherpa meeting of Indonesia’s G20 Presidency, held in Yogyakarta from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022. (The first Sherpa meeting under

---

the Indonesian Presidency was held in December 2021 and the second in July 2022). At the meeting, according to MEA: “Amitabh Kant reaffirmed India’s commitment and active support to Indonesian Presidency’s efforts...He emphasised the need for G20 to bring enhanced global focus on and strengthen international cooperation and efforts in key priority areas such as sustainable growth, accelerated progress on SDGs, addressing climate change including through Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE), tech-enabled development and digital public infrastructure, multilateral reforms and women’s empowerment”.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, Kant also highlighted Prime Minister Modi’s recent statement on 16 September: “Today’s era is not of war... diplomacy and dialogues are things that touch the world”. On the sidelines of the G20 Sherpa meeting, Kant held bilateral interactions with his visiting Sherpa counterparts from Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Spain, UK and USA. According to informed sources, the Indian delegation led by Kant through its constructive interventions was able to infuse greater positivity and optimism in G20 deliberations, in preparation for the Indian Presidency.

### **Challenges Identified by the Sherpa**

On 5<sup>th</sup> September 22, on Twitter, Kant provided a unique insight into PM Modi’s vision for the Indian Presidency. He gave a broad-brush perspective on the core issues of importance noting: “India believes that the G20 countries must close ranks and work together. While the agenda and priorities for the Presidency are still evolving, India is committed to focussing on issues of critical

importance to the world<sup>6</sup>.

The world is facing huge challenges due to post pandemic blues, debt distress, food and energy security and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, along with instability and conflict that are impacting people globally.

The global development agenda is facing monumental challenges at present. The pandemic came on the eve of “Decade of Action” and has disrupted decades of developmental progress globally on many fronts. These effects are compounded by the additional effects of ongoing conflict in Europe. India believes that a conversation on economic growth with sustainability is the need of the hour. The G20 should lead the discussion on how countries can work together to ensure return to economic growth, but one which is rooted in sustainability and sustainable lifestyle.

The concept of LiFE was introduced by PM Modi during the 26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow 21. India hopes to highlight LiFE as a critical focus area for discussion and action during our Presidency. India believes that digital technology and digital public platforms are key to deepening engagements of government with citizens. Our belief is that digital identity, content-based framework and payments are key building blocks for a digital future. Digital solutions to traditional problems have transformed and elevated the lives of people across the world. During India’s Presidency, we would like to help take this discussion forward.

We aim to deliver outcomes in areas of critical

---

intent such as integrating the climate and development agenda, accelerating progress towards achieving the 2030 agenda, furthering development cooperation, supporting small and marginal farmers, enhancing food security and nutrition, addressing global skill gaps, promotion of blue economy and coastal sustainability, digital health solutions, green hydrogen and tech-enable learning.

India also hopes to bring into the G20 discussions a focussed conversation on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The average annual loss from disasters globally is approximately USD 218 billion. We believe that a working group on DRR would help the global efforts in reducing the loss of life and livelihood. India believes that the G20 countries must come together to deliver on matters of crucial importance to the world and not let the Russia-Ukraine crisis dominate the broader agenda. The G20 should show the necessary leadership and flexibility to accommodate differences among its members to effectively deliver outcomes”.

While concluding, Kant stated: “The G20, in India, will comprise around 200 events to be held across all the States and Union Territories. The intention is to execute them to perfection and send back every guest as a brand ambassador of India. Our aim is to create a uniquely Indian experience, which is spiritually invigorating and mentally rejuvenating. India’s achievements—both nationally and internationally—have earned us goodwill. India’s stature is extremely tall in the hearts of people. The G 20 will elevate it to even greater heights”.<sup>7</sup>

## **Ukraine-Russia Conflict as a possible Spoiler**

India has thus so far meticulously prepared for the Presidency. While the focus will be on sustainable economic growth, there are many challenges ahead with the Ukraine-Russia conflict being a possible spoiler. This is despite PM Modi’s determination not to let it become the spoiler.

The G 20 Presidency coincides with the domination of a neo-conservative US approach with regard to Russia. Of concern is also a negative narrative on India emanating from some sections of the Western media as well as politicians, the most recent being the Greens German Foreign Minister. This could be due to resentment at India’s rise and India’s independent stand on Ukraine-Russia. Calls for a negotiated end to the conflict have gone unheeded by the West who seems determined to bring down President Putin. More unfortunate, Russia’s recent reverses seem to have whetted the appetite of NATO to reduce Russia to a subordinate status.

The West seems to be in no mood to listen to Kissinger who at 99, in a recent article, had invaluable advice to offer to the West: “The question will now be how to end that war. At its end a place has to be found for Ukraine and a place has to be found for Russia — if we don’t want Russia to become an outpost of China in Europe.”<sup>8</sup>

The war has entered a crucial stage and the Russian armed forces have been forced to retreat from some strategic areas it had conquered. President Putin has ordered a partial mobilisation. For the first time, ordinary Russians are feeling

---

the impact of the war. A businessman in Moscow describes a growing sense of vulnerability by quoting from Kipling's 'Jungle Book', which is a favourite of President Putin as follows: "When a leader of the pack has missed his kill, he is called the Dead Wolf as long as he lives, which is not long".<sup>9</sup>

President Putin's dilemma of whether to consolidate gains which are being reversed by expanding the range of weapons (which is implicitly acknowledging the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons) is bringing the international community closer to a major conflict than any other time since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The contradictions in US position on Ukraine has been high-lighted as follows: "First, that of enabling Ukraine to mount a robust defence – a humanitarian intervention; second, and emphasised in repeated bulletins from President Joe Biden's administration, the intent to "cripple" Russia, not only in the current conflict but in any future (unspecified) military adventurism. This, far from offering protection to Ukraine, guarantees that the war will drag on, with ever greater levels of death and destruction. It has also led to both Russia and the US on hair-trigger launch policy, raising the spectre of two equally catastrophic "next steps": a grievously wounded Russia lashing out – as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has threatened as much – or, accidental or inadvertent nuclear action by, for instance, computer error". For now, one hopes that Benjamin Abelow's last word is not prophetic: "False narratives lead to bad outcomes."<sup>10</sup>

Several Western writers and thinkers have a similar perspective. They regret the insistence of the West to dominate the world even when

economic power has shifted to Asia. Jeffrey Sachs says: "We are at the 60th anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis, which I've studied all my life and I've written about, having written a book about the aftermath. We are driving to the precipice, and we are filled with our enthusiasm as we do so. And it's just unaccountably dangerous and wrongheaded, the whole approach of U.S. foreign policy. And it's bipartisan".<sup>11</sup>

As incumbent President of the G 20, P M Modi has spoken several times to both President Putin and President Zelensky and most recently to President Zelensky. India is ready to support all efforts at de-escalation. India insists that the global order should be anchored in the principles of the UN Charter, international law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States. There can be no doubt that the direction of this conflict may cast a long shadow on India's Presidency.

## Concluding Reflections

In the post pandemic period, this will be undoubtedly the most important multilateral event being organised outside the UN. India had hosted NAM and CHOGM Summits in 1983 and International Solar Alliance Summit in 2018. These meetings, though important, did not include all P5 and major countries. The G 20 Presidency will be at the beginning of Amritkaal, the next 25 years after the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's independence, which makes it both futuristic and inclusive. India is also Chair of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) from September 2022 to September 2023 and President of the UN Security Council for the month of December 2022.

---

As the world's largest democracy, the third largest economy of the world in PPP terms and 2<sup>nd</sup> most populous country of the world, India will make a meaningful contribution in the G 20 to support faster, sustainable and inclusive growth. The G 20 Presidency would place India on the global stage, and provide an opportunity for India to place its priorities and narratives on the global agenda.<sup>12</sup> It would also provide a unique opportunity to showcase India's progress and developments as well as its rich culture heritage and diversity.

India hopes it can contribute to a speedy end to the Ukraine Russia conflict during its Presidency. India's hopes for its G 20 Presidency can be summed up in this verse from the Rig Veda:

"May the stream of my life flow into the river of righteousness.

Loose the bonds of sin that bind me.

Let not the thread of my song be cut while I sing;

And let not my work end before its fulfillment".<sup>13</sup>

## References:

---

- 1 "Harsh V Shringla is G20 chief coordinator", *The Economic Times*, Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/harsh-v-shringla-is-g20-chief-coordinator/articleshow/90752084.cms>
- 2 Mishra, Asit Ranjan. "Cabinet Approves Setting up of G20 Secretariat Ahead of India's Presidency." *Business Standard News*. Business-Standard, February 15, 2022. [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/cabinet-approves-setting-up-of-g20-secretariat-ahead-of-india-s-presidency-122021501426\\_1.html#:~:text=Last%20Updated%20at%20February%2015%2C%202022%2019%3A55%20IST.](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/cabinet-approves-setting-up-of-g20-secretariat-ahead-of-india-s-presidency-122021501426_1.html#:~:text=Last%20Updated%20at%20February%2015%2C%202022%2019%3A55%20IST.)
- 3 "PM Shares Recruitment Opportunities at G20 Secretariat under India's Presidency." *Press Information Bureau*. Accessed October 21, 2022. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1863453#:~:text=PM%20shares%20recruitment,an%20exciting%20opportunity%E2%80%A6%E2%80%9D.>
- 4 "India's Forthcoming G20 Presidency" Accessed October 21, 2022. [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias\\_forthcoming\\_G20\\_Presidency](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias_forthcoming_G20_Presidency)
- 5 "MEA: Statements: Press Releases." *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*. Accessed October 21, 2022. <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl%2F35773%2FIndia%2Bparticipates%2Bat%2Bthe%2Bthird%2BG20%2BSherpa%2Bmeeting%2Bin%2BYogyakarta%2BIndonesia.>
- 6 Kant, Amitabh. "India Taking over Presidency of G20 This Year. What It Means." *The Week*. The Week, September 5, 2022. <https://www.theweek.in/columns/amitabh-kant/2022/09/05/india-taking-over-presidency-of-g20-this-year-what-it-means.html>.
- 7 Amitabh Kant Twitter, Accessed October 21, 2022. [https://twitter.com/amitabhk87/status/1577537738811372032?s=48&t=Zb2g6mn-Zmm01\\_tlaWooBw](https://twitter.com/amitabhk87/status/1577537738811372032?s=48&t=Zb2g6mn-Zmm01_tlaWooBw)
- 8 Ferguson, Niall. "Henry Kissinger at 99: How to Avoid Another World War." *The Sunday Times Magazine* |



---

*The Sunday Times. The Sunday Times, June 12, 2022. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/henry-kissinger-at-99-how-to-avoid-another-world-war-lwt6q5vbq>.*

- 9 *“What next? A Special Report on the World Economy | OCT 8th 2022.” The Economist. The Economist Newspaper. Accessed October 21, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/2022-10-08>. p-22*
- 10 *Speedie, David C. “Did the West ‘Bring War’ to Ukraine?” Asia Times. Asia Times, September 3, 2022. <https://asiatimes.com/2022/09/did-the-west-bring-war-to-ukraine/>.*
- 11 *Jeffrey D. Sachs. “The West’s False Narrative about Russia and China.” Jeffrey D. Sachs. Jeffrey D. Sachs, September 16, 2022. <https://www.jeffsachs.org/newspaper-articles/h29g9k7l7fymxp39yhzwx5f72ancr>.*
- 12 *“India’s G20 Presidency Aims to Strengthen Global Support for Diverse Social & Eco Sectors.” The Economic Times. Accessed October 21, 2022. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/indias-g20-presidency-aims-to-strengthen-global-support-for-diverse-social-eco-sectors/articleshow/93506804.cms>.*
- 13 *Rig Veda 11.28. 1-9*



# Global Climate and Energy Transition: A Proposed Agenda for India's G20 Presidency

Jagjeet S. Sareen\*

## 1. The global context of climate and energy

The latest reports from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC-2022)<sup>12</sup> leave no doubt for the global community that climate change is widespread, rapid, and intensifying<sup>3</sup>. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres said the IPCC Report was nothing less than “a code red for humanity. The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable.”<sup>4</sup>

Economic shocks, disruptions in supply chains, fiscal and monetary responses triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and disrupted production and trade in food and energy markets due to the war in Ukraine have further aggravated the climate crisis. The renewed search for energy security and the higher energy prices of oil and gas is leading to a reversion to carbon-intensive fuels that risk reversing the gains made in the last decade on energy transition. Higher food and energy prices and higher debt distress are also sliding the world's poor back into extreme poverty<sup>5</sup>. These interlinked stresses on poor and emerging economies are making it even more difficult for governments to enhance energy access, transition, and security. Simultaneously, the availability of public funds to improve their people and communities' adaptation and resilience to climate and extreme weather events is getting scarcer.

This article presents a suite of proposals for the incoming G20 Presidency of India to guide an ambitious global response on climate and energy transition during these interlinked global stresses on economies, communities, and people.

## 2. G20's impact on global climate efforts

All countries of the G20 grouping generate 80% of the world's GDP, conduct 75% of world trade, and make up 60% of the global population<sup>6</sup>. G20 countries cause 76% of global greenhouse gas emissions<sup>7</sup>. Driving global economies towards a net-zero pathway will require deep cuts (~50%) in emissions throughout the G20 by 2030. Climate mitigation and adaptation actions undertaken by G20 countries will determine whether the next generations of humans will have a habitable planet or not.

At COP 26 in Glasgow in Nov 2021, the G20 countries<sup>8</sup> announced national long-term decarbonization pledges. Many G-20 governments have also implemented national policies and regulations to turn these pledges into actions in the last year. However, the BNEF's G-20 Zero-Carbon Policy Scoreboard 2022 analyzed that while G-20 governments made ambitious pledges in 2021, none have implemented sufficient policies to plausibly achieve deep decarbonization, though some are

*\*Jagjeet Singh Sareen is a Senior Policy Officer at the World Bank. He served as the Assistant Director-General of the International Solar Alliance on secondment from the World Bank. He is also an esteemed member of the India Foundation Journal Editorial Board. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the views of the World Bank and International Solar Alliance.*

---

closer than others.<sup>9</sup> This leaves an important and urgent role for all G20 countries to lead by example and implement policies and regulations to drive the mitigation and adaptation measures for effective global climate change response.

The current G20 Presidency, Indonesia<sup>10</sup>, and the previous Italian Presidency<sup>11</sup> have made substantial efforts to move the energy transition<sup>12</sup> and climate agendas under the Sherpa Track. The agreements on enhancing climate action struck under the G20, like the directional shift of “Climate Action by ALL” in the declaration of the 2014 G-20 Summit<sup>13</sup> in Australia, have also found their way into and guided inter-governmental negotiations on critical geopolitical issues under the UNFCCC COP in Paris in 2015<sup>14</sup>. Given the emissions profile of G20 countries and the impact of the actions undertaken on the global economy, the agreements struck on climate and energy transition agendas under the G20 processes have a significant bearing on the worldwide response to climate change and energy transition.

### **3. India’s leadership on global climate and energy transition issues**

#### **a) Climate and energy transition pledges**

At Glasgow COP in 2021, the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India presented five nectar elements, ‘Panchamrit’<sup>15</sup>, to deal with the climate challenge. These included:

- I. Take non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030.
- II. Meet 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030.
- III. Reduce the projected carbon emissions by one billion from now till 2030.

IV. By 2030, reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by more than 45 per cent.

V. By the year 2070, achieve the target of Net Zero.

In line with the PM’s statement in Glasgow, the Indian Union Cabinet, on 3rd Aug 2022, approved India’s Updated Nationally Determined Contribution<sup>16</sup>. This update to India’s existing NDC translates the ‘Panchamrit’ announced at COP 26 into enhanced climate targets. The update is also a step towards achieving India’s long-term goal of reaching net zero by 2070.<sup>17</sup>

#### **b) Recognition of ongoing domestic climate and energy transition actions**

The IEA report, “India 2020- Energy Policy Review<sup>18</sup>” congratulated,<sup>19</sup> the Indian government on its outstanding achievements in extending citizens’ access to electricity, affordable, efficient lighting, and clean cooking in record time through historic schemes like SAUBHAGYA<sup>20</sup>, UJALA<sup>21</sup> and UJJWALA<sup>22</sup>. The Report recognized efforts by the Indian Govt to pursue energy market reforms and facilitating the swift deployment of renewable technologies. The Report also highlighted the strong growth of renewables in India, which now account for almost 23% of the country’s total installed capacity. The review also found that energy efficiency improvements in India avoided 15% of additional energy demand, oil and gas import, air pollution, and 300 million tonnes of CO2 emissions between 2000 and 2018.

India was the most attractive emerging market for clean power investment in 2021<sup>23</sup>. India has also consistently ranked among the top ten emerging markets covered by Climatescope<sup>24</sup>, BNEF’s flagship report analyzing market

---

attractiveness for energy transition investment. All these efforts and the climate mitigation and energy transition impacts solidify India's credibility to lay out an ambitious G20 agenda on these issues.

### **c) International climate leadership**

Building on her domestic action and credibility, India has emerged as a global leader on climate and energy transition action. Under the leadership of the Hon'ble PM of India, the Government of India has also launched two global climate change response initiatives.

#### **I. International Solar Alliance:**

The International Solar Alliance (ISA)<sup>25</sup>, launched at the UNFCCC COP in Paris in 2015, aims to address issues related to climate mitigation by managing energy access, security, and transition with solar projects. The ISA now has 110 member countries with nine active programmes<sup>26</sup> promoting 10 GW of off-grid and grid-connected solar projects in developing countries to promote energy access and transition. The ISA has an ambitious global agenda to help mobilize USD one trillion in solar investments for enhancing energy security, access, and transition.

#### **II. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**

On the adaptation and resilience front, the Government of India has launched the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)<sup>27</sup>. The CDRI brings together nations, multilateral agencies and public and private partners to address issues of infrastructure resilience more systematically and comprehensively.

Both these global initiatives strive for a new model of South-South cooperation and exchange of experience and knowledge of new development

paradigms as developing nations mitigate and adapt to climate change while addressing their development imperatives, like poverty alleviation, food security, and economic growth. India has also played a leadership role in various UN Summits related to climate and energy, like the India and Sweden co-leading Industry Transition track<sup>28</sup>, and has committed to progressively enhance climate action in various plurilateral and bilateral agreements with major countries and economic blocks like India-US<sup>29</sup>, and India-EU climate agreements<sup>30</sup>.

## **4. India's G20 Presidency**

Following the 75th year of her independence, India will host G20 in 2023. It would be a historic opportunity for India to advance her national interest and showcase her prowess as a global leader. Overall, India's G20 theme could be centred around combining the elements of self-reliance and economic growth in a sustainable and climate-responsive manner. India's Presidency could usher in a new model of global cooperation, "Atmanirbharta/self-reliance in a globalized world for sustainable development". India could also position this new framework that would serve not just the G20 members but for the benefit of all developing countries.

With the troika of Indonesia (2022), India (2023), and Brazil (2024), the three developing countries, the Indian G20 Presidency offers a unique moment to strengthen the issues that matter more to developing countries in the global response to climate and energy transition. The author notes that there would be a continuation and path dependency of the various ministerial and working

---

groups related to the environment, climate, energy, and sustainable financing of 2021<sup>31</sup> and 2022<sup>32</sup> G20 Presidencies. Still, each Presidency has the flexibility to guide the discussions and set the agenda.

The author proposes below a suite of concrete proposals which could be launched during India's Presidency to strengthen India's climate leadership through decisive domestic action and to initiate new global actions for enhancing global energy access, security and transition.

**a) Energy and climate agenda setting for the Presidency**

In a recent article, India's G20 Sherpa has outlined India's priorities as it concerns the environment, climate, and energy and, "The concept of LiFE,<sup>33</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced during the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, 2021. A global initiative 'Lifestyle for the Environment-LiFE Movement' was launched on World Environment Day<sup>34</sup>. India hopes to highlight LiFE as a critical focus area for discussion and action during our Presidency."<sup>3536</sup>

India has championed the cause of developing countries in UN climate negotiations. India has been an avid supporter of the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", asking developed countries to pay for climate finance and undertake a large share of mitigation actions. While the underlying historical context of climate change hasn't changed, the contemporary geopolitical rivalries among major powers have sharpened considerably. The US-China (the two largest global emitters of greenhouse gases) dialogue on climate is stalled due to the Taiwan issue<sup>37</sup>. Europeans

and other developed countries are shunning Russian oil and gas<sup>38</sup> in response to the Ukraine-Russia war and are securing carbon-intensive fuels, including restarting coal plants, to maintain energy security. Additionally, with deep aid cuts in G20 OECD countries, support for energy access and climate finance risks are being sidelined.

In this fast-changing geopolitical context, the Indian Presidency may consider shifting gears from the "power of the principle" to the "principle of power". India could forge a new framework for driving climate action and energy transition while addressing energy security concerns of her own and other G20 countries. For developing countries, India could broker a broader deal that facilitates technological and financial support for countries to drive the energy transition and energy access agendas in times when nations are preoccupied with energy security concerns.

**b) Initiatives for Enhancing Energy Security and Transition**

For agenda-setting purposes, the Presidency should reinforce principles of equity, justness, and citizen centrality to the global discourse on energy transition. It is imperative to ground the discussion on energy transition in the developmental imperatives of developing countries.

The Presidency could shape the energy security agenda so that countries broaden the energy transition discussion from the current exclusive focus on the transition away from coal to a comprehensive discussion on the shift away from all fossil fuels in a systematic and time-bound manner to cleaner energy fuels. Cooperative arrangements for enhancing investments in large-scale battery and pumped hydro storage, green

---

hydrogen fuels and green ammonia, and cross-border trade in green electricity could also be forged to strengthen energy security and energy transition concerns simultaneously.

The Presidency could work with MDBs, DFI and Rating agencies to propose a new framework for measuring energy transition efforts for rating countries and public and private institutions raising funds from global markets. This would bring a broader perspective on the comprehensive energy transition efforts of governments and institutions rather than the current focus on coal transition or penalizing countries and companies for their coal or high-carbon energy assets and not recognizing the overall energy transition efforts of these sovereign and private actors.

Global energy transition could be expedited through a robust global push for pumped hydro storage and utility-scale battery storage technologies. With the increasing shares of green energy sources, cross-border green electricity trading has also become more relevant for the energy transition<sup>39</sup>.

### **I. Coalition for scaling-up storage technologies**

The UN Secretary-General has also called<sup>40</sup> for a global coalition on battery storage to fast-track innovation and deployment — a Coalition led and driven by Governments, bringing together tech companies, manufacturers, and financiers. The Presidency can bring together a Coalition of like-minded governments, tech companies, manufacturers, and financiers to scale up the battery and pumped storage technologies and projects. The Energy Storage Partnership<sup>41</sup> initiative at the World Bank can be a supportive

institution to build and strengthen such a global coalition.

### **II. Regional interconnections and green electricity trading**

By trading energy from the sun, wind, and water across borders, countries can deliver more than enough clean energy to meet the needs of everyone on earth. This trading is already beginning to happen through discrete bilateral and regional arrangements. But to meet the sheer scale of the challenge, these efforts need to be combined and supplemented to create a more interconnected global grid. To realize the One Sun, One World One Grid vision, Hon'ble PM Modi and Hon'ble PM Johnson launched the One Sun One World One Grid-Green Grids Initiative<sup>42</sup> at COP 26 in Glasgow. More than 80 countries endorsed the One Sun Declaration<sup>43</sup> for the launch of the initiative.<sup>44</sup> The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the Government of India, with the support of the ISA<sup>45</sup> and the World Bank Group, has commissioned a technical study to assess the techno-commercial viability of global vision and explore 2-3 pilot projects to the East and the West of India for green electricity trading<sup>46</sup>.

Connecting the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the West coast of India<sup>47</sup> through undersea high-voltage direct current (HVDC) cables and transferring green energy produced by solar in both countries could be the first such game-changing energy transition project for realizing the global network of interconnected grid vision<sup>48</sup>. The UAE will host UN Climate Change COP 28 in 2023<sup>49</sup>. It is noted that India has invited the UAE to become part of its G20 Presidency as a guest country<sup>50</sup>. This provides the Indian Presidency with

---

a unique opportunity to partner with UAE and launches regional electricity interconnection projects. India power and infra majors like Sterlite Power<sup>51</sup>, Adani Infra and others, along with UAE investments, can play a leading role in such a regional project. The proposed initiative can be anchored under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India and the UAE.<sup>52</sup>

**c) Initiative for Enhancing Global Energy Access**

As per the Tracking SDG 7 Report of 2022, the recent progress in universal access to electricity was mixed<sup>53</sup>. There were still 733 million people without access to electricity in 2020<sup>54</sup>. Among people without access to electricity, 77 per cent—about 568 million people—lived in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020. Meeting the 2030 target requires increasing the number of new connections to 100 million a year.<sup>55</sup>In the past few years, the Indian Government has made full electrification of its people possible through “Saubhagya” and other central and state-level initiatives. Lessons learned through these policy measures, including using off-grid solar solutions, can be instructive as the Presidency supports the energy access agenda for developing countries. This would be of invaluable support for the acute energy access needs of the Least Developed Countries. The partnership with ISA under the leadership of India at the G20 to help Africa would significantly impact the Region’s path to renewable energy.

A recent report by the World Bank has analyzed that solar mini-grids can provide electricity to nearly 500 million people in Africa and be the least-cost solution to close the energy access gap

by 2030.<sup>56</sup> The Indian Presidency, through the ISA platform, could offer a new financial instrument for making substantial progress in energy access through mini-grid and off-grid solar projects. Hon’ble PM Modi announced<sup>57</sup> USD 1.4 billion in concessional financing for solar projects in ISA member countries. The uptake of these concessional funds has been slow due to COVID and the high-debt distress and political situations in the sub-Saharan African countries.

Under the leadership of India’s G20 Presidency, a risk guarantee and insurance facility by the ISA<sup>58</sup> and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)<sup>59</sup> of the World Bank Group can be launched in partnership with interested countries from the Africa Region to provide the necessary risk coverage for public and private investments to flow for solar projects to enhance energy access. The proposed Facility can mitigate the credit and default risks and unlock the public and private funding, including the unlocking the funds pledged in 2018 at the ISA founding ceremony. Indian solar manufacturers benefiting from the Production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme<sup>60</sup> of the Government of India may also find new markets for solar products in Africa. It is noted that India also holds the ISA Presidency. Grant funding from global climate and energy foundations like Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet<sup>61</sup>, could be secured to capitalize on the risk guarantee and insurance facility.

**d) Climate and sustainable financing agenda**

For a long time, the global climate finance discussion under the UNFCCC format has been centred on the delivery of the Copenhagen promise

---

by developed countries for collectively mobilizing USD 100 billion for supporting climate action in developing countries<sup>62</sup>. In the global economy, green financing has grown into hundreds of billions of dollars per year<sup>63</sup>. In the real economy, investors invest with financial risk and return parameters and do not pay a special premium for climate benefits. However, in the last few years, new investment frameworks are currently being operationalized to internalize climate and ESG risks into investment decisions<sup>64</sup>.

The Indian Presidency may like to propose a new framework for climate finance by introducing a principle of climate-adjusted returns. This principle will entail discounting return expectations by specific percentage points if the investment brings climate return regarding mitigation and adaptation benefits. Or conversely, putting a financial premium on climate returns in investments' decision-making or cheaper interest rates for climate-friendly projects. A recent proposal<sup>65</sup> for the provision of deeply concessional financing for climate action by MDBs, submitted at the 2022 Annual Meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund by the G7 Presidency, Germany, may be worth examining in this regard. This principle would be of great value in simplifying the climate finance debate and help global efforts for scaling-up investments for addressing climate change, adaptation, and resilience activities.

For mobilizing larger pools of investments for global climate actions, the Indian Presidency can promote the use of blended finance instruments where the donor and concessional capital can be effectively utilized for mitigating risks for large-

scale commercial investments from asset owners and pension funds<sup>66</sup>. G20 countries would consider new blended finance facilities and innovative risk mitigation instruments for scaling-up investments in large-scale battery storage and hydrogen projects in partnership with MDBs and global climate funds like the Climate Investment Funds<sup>67</sup> and the Green Climate Fund<sup>68</sup>.

#### **e) Strengthening domestic Climate action**

To meet India's 2030 and the long-term trajectory towards a net-zero future by 2070 would require 'whole of economy planning' and strengthening execution capacities at all levels of the central and state governments. It is critical that other stakeholders, like the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and citizen groups, participate actively in such planning and execution processes. A robust institutional structure to guide the thinking and planning process for climate transition would provide a clear signal to public and private actors for making long-term investment decisions in critical sectors of the economy. In this regard, the Indian Presidency could also establish a comprehensive national institutional framework to guide medium to long-term policy changes for meeting net-zero targets.

In 2014, the Government re-constituted the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change to coordinate National Action for Assessment, Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change<sup>69</sup>. The Council may have served its purpose and need an upgrade in its mandate. India could use the G20 Presidency period to lead by example for other G20 nations and launch a 'Climate Transition National Mission' and constitute a 'Climate Transition Commission' to drive a 'whole of



---

government' thinking towards climate transition. The Mission and the Commission could be established along the lines of the Mission Karamyogi<sup>70</sup> and the Capacity Building Commission<sup>71</sup>. The Commission could have members from both govt and private sectors.

## 5. Sherpa Track format

Indian Presidency could explore a new format for structuring sectoral themes and meetings. Sectoral Ministerial and Working group discussions and meetings/visits can be planned to showcase the potential of the Indian industry/sectors leading strong climate and energy transition actions. Sectoral and industry champions can be identified and tasked with building these themes in close collaboration with line Ministries, corporates, and other stakeholders. Examples of such champions could be assigning Mr Anand Mahindra for EV

mobility; Mr. K V Kamath for Sustainable Finance; Mr. Gautam Adani for Renewable Energy, and others.

Substantive support, including staff secondments, from WB, IMF and other IOs like IEA, IRENA and ISA can be mobilized to support the Presidency and G20 working groups. Active participation of Indian institutions to substantively contribute to agenda discussions need to be encouraged.

## 6. Conclusion

The G20 Presidency offers India a unique and historic opportunity to display her transformation developmental experience and growth opportunities for a climate-responsive and sustainable world. The Presidency could drive the climate and energy transition agenda by instituting bold domestic and global initiatives that are concrete and bring real change on the ground.

---

## References:

- 1 [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGIII\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_SPM.pdf)
- 2 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>
- 3 <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>
- 4 <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm#:~:text=Today's%20IPCC%20Working%20Group%201,of%20people%20at%20immediate%20risk.>
- 5 <https://www.devcommittee.org/sites/dc/files/download/Statements/2022-10/DC-S2022%200069%20DC%20Chair%20for%20AM%20Fall%20statement.pdf>
- 6 [https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/G20\\_Brief\\_for\\_website\\_-\\_27.10\\_\\_1\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/G20_Brief_for_website_-_27.10__1__1_.pdf)
- 7 <https://eciu.net/analysis/briefings/international-perspectives/g20-meetings-climate-pledges>
- 8 <https://unfccc.int/cop26/world-leaders-summit>
- 9 <https://assets.bbhub.io/professional/sites/24/BNEF-G20-Zero-Carbon-Policy-Scoreboard-Executive-Summary.pdf>
- 10 [https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/G20-Bali-COMPACT\\_FINAL\\_Cover.pdf](https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/G20-Bali-COMPACT_FINAL_Cover.pdf)
- 11 <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2021/210723-climate-energy.html>
- 12 [http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2022/Bali-Energy-Transitions-Roadmap\\_FINAL\\_Cover.pdf](http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2022/Bali-Energy-Transitions-Roadmap_FINAL_Cover.pdf)
- 13 <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2014/2014-1116-communicue.html>
- 14 <https://icwa.in/pdfs/G20@2023TwoEasyweb.pdf>

- 
- 15 <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34466/National+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+Shri+Narendra+Modi+at+COP26+Summit+in+Glasgow>
  - 16 [https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1847812#:~:text=The%20Union%20Cabinet%20chaired%20by,on%20Climate%20Change%20\(UNFCCC\).](https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1847812#:~:text=The%20Union%20Cabinet%20chaired%20by,on%20Climate%20Change%20(UNFCCC).)
  - 17 <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1847812#:~:text=As%20per%20the%20updated%20NDC,based%20energy%20resources%20by%202030.>
  - 18 [https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/2571ae38-c895-430e-8b62-bc19019c6807/India\\_2020\\_Energy\\_Policy\\_Review.pdf](https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/2571ae38-c895-430e-8b62-bc19019c6807/India_2020_Energy_Policy_Review.pdf)
  - 19 <https://www.iea.org/news/iea-launches-first-in-depth-review-of-indias-energy-policies>
  - 20 <https://powermin.gov.in/en/content/saubhagya>
  - 21 <https://eeslindia.org/en/ourujala/>
  - 22 <https://www.pmu.gov.in/index.aspx>
  - 23 <https://global-climatescope.org/markets/in/>
  - 24 <https://global-climatescope.org/>
  - 25 <https://isolaralliance.org/>
  - 26 <https://isolaralliance.org/work/scaling-solar-application-agricultural-use>
  - 27 <https://www.cdri.world/>
  - 28 <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1830145>
  - 29 India-U.S. Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 partnership launched at the Leaders' Summit on Climate in April 2021. <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33821/IndiaUS+Joint+Statement+on+Launching+the+IndiaUS+Climate+and+Clean+Energy+Agenda+2030+Partnership>
  - 30 EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership. <https://www.cecp-eu.in/>
  - 31 [http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2021/2021\\_G20-Energy-Climate-joint-Ministerial-Communique.pdf](http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2021/2021_G20-Energy-Climate-joint-Ministerial-Communique.pdf)
  - 32 [https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/G20-Bali-COMPACT\\_FINAL\\_Cover.pdf](https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/G20-Bali-COMPACT_FINAL_Cover.pdf)
  - 33 <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34466/National+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+Shri+Narendra+Modi+at+COP26+Summit+in+Glasgow>
  - 34 [https://newsonair.gov.in/News?title=PM-to-launch-global-initiative-%E2%80%98Lifestyle-for-Environment-\(LiFE\)-Movement-on-Sunday&id=442124#:~:text=The%20idea%20of%20LiFE%20was,of%20mindless%20and%20destructive%20consumption.](https://newsonair.gov.in/News?title=PM-to-launch-global-initiative-%E2%80%98Lifestyle-for-Environment-(LiFE)-Movement-on-Sunday&id=442124#:~:text=The%20idea%20of%20LiFE%20was,of%20mindless%20and%20destructive%20consumption.)
  - 35 <https://www.theweek.in/columns/amitabh-kant/2022/09/05/india-taking-over-presidency-of-g20-this-year-what-it-means.html>
  - 36 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/mission-life-fighting-climate-crisis-pm-modi-gujarat-antonio-guterres-2287593-2022-10-20>
  - 37 <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/beijing-halts-climate-military-talks-with-us-suspends-other-cooperation>
  - 38 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_5989](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_5989)
  - 39 [https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/d9381c64-bbe8-4855-812c-e5e3d3f50dbf/Integrating\\_Power\\_Systems\\_across\\_Borders.pdf](https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/d9381c64-bbe8-4855-812c-e5e3d3f50dbf/Integrating_Power_Systems_across_Borders.pdf)
  - 40 <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21284.doc.htm>
  - 41 [https://www.esmap.org/the\\_energy\\_storage\\_partnership\\_esp](https://www.esmap.org/the_energy_storage_partnership_esp)
  - 42 <https://isolaralliance.org/work/osowog/>

- 
- 43 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1031767/One\\_Sun\\_Declaration\\_\\_Glasgow\\_2\\_November\\_2021\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1031767/One_Sun_Declaration__Glasgow_2_November_2021__2_.pdf)
- 44 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/one-sun-one-world-one-grid-india-uks-ambitious-global-solar-grid-plan-explained/articleshow/87502775.cms>
- 45 <https://www.gccbusinessnews.com/global-solar-power-grid-uae-international-solar-alliance-to-begin-study/>
- 46 <https://isolaralliance.org/work/osowog/>
- 47 <https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/renewable/uae-india-discuss-economic-opportunities-of-energy-transition/91845592>
- 48 <https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2020/oct/21/india-to-link-power-grid-with-middle-east-seato-export-excess-electricity-2213041.html>
- 49 <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/2022-un-climate-change-conference-unfccc-cop-28/>
- 50 [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias\\_forthcoming\\_G20\\_Presidency](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias_forthcoming_G20_Presidency)
- 51 [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/pratik-agarwal-b6278b2\\_onesunoneworldonegrid-osowog-dubaiexpo2020-activity-6851854978701656064-w52B/?trk=public\\_profile\\_like\\_view&originalSubdomain=in](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/pratik-agarwal-b6278b2_onesunoneworldonegrid-osowog-dubaiexpo2020-activity-6851854978701656064-w52B/?trk=public_profile_like_view&originalSubdomain=in)
- 52 <https://commerce.gov.in/international-trade/trade-agreements/comprehensive-economic-partnership-agreement-between-the-government-of-the-republic-of-india-and-the-government-of-the-united-arab-emirates-uae/>
- 53 [https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2022-executive\\_summary.pdf](https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2022-executive_summary.pdf)
- 54 <https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/>
- 55 [https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2022-full\\_report.pdf](https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2022-full_report.pdf)
- 56 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/09/27/solar-mini-grids-could-power-half-a-billion-people-by-2030-if-action-is-taken-now>
- 57 <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29602>
- 58 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/international-solar-alliance-approves-funding-facility/article66027039.ece>
- 59 <https://www.miga.org/environmental-social-sustainability>
- 60 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/renewables/govt-to-enhance-funding-under-pli-for-solar-manufacturing-to-rs-24000-cr-says-r-k-singh/articleshow/87695133.cms?from=mdr>
- 61 <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/news/historic-alliance-launches-at-cop26-to-accelerate-renewable-energy-climate-solutions-and-jobs/>
- 62 <https://unfccc.int/topics/climate-finance/the-big-picture/climate-finance-in-the-negotiations>
- 63 <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/publication/global-landscape-of-climate-finance-2021/>
- 64 <https://www.cfainstitute.org/en/research/esg-investing>
- 65 <https://www.bmz.de/de/aktuelles/aktuelle-meldungen/schulze-weltbank-jahrestagung-2022-125250>
- 66 <https://www.blackrock.com/institutions/en-us/strategies/alternatives/real-assets/infrastructure/climate-finance-partnership>
- 67 <https://www.cif.org/about-cif>
- 68 <https://www.greenclimate.fund/>
- 69 <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=111090>
- 70 <https://dopttrg.nic.in/igotmk/>
- 71 <https://cbc.gov.in/>



## What G20 can do to get the Multilateral Institutions in Shape: India's Key Challenge

Subhomoy Bhattacharjee\*

### Abstract:

**T**he annual G20 Presidency of India comes in a year, which despite all the difficulties thrown by 2022, only promises to be worse. The IMF has noted that “2023 will feel like a recession”. The slowdown will be broad based, with countries accounting for a third of the global economy expected to contract this year or next<sup>1</sup>.

The Covid pandemic for more than two years erasing health and education gains of more than a decade, the subsequent Chinese lockdown creating a global supply chain shock to manufacturing, the Russia—Ukraine war and the consequent fossil fuel led global energy crisis and the consequent evaporation of stamina to tackle the global climate agenda, add up to a long spell of bad news for this decade.

The reasons why the world is facing utmost challenge in tackling these overlapping crises is the failure of the multilateral order. Hardly any multilateral institution (MI) has escaped unscathed. At an institutional level this is the biggest casualty of this decade. That these institutions, created post the Second World War to nurture global opinion and therefore policies on a series of topics that concern the welfare of the world population, rising above often narrow national considerations have been rent asunder means the global order has to be built anew, in a climate of intense distrust among the nations.

This perspective offers the insight into why the role of G20 has become paramount. In a sense, the G20 is not a typical MI. The organisation does not have a permanent secretariat. It was created in the aftermath of the Asian crisis in 1999 but recognising its versatility it graduated to become the only heads of summit forum in 2008 in the wake of the Global Financial Meltdown, capable of taking swift and enforceable decisions.

Along with 19 nations and the European Union, the G20 high table also includes almost all the key multilateral institutions. The communique of the G20 has till now, never examined the state of health of these institutions. But in an unusual departure it will do so now, as India's finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has pointed out recently. She has said India will prioritise the strengthening of these multilateral institutions, a call that is most appropriate at this juncture.

### Introduction:

It is an amazing coincidence that beginning with Indonesia, the annual G20 Presidency will remain with the global South for four years. India, which shall assume the Presidency in December 2022, will hand it over to South Africa in 2024. Brazil comes in thereafter in 2025. The continuity provides a great opportunity to redraft the role and the leadership of the MIs by a new set of nations, mainly from the global South.

---

*\*Subhomoy Bhattacharjee is Consulting Editor for the Business Standard Newspaper and Senior Adjunct Fellow, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi.*

---

In these four years, the foremost question the G20 will have to address is how to rebuild the MIs to effectively serve the new world order. There is similar breakdown and rebuilding taking place at another level, that of defence. The global security pacts of the 20th century are being upended by new ones like the Aukus and the Quad. “The formation of AUKUS...and its impact on the geopolitical environment and security architecture in the eastern Indo-Pacific region is likely to be significant”<sup>2</sup>

The setting is therefore most appropriate to appreciate why a large-scale putsch of the order of the MIs, is in order (no pun). To understand why, a brief recital of the journey of these bodies, is necessary.

First of all, what do we mean by the universe of MI? These institutions were a response of the victorious nations to the devastation inflicted by the Second World War. They were meant to guide the gradual dismantling of the colonial world order built on empires to a new world order to be based on the voluntary comity of nations. That this transition should happen well, was the *raison d'être* of each MI. Yet, given that many of the nations were just infants, economically and politically, when they entered the post-colonial world, the leadership role of the MIs were largely concentrated among the leading Allied powers, led by the USA. It also created an interesting geography of the headquarters of these bodies, located exclusively in the Western European continent and the USA.

The foremost of them was the United Nations whose charter was initially signed by 50 nations including India, in 1945. Since then, the membership of the UN by countries and of its related bodies

like the WHO, the UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO and UNHCR among others have exploded<sup>3</sup>. The other set of charter organisations came out of the Bretton Woods conference of 1944, led by the IMF, the World Bank, the GATT and the continent wise development finance organisations including the ADB, the EBRD and the AfDB. While the alphabet soup expanded every decade since then, the most notable addition to the list has been that of WTO (a follow up to the GATT) in 1995 and the three Asia based financial institutions, the New Development Bank in 2014, the AIIB in 2016 and the ISA in 2018. For the past seventy-seven years since 1945, these MI had run on a governance structure straddling the global commonwealth of finance, disarmament, health, education, labour, laws of the seas and of air, to even culture and more. The key roles in the UN family was based on the voting rights of the nations in the Security Council, while in the economic MI, these were often based on preferential voting rights.

But in the face of the challenges thrown up by the third decade of the twenty-first century, the MIs are failing drastically short. This is quite different from several occasions in the 20th century when nations found the remit of the various MI inadequate. Those inadequacies were addressed not by calls to develop new institutions jettisoning the old but by coopting the old and the new institutions. For instance, the establishment of internet coordination platform, ICANN in 1998 filled an emerging gap in the development of the net. But it looped back with the UN. Sometimes, the UN itself promoted a new organisation. The most famous of them all, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change came up in 1988 to

---

coordinate global response to the warming planet.

In the current decade there is instead no call to develop such feedback loops but restructure the organisations, hook, nail and sinker. Why has this happened? It is because the governing structure of these MIs have fallen prey to intense hostility among the member nations, in an era of hardened politico-economic differences. The “continued success and relevance (of the UN) would be determined by its ability to adapt to the realities of today’s world, which is starkly different from what it was at the time of its creation more than 75 years ago,” notes the BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System, issued last year<sup>4</sup>.

For instance, conventional wars like that of Russia—Ukraine have split the UN so effectively that it cannot even decide on sanctions. In other wars not occupying comparable media space like those in Yemen or Iran, the differences are almost equally stark. New flashpoints are meanwhile developing alarmingly like those in South China Sea, where only the gunpowder is missing in action.

Add to them the list of challenges like the Covid pandemic, an energy crisis brought on not by natural shortages but because of a war bereft of reasons, a global supply shock of commodities brought on by the breakdown of a globalised supply chain and a climate crisis that offers no easy solutions but inflicts an unfair cost on those who are most at risk. Nations stand ready to blame each other, for each of these crises, but most important, point fingers at the MI for perceived bias<sup>5</sup>. Their inability has not escaped attention. “We therefore must modernise our multilateral institutions, making them fit for purpose and better

equipped to deal with the global and cross-generational challenges we face,” notes a joint article penned by Jacinda Ardern, Cyril Ramaphosa and Pedro Sánchez, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, President of South Africa, and Prime Minister of Spain, respectively<sup>6</sup>.

In the post Second World War era, the MIs were conceived to address tough social and economic challenges but armed with a stable governance structure. In the intervening decades these organisations worked on a common belief that each of the global problems can be addressed through adequate technocratic responses. The stable Eurocentric governance structures offered a plausible assumption that this was possible.

With the breakdown of faith in the governing structure, the MIs can hardly offer any adequate response to the current global war-like situation among many members<sup>7</sup>. Those war-like postures have been sharpened into acute political hostilities among the members in the governing bodies of the MIs “The clash between China and the U.S. at the just concluded World Health Assembly in May marks the end of the multilateralism of the past 70 years”<sup>8</sup>. In such an environment hopes of dousing the multiple crisis are just not on.

It is this context which allows one to understand why Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, at a Brookings Institution event in the USA “You need new institutions, please do... From the lessons learned from how these [existing institutions] have become less effective, we need to make them more effective as well”. Her highly significant remarks were made in a conversation with economist Eswar Prasad on ‘India’s Economic Prospects and Role in the World Economy’<sup>9</sup>. These are measured

---

remarks but that Ms Sitharaman has made them and at an institution where those shall be heard loud and clear, are themselves an indication of how deep the malaise has spread.

### **Role of G20:**

In these recondite circumstances, where does the G20 fit in? The transformation of this group to that of a heads of state in 2008 followed a recognition, that the Global Financial Meltdown was too much of a bewildering development in the global economy. There was a recognition that unless a meeting similar to that of the G7 was held to bring the leaders of more key economies across the table, to direct coordinated action, there shall be intense pain for the global economy. The 19 countries plus the European Union at the table, brought with them up to 80 percent of the world's economic output, two-thirds of the global population and three quarters of the international trade.

The template of commonly directed actions significantly helped the world swim out of the Meltdown. The first meeting in November at Washington DC was so successful that it became an annual template. "On that occasion, the country's leaders coordinated the global response to the impact of the financial crisis that occurred in the US at that time and agreed to hold a follow-up meeting"<sup>10</sup>.

After a decade of relatively moderate pressures, the success of the model was again made clear in April 2020 when the G20 leaders assembled virtually to direct global action against the Covid pandemic.<sup>11</sup> The meeting, coordinated by Saudi Arabia as the President "asked Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to develop

an Action Plan in response to COVID-19". This included sharing of the latest information and country experiences on COVID-19 containment measures, their implementation and subsequent removal to minimise negative spillover and second wave effects, including the risk of secondary waves of infection. That level of coordination among the members of the UN system would have taken more than a year to come up for signature.

Compared to any other global organisations, including the UN Security Council, it is this ability of the G20 to bring the top political heads of state of the world in one room, speaking with and listening to each other, that has set it apart. It is this avatar in which the G20 will be needed to be seen again in a highly polarised world. In this context, other than the sterling role played by it with respect to the cataclysmic events of 2008, one has to examine to what extent the body has been successful and where it has failed, since then.

One of its striking successes in recent years is that in the Italian presidency in 2021 (the G20 presidency usually runs from the previous December to November), the G20 agreed to put a floor under corporation tax rates of 15 percent. Since then, all multinational companies with turnover of USD 100 billion or more have begun to recalculate their tax liabilities, globally. The body has also notched up several successes in the field of setting standards, like global telecom rules, data interoperability, financial technology, a common agreed approach to address the climate emergency, and so on. Importantly, the G20 meetings offered the world leaders an opportunity to speak with each other in person. Once the Meltdown was sufficiently addressed, the early part of the second

---

decade allowed for tensions to be lowered across the table, on a vast range of issues.

Yet even this environment of letting off steam has not held up. The G20 meetings now face an intractable challenge. In the Indonesian Presidency, till now it is unclear whether the US, Canada and the European countries will agree to even sign a joint communique, along with Russia, in November this year. This communique is not symbolic but gives direction to the respective member countries expressing their “commitments and vision for the future, drafted from the chosen recommendations and deliverables from ministerial meetings and other work streams”. Yet, at several ministerial working groups, even the preparatory work has got largely stalled. In the G20 framework, a large number of subject areas are threshed at ministerial levels by the member countries. The working groups of country officials create draft joint declarations on labour, energy, telecommunications, health, finance and even arcane topics like culture.

The Russia-Ukraine war has cleaved the G20 into two groups. Russia is a member of the G20, Ukraine is not. But never before has any of the member nations gone to war at this scale. The US invasions of Iraq and of Afghanistan, for plenty of reasons, do not count in the same league. The European and American nations are keen to include a reference to this war, in every possible forum, condemning Russia. It follows what they are doing domestically also. For instance, in all press communiques issued by the US department of treasury, secretary Janet Yellen has made an obligatory reference to the war, where she criticises the role of Russia and commiserates with Ukraine.

While all the Asian nations of G20 are on the same page in their criticism of Russia, they are also insistent that the right place for expressing any such opinion is the declaration of the heads of state, which will follow their meeting in November this year. As a result, when officials from the G20 nations have met this year as members of working group, more than the substantive issues, their dialogue have stalled. “Indonesia...is understood to be struggling to get all countries to arrive at a consensus on outcome documents. With tensions between the West and Russia intensifying, convening all members in the same room has been a challenge too”<sup>12</sup>.

### **The stakes involved:**

Are there any competing global organisations that can offer a viable alternative? It does not seem so. Having wedged themselves into the war by supporting one of the combatants, neither the IMF, nor the World Bank and its associate organisations have shown the ability to bring all nations to a constructive dialogue. Two developments in this context are worth noting. First, there is hardly any doubt that the reconstruction efforts post the Russia-Ukraine war will be dominated by the heft of the membership of major nations across international organisations. India is hamstrung because she plays host to no major global institutions. Yet, as the fifth largest economy, she has a stake in the rules set by most of them.

Second, the weaponisation of the global financial system to target countries, most evidenced in the sanctions, price cap on sales of Russian crude and making the Swift system unavailable to transactions involving Russia and



---

Iran, make it absolutely essential that India sits in positions of authority at the rule making bodies. As globalisation goes on retreat, participation in the multilateral organisations with strength is becoming more important for major nations.

One of the key organisations which could become a significant entity consequently is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). India is in an advantageous position here since it shall become the chairman of SCO in 2023. Analysts are already comparing the role of SCO with that of NATO in Europe<sup>13</sup>.

“In the short term, the West has reasserted its dominance over the international system that it built in the aftermath of World War II. But it should expect a serious longer-term challenge from an intensification of the China-led effort to build an alternative system”, Mohamed A. El-Erian has written in his Project Syndicate column<sup>14</sup>. At stake shall also be dominant roles in organisations like the AIIB and the NDB.

At the IMF, India has already pitched for conflating the issue of Special Drawing Rights with enhanced voting rights. The dispute has led to stiff

arguments among the member nations. India argues that just as nations which need more support from the IMF to recover from Covid by getting more SDR (which substitutes for scarce foreign exchange reserves for them), those nations which provide the support should also get larger voting rights.<sup>15</sup>

Paradoxically, even as the MIs wilt, they shall be drawn into a vast agenda of reconstruction just as it happened post the Second World War. Estimates say that Ukraine itself shall need a global support of a massive USD 349 billion as per the World Bank, and there are going to be other centres of destruction<sup>16</sup>. The MIs shall be asked to estimate the scale of the disasters and prepare a laundry list. As Sitharaman noted, the multilateral institutions exist but problems remain and solutions are not coming through them.

But to get the whole set up of organisations ready to take on their renewed mantle, the G20 has to provide the political leadership in the governance of each of them. It remains the only organisation which has the persuasive power to make peace and reconstruction happen.

---

## References:

- 1 WEO Press Briefing Annual Meetings 2022, October 11, 2022  
<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/10/12/tr101122-weo-transcript>
- 2 AUKUS and the Eastern Indo-Pacific's Evolving Security Architecture, GIRISH LUTHRA;  
<https://www.orfonline.org/research/aukus-and-the-eastern-indo-pacifics-evolving-security-architecture/>
- 3 For a list, see here [https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/VBS\\_UNSystem](https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/VBS_UNSystem)
- 4 BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System, June 01, 2021  
[https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33888/BRICS\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_Strengthening\\_and\\_Reforming\\_the\\_Multilateral\\_System](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33888/BRICS_Joint_Statement_on_Strengthening_and_Reforming_the_Multilateral_System)
- 5 Xenophobia, prejudice, and blame in pandemic times; Alexandra R White [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)00197-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)00197-0/fulltext)

- 
- 6 <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/let-us-revitalize-multilateralism-the-future-of-the-world-is-at-stake-11633279934717.html> ©2021/Project Syndicate
  - 7 10 Conflicts to worry about in 2022: Mid-year update <https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/mid-year-update/>
  - 8 *Multilateralism in the new cold war*; Mukul Sanwal. *The Hindu*  
<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/multilateralism-in-the-new-cold-war/article31734107.ece>
  - 9 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/g20-has-a-great-potential-to-work-towards-global-good-sitharaman-in-us-101665560764915.html>
  - 10 <https://www.g20.org/about-the-g20/#about>
  - 11 *Communiqué—Virtual meeting of the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors* Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, April 15, 2020;  
<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2020/2020-g20-finance-0415.html>
  - 12 *With an eye on G20, Sitharaman steps up engagements in Washington DC*, *Hindustan Times*, Oct 14, 2022  
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/with-an-eye-on-g20-sitharaman-steps-up-engagements-in-washington-dc-101665685607257.html>
  - 13 *Rogue NATO: The new face of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*; © European Council on Foreign Relations 2022  
<https://ecfr.eu/article/rogue-nato-the-new-face-of-the-shanghai-cooperation-organisation/>
  - 14 *The Ukraine War's Multifaceted Economic Fallout*; Mar 7, 2022, Mohamed A. EL-Erian <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/economic-policy-response-to-ukraine-war-by-mohamed-a-el-erian-2022-03>
  - 15 Bhattacharjee, Subhomoy. "India May Not Get to Play a Major Role in Reconstruction of Ukraine." *Rediff*. *Rediff.com*, March 16, 2022. <https://www.rediff.com/money/report/india-may-not-get-to-play-a-major-role-in-reconstruction-of-ukraine/20220316.htm>.
  - 16 *Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Estimated \$349 Billion*  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/09/09/ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-estimated-349-billion>



## The Role of Digital Democracies: What India's G20 Presidency Must Underline

Hindol Sengupta\*

**T**he G20 presidency allows India to highlight a key aspect of its global rise – its role as a provider of global public goods and services. All delivered digitally.

From December 2022, India will take over the presidency of the G20 for one year. The G20 or Group of Twenty is one of the most important groupings in the world because it includes not only most of the world's leading economies (both developed and developing) but also makes up 80 per cent of the gross world product, measures half of the globe's land area, two-thirds of the population, and around 75-80 per cent of international trade.

India's presidency comes at a time of great global turmoil. The changing world order, and India's own ambitions of rising in the global system, must today take into account not just a global warming crisis, but also an upcoming recession, and a war in Ukraine which is alarmingly bringing back fears of the use of nuclear weapons.

At a time like this, the key question is what India could achieve through its presidential term, what could it showcase that would stand out and be representative of its undisputed global contribution. This essay argues that the G20 is India's opportunity to craft a new narrative of 'digital democracies' which would enable the country to showcase not only its prowess in building and deploying public goods at scale which operate, and are delivered, digitally, but it would also assist in demonstrating its commitment to offer such

goods at a global, and not merely national, level.

In recent years, India's policymaking and delivery has had a digital cornerstone. Whether it was delivering cash benefits to vulnerable populations, or instantaneous delivery of vaccine certificates, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of mobile phone-based digital infrastructure took centerstage. Alongside this, India's UPI (Unified Payments Interface) and RuPay – built by India's National Payments Corporation of India - payment cards systems which constitute a multinational financial services and payment service system has now spread to seven countries – Oman, Singapore, Bhutan, Malaysia, France, Nepal, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Last year, India led the world in digital financial transactions clocking 48 billion such transactions, three times China's number, and 6.5 times that of the US, Germany, France, and Canada put together.

The Aadhaar digital identification number system, and the upcoming digital health platform, along with other initiatives like the digital locker (whose registered users have grown from 40 million before Covid to 125 million today with more than 5.6 billion documents stored) constitute an ecosystem which should be presented to the world as something other countries could successfully adopt. The successful implementation of the digital locker is the first step towards unrolling the digital health scheme which hinges upon patients being able to store their health records digitally so that they are accessible, anytime, anywhere.

---

*\*Hindol Sengupta is Vice-President and Head of Research at Invest India.*

---

The success of the underlying thought behind all these products is being recognised. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has described India's digital cash transfer process during the pandemic a 'logistical marvel'. Digital technology has indeed given a fillip to delivery systems and mechanisms in India, where dealing with the labyrinthine state was always challenging for the ordinary citizen. Now, often, all it takes is a mobile phone. It has also built the case for India as the provider of global goods related to digital technologies. What kinds of goods are these?

These are two kinds of digital architectures – one owned by major corporations like in the United States which then spread their network of users around the world, and the other, a more closed system in a sense, comes from China, which also builds such architecture at scale. If the American system is dominated by large corporations, China's systems are operated by a rather opaque authoritarian system which consistently faces investigations on issues like espionage and other allied matters.

India stands out in this because it is showing that it is able to build digital architecture at scale which does not have to fall into either of these two binaries. It can be built at scale under a democratic governance structure. This is what makes it possible for India to offer this kind of technology to other countries as suitable measures to distribute and monitor goods of governance while keeping the framework firmly democratic. At the G20 platform, India could display this prowess in a programmable manner, which means it could offer this technology as the basis for a new kind of global cooperation.

What kind of cooperation could this be? It would be between 'digital democracies'.

Recent US government decision about licensing semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China is a very stark reminder that in an increasingly fractured world, a new network of supply chains, based once again on deep strategic reasoning, is being built.

What is happening is that a new reasoning for cooperation and collaboration is emerging where countries will build supply chains based on alliances. This kind of thing was once confined to military technology but will increasingly spread to other forms of technology sharing, because increasingly, even domestic-use technology is being weaponised. One of the examples of this came in the blocking of Russian entities from the global SWIFT financial transaction system.

Therefore, democracies will choose to band together in the sharing of cutting-edge technologies, whether civilian or military, and India is among a handful of countries which can both create mass technologies but also test them at scale. Therefore, India could legitimately hope to play a role in ensuring that a consensus is built among democracies to use and share digital public goods, many of which India could construct and bring to the table.

The ability to do so gives India a voice in the technology conversation, not merely as the site which provides tech talent, but also as the maker of products, and architecture. India is now a place where some of the biggest, and one can now legitimately say, best, digital public architecture is going to be built. A 'digital democracy' grouping promoted by India, the country with one of the

---

largest sets of internet users in the world, and a place which has one of the cheapest data rates on earth, can work to build consensus on not only what kind of public utility digital infrastructure to build but also to what kind of use it should be put to, and how to prevent illegitimate use.

By championing the idea of bringing together digital democracies during its G20 presidency, India would be able to showcase its products, their impact, and their potential use in other parts of the world; all the while leading the conversation on the manner in which the global digital economy must be steered by governments to keep it away from authoritarian use. This also fits in well with India's efforts to provide goods and services to countries that need them, as in the manner it provided vaccines around the world during the Covid pandemic. From the islands of the Pacific to countries in Africa and Latin America, where India is building deeper ties today than what it has traditionally possessed, it can offer digital goods that could be deployed effectively in many countries who might otherwise not have the technological prowess or the scale to successfully build such models.

A digital democracy framework is also a great platform for deeper India-US collaboration, especially in the light of the decoupling that the US is affecting with China, including in technology. As the world embraces 5G, issues on who has what kind of technological architecture will become a

key governance question, similar to the impact that good quality roads, railways lines and airports have had. As President John F. Kennedy famously said, "American roads are not good because America is rich, but America is rich because American roads are good."

Today, countries don't have to be the richest to have the best public digital infrastructure. But they will be able to increase their wealth if this kind of infrastructure is widely and democratically, made available to their citizens. This is something India can take advantage of. It is a country which leapfrogged inadequacies in its physical infrastructure by building a world class information technology industry. Now it is building not only physical infrastructure that is world class but also digital infrastructure which is among the best in the world.

The G20 presidency is the platform where India comes into its own as an innovator in digital governance and places its skills and talents in this aspect as a vital part of its diplomatic goodie bag. It is a moment when India can urge a grouping based on shared values in the creation and dissemination of digital goods and services and where democracies agree on broad principles of information sharing, sovereignty safeguards, and adequate protection for privacy. This is not just an important issue for India, but is increasingly critical for every major democracy. Therefore, it might be worth considering as part of India's G20 plans.



## **G20 and Inclusive Green Growth: Can India Take It Forward?**

Rajeesh Kumar\*

**T**he Group of Twenty (G20), an informal grouping of the world's largest 20 economies, was formed in 1999 after the Asian financial crisis. The Grouping was created to enhance global policy coordination and give greater visibility to emerging economies, which are increasingly interconnected in the global economy. In its initial years, global economic growth and financial market regulation have been the sole focus of G20.<sup>1</sup> Many argue that G20 played a vital role during the 2008 financial crisis and probably saved the world from economic depression.<sup>2</sup> It facilitated a coordinated response on fiscal stimulus, and helped improve financial regulation. It also created a supportive political environment for strong national and global actions to address the crisis.

G20 members currently account for nearly 80 per cent of the world GDP, 75 per cent of global trade, and 60 per cent of the global population.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, the G20 agenda has broadened and deepened, and the Group became the premier global forum for discussing the many pressing socio-economic and development issues. While the first decade of G20 actions were at the level of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, its agenda has diversified significantly in the second decade at the leaders' summit level. For instance,

one of the most significant outcomes of its 2009 summit was the agreement to implement a framework for strong, sustainable, and balanced global growth.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the G20 growth framework seeks to ensure that growth is characterised by inclusiveness and resilience, both of which are necessary for sustainable and equitable development.<sup>5</sup> For instance, in 2012, under Mexican presidency, G20 introduced inclusive green growth as a cross-cutting priority on the G20 development agenda. Subsequent G20 presidencies took forward this agenda, and the members made several commitments to inclusive green growth. In 2016, for instance, the G20 committed itself to the Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The plan aims to contribute to global efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (AAAA).<sup>6</sup>

India will assume the G20 presidency on 01 December 2022. The year-long presidency would be a watershed moment for India, a country profoundly committed to multilateralism. It also provides India a significant opportunity to drive

---

*\*Rajeesh Kumar is an Associate Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA). He has PhD in International Organization from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Prior to joining MP-IDSA in 2016, he taught at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (2010-11 & 2015-16) and the University of Calicut, Kerala (2007-08). His areas of research interest are International Organizations, India and Multilateralism, Global Governance, and International Humanitarian Law.*

---

global economic cooperation and articulate policies on various pressing socio-political issues. However, India's presidency comes at a time of intensifying geopolitical tensions and increased anti-multilateral, anti-globalisation sentiments. Consequently, the challenge before India is to help the G20 to reinvigorate failing multilateralism and strengthen global support for post-pandemic recovery and growth. This article examines how India can utilise its G20 presidency to steer global confidence in multilateralism, focusing on G20 actions on inclusive green growth.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it explores the G20 conversations on growth and recovery and its achievements in inclusive green growth, focusing on food security, climate sustainability and public health. The second section focuses on options and priorities for India's G20 presidency towards inclusive green growth.

## **G20 and Inclusive Green Growth**

Green Growth attempts to provide a solution to the joint objectives of economic growth and environmental sustainability. The G20 countries have increasingly recognised the importance of green growth. In the past, G20 made several commitments to creating new economic opportunities while solving environmental and resource scarcity challenges. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the worst economic contraction and significantly impacted the global green growth transition. The pandemic has largely relegated climate, food security and public health. The following three subsections will discuss the G20 commitments on climate change, food security and public health as a background to

explore India's options and priorities as G20 president.

### ***Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture:***

Sustainable agriculture and food security remain top priorities in the G20 agenda. The G20 members are committed to promoting sustainable agriculture, which has a significant role in achieving a wide range of SDGs, including food and nutrition security. The G20 economies are central players in the global food production and supply chain system. For example, G20 nations produce nearly 80 per cent of the world's cereals and account for a similar percentage of world agricultural exports.<sup>7</sup> As a result, G20 policies related to agriculture and food security can also impact global food security and nutrition. Furthermore, G20 countries are also the major providers of development assistance for food security and nutrition, as well as key shareholders of multilateral development institutions that channel aid and non-concessional finance for investments in rural development.<sup>8</sup>

G20 has shown leadership in addressing food insecurity on various occasions in the past. During the 2008 food price crisis, G20 intervened and positively responded to the crisis. These interventions later resulted in the formation of an Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) and its Rapid Response Forum (RRF), a Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), the Global Agricultural Monitoring initiative (GEOGLAM), the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP), Platform for Agricultural Risk Management (PARM) and AgResults.<sup>9</sup> Food Security and Nutrition Framework (2014), Food Security Action Plan (2015) are other significant developments in this regard. The

---

Framework provides “the basis for the G20 to take a long-term, integrated and sustainable food systems approach that will guide future action on food security and nutrition.”<sup>10</sup>

The 2016 G20 Agriculture Minister’s meeting produced the Implementation Plan and the Action Plan on Food Security and Sustainable Food Systems. Likewise, the 2018 Argentina Presidency has focused on sustainable soil management and its impact on food security and human development. In 2020, the Saudi G20 Presidency initiated the G20 Riyadh Statement to Enhance Implementation of Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (G20 Riyadh RIAFS Statement). The Statement emphasized the G20 Members’ leadership role in promoting responsible investment to improve the sustainability, inclusiveness and resilience of agriculture and food systems.<sup>11</sup> In 2021, G20 meeting culminated in the Matera Declaration on food security, nutrition and food systems, which outlines an agenda for addressing global food insecurity and putting the world back on track to end hunger within the decade.<sup>12</sup> In October 2022, the first G20 Joint Finance and Agriculture Ministers (JFAMM) meeting agreed to task international organisation namely the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and World Bank in mapping global policy responses to food insecurity.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the Russia-Ukraine war, has deepened global food insecurity and has significantly impacted the agri-food supply chain system, particularly in developing countries. This requires G20 members to work hand in hand, make more commitments, and ensure its implementation.

***Climate Sustainability:*** Climate change has now become one of the most significant challenges to humankind. The deteriorating global environment seriously imperils sustainable development goals. The G20 economies are responsible for nearly 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, they are leading in the promotion of fossil fuels, as they derive 82 per cent of their total energy supply from coal, oil and gas.<sup>13</sup> Many G20 countries are also significant producers of fossil fuels. Thus, the group members’ commitments and compliance are critical to achieving global climate commitments. Moreover, G20 has a strong economic interest in limiting global warming to 1.5°C due to climate change’s negative impact on total economic activity. Climate plays an important role in the both Finance and Sherpa track of the G20. The Finance track, which deals with “the traditional core issues of the G20, has been discussing, among others, climate finance. The Group has frequently reiterated the timely implementation of international climate agreements and commitments.

Over the last decade, the G20 has repeatedly endorsed global climate negotiations and established its own initiatives. The G20 supports the transition to more adaptable, open, and clean energy systems while acknowledging the value of collective action in addressing environmental issues and climate change. The most significant change is the augmentation of renewable energy. Nearly all G20 countries have substantially increased their renewable energy portfolio. In 2009, G20 committed to “rationalise and phase out over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption”.<sup>14</sup> In 2020, the



---

G20 Summit held in Toronto reconfirmed the Group's commitment to green recovery and sustainable global growth. The primary focus of the 2011 Summit was on promoting low-carbon development strategies to optimise the potential for inclusive green growth and to ensure sustainable development.<sup>15</sup>

The 2012 Summit in Mexico established the G20 study group on climate finance to consider ways to mobilise resources and support the operationalisation of the Green Climate Fund. Commitment to phase down the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons, the USD 3 billion campaign for the Green Climate Fund and support for the Paris Conference's ambition were the significant outcomes of St Petersburg (2013), Brisbane (2014) and Antalya (2015) Summits. In 2015, the G20 also called for the timely submission of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) and ratification of the Paris Agreement. In Guangzhou, in 2016, the G20 Sherpas agreed on a Presidential Statement on Climate Change, committing to signing the Paris Agreement and bringing it into force as soon as possible.<sup>16</sup> The Sherpa track, which is coordinated directly by the G20 leaders, established a dedicated working group, the G20 Hamburg Climate and Energy Action Plan for Growth, on climate and energy in 2017, which became a stand-alone working group in 2018.<sup>17</sup> Osaka Blue Ocean Vision and the G20 Implementation Framework for Actions on Marine Plastic Litter were the other significant developments during these years.

In 2020, under Saudi presidency, G20 endorsed Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) Platform, with its 4Rs framework (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and

Remove), recognising the key importance and ambition of reducing emissions, taking into account system efficiency and national circumstances.<sup>18</sup> In the 2021 Rome summit, in keeping with expanding agenda, the G20 shared its aspirational goal "to collectively plant one trillion trees, focusing on the most degraded ecosystems on the planet, and urged other countries to join to reach this global goal by 2030, including through climate projects, with the involvement of the private sector and civil society."<sup>19</sup> As an extension to the Sustainable Finance Roadmap of the Rome summit, under the Indonesian presidency, G20 held an exclusive meeting on climate mitigation which discussed policy and regulatory approaches to climate finance mobilisation.

Furthermore, beyond the promises, G20 members have delivered real progress in the climate change and clean energy areas. For instance, between 2015 and 2020, the share of renewables in the G20 increased by 20 per cent, reaching 28.6 percent of its power generation in 2020 and is projected to reach 29.5% in 2021.<sup>20</sup> The energy sector's carbon intensity decreased by 4 per cent across the G20 during the same period. Moreover, even when the US planned to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the G-20 further sought to improve sustainable livelihoods with its clean energy and climate efforts. However, the post-Covid-19 data shows that the G20 countries are not on track to achieve their climate commitments and to accelerate the transition, they need to follow up on past commitments and take further steps.

**Public Health:** Global public health has received consistent attention of the G20 since its

---

first leaders' level summit in Washington DC, in 2008. Since then it made nearly 80 collective, politically binding, future-oriented commitments on health.<sup>21</sup> However, health became a prominent issue on G20 agenda in the recent past only. The outbreak of Ebola crisis in 2014 and G20 response is a case in point for Group's work on health emergencies. In 2017, under the German Presidency, the G20 Health Working Group (HWG) was founded to create a unified international agenda on improving healthcare systems.<sup>22</sup> The Group also agreed to collectively respond to public health emergencies and tackle the challenge of antimicrobial resistance, resulting in the Global AMR Research and Development Hub.

Next year, the Argentinean Presidency introduced childhood obesity and maintained efforts to strengthen the health system and combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR).<sup>23</sup> The summit also reinforced the need for joint commitment by G20 countries to strengthen core capacities for prevention: detection, preparedness and response to health emergencies.<sup>24</sup> In 2019, the Japanese Presidency focused on issues such as the achievement of Universal Health Coverage, response to population ageing and management of health risk and health security.<sup>25</sup> It was in Japan, for the first time G20 Health and Finance Ministers met jointly and the Group recognised the vital link between investments in public health and economic resilience.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics has become the core of the G20 agenda. It led the global fight against the pandemic with a USD 10 trillion bailout package focused on addressing the economic and health crisis. In 2020,

the Saudi Arabian presidency developed a new narrative for pandemic financing. It also proposed "Enabling Person-Centred Health Systems" focusing on value-based health care and digital health solutions as the central pillar of the health agenda.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, a G20 Digital Health Taskforce was created and it submitted a Report on Digital Health Implementation Approach to Pandemic Management.<sup>27</sup>

In 2021, under Italian leadership G20 has not only recognised the interdependency between health and wealth but also created a High-level Independent Panel on Financing the Global Commons for Pandemic Preparedness and Responses.<sup>28</sup> The panel calls for a significant increase in public funding in the global health to plug major gaps in pandemic prevention and preparedness. It has also identified four pressing preparedness gaps: "infectious disease surveillance, resilience of national health systems, global capacity to supply and deliver vaccines and other medical countermeasures, and global governance."<sup>29</sup> G20 members also agreed to establish a Joint Finance-Health Task Force to further strengthening a crucial coordination between Finance and Health Ministries in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The Group also collaborated on the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative and reinforced their financial support for the "Access to COVID-19 Tools." Moreover, global health architecture was also one of the key priorities of the current Indonesian Presidency.

### **Challenges, Options and Priorities for Indian Presidency**

According to the Ministry of External Affairs,

---

as G20 president, India aims to strengthen global support for developing countries' priorities around inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth. These range from LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment), global food security, energy security, women's empowerment, tech-enabled development in health, agriculture and climate financing, and multilateral reforms.<sup>30</sup> The year-long presidency will also focus on building a consensus within the group on actions to revitalise global economic growth in a human-centric and inclusive manner and ensure just green and digital transitions.<sup>31</sup> However, for India, the G20 presidency will be a significant challenge for various reasons.

The most significant challenge before the Indian presidency is the persisting Russia–Ukraine conflict. The conflict is worsening the macro-economic and supply chain and the food security crises aggravated by the pandemic. Therefore, India must devise some constructive measures to urge the West and Russia to give diplomacy its legitimate space. India could use its friendly relationships with the West and Russia and its forthcoming UNSC and SCO presidencies to bring the conflicting parties to the negotiation table.

The second challenge is addressing global food insecurity. Currently, the world is off track in accomplishing SDG goals of alleviating poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. Nations are looking into becoming more self-reliant, particularly regarding food, since COVID-19 exposes the fragility of the global food and agricultural supply chain. The World Bank reported that between 75 and 95 million additional people could be living in extreme poverty in 2022 and 255 million lost their jobs because of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>32</sup> In addition,

the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022 Report estimates that the pandemic has increased chronic undernourishment by 150 million people since 2019, and between 702 and 828 million people in the world were affected by hunger in 2021 and around 670 million people may still face hunger in 2030.<sup>33</sup> The pandemic has also demonstrated the need for sustainable agriculture to consider the interconnected relationships between people, animals and the environment.

As India takes up leadership of G20 in 2022, it would be most appropriate to bring food, nutrition and agriculture to the centre stage. India can add value to the endeavours of the G20 for food security and nutrition by providing leadership and encouraging global cooperation.<sup>34</sup> India is the world's largest producer of milk, millet and pulses. Also, India is now the seventh largest exporter of agricultural products globally. Moreover, India is the top food supplier to the least developed countries (LDC), with around \$5.2 billion in sales. The Joint Finance and Agriculture Ministers (JFAMM) meeting in Washington recently reaffirmed the G20 commitment to addressing challenges to global food insecurity. As president, India should ensure G20 members' compliance with these commitments. India must also set the G20 agenda that marshals the creation of robust food supply chains while managing immediate food shortages. In 2021, India became a part of the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) along with Japan and Australia.

Addressing the pandemic-induced global health crisis is India's third challenge. The G20 presidency could be an opportunity to make global health governance more democratic and evidence-

---

informed. Given the current predicament of the World Health Organization (WHO), India could push for an Intergovernmental Panel on Pandemic Risk/Preparedness similar to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to advance scientific knowledge on pandemic risk/preparedness. Over the years, G20 Joint Finance and Health Task Force (JFHTF) has emerged as a robust global platform for discussing actions to prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies. India should propose creating an integrated trade, health, and intellectual property approach to responding to the global health crisis under this task force.

Today India is fast emerging as a global clean energy powerhouse. India committed to net zero emissions by 2070. It has ambitious targets for 2030, installing 500 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity and reducing the emission intensity of its economy by 45 per cent. Furthermore, India is also scaling up its footprints in emerging technologies such as hydrogen, battery storage, and low-carbon steel. As G20 president, India will have multiple opportunities to share its clean energy expertise and products with the member countries. India could also play an effective role in supporting the multilateral goals of advancing research and development to produce affordable renewable energy. India has signed clean energy partnerships with G7 countries Australia, Japan, the US, and the EU. India should consider creating regional collaboration as a guiding principle of energy transitions to drive this further.

Preparing a skilled workforce is a significant concern for all the G20 nations. At the G20, India consistently supported youth's skills and

employability and agreed to tackle unemployment by sharing best practices. Furthermore, India pushed for signing a Migration and Mobility Agreement to tackle the global migration crisis. However, the post-Covid-19 data suggest that G20 nations are far from achieving their skilling and employment goals. Therefore, strengthening the skilling ecosystem and youth employability must be one of India's core priorities.

India's presidency also presents a golden chance to push for improving African representation in the G20 and G20's engagements with African regional organisations. Though the G20 Compact with Africa (CwA) is ambitious, it fails to take the sustainable development agenda comprehensively and seriously. For instance, CwA misses elements such as skills development and education. With its strong skills development and capacity-building partnerships with Africa, India could address some of the shortcomings of the Compact and improve G20's future engagement with Africa.

In short, India's G20 presidency comes at a critical stage in world affairs, where deep-rooted fault lines emerge, and transformative solutions are needed. The catastrophic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change are undeniable. The pandemic unprecedentedly impacted the global economy and supply chain system. Nevertheless, the global responses to the pandemic and its recovery are uneven and not inclusive. Furthermore, macroeconomic challenges in the form of rising debt, inflationary pressures, and challenges due to the Russia-Ukraine war have emerged.<sup>35</sup> India has a vital role in addressing these challenges as a country highly committed to

---

multilateralism and a zealous advocate of inclusiveness and equity in the global governance system. With the above-discussed priorities, India

can take the lead in moving forward with the G20 agenda of inclusive green growth and sustainable development.

## References:

- 1 'Communique of G- 20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors', Berlin, Germany, 15-16 December 1999, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/1999/1999communique.pdf>
- 2 Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The G20 and the Recovery and Beyond: An Agenda for Global Governance for the Twenty-First Century*, [https://policydialogue.org/files/publications/samples/The\\_G20\\_and\\_Recovery\\_and\\_Beyond.pdf](https://policydialogue.org/files/publications/samples/The_G20_and_Recovery_and_Beyond.pdf); [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/conferences/shared/pdf/g20framework/Keynote\\_Turalay.pdf?edff74ffbc8baa7e40d93a445ead7067](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/conferences/shared/pdf/g20framework/Keynote_Turalay.pdf?edff74ffbc8baa7e40d93a445ead7067)
- 3 'About the G20' <https://www.g20.org/about-the-g20/>
- 4 See G20 Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth,
- 5 Colin I. Bradford and Wonhyuk Lim (ed.), *Global Leadership in Transition: Making the G20 More Effective and Responsive*, Washington, Brookings, 2011.
- 6 G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, [https://www.b20germany.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/G20\\_Action\\_Plan\\_on\\_the\\_2030\\_Agenda\\_for\\_Sustainable\\_Development.pdf](https://www.b20germany.org/fileadmin/user_upload/G20_Action_Plan_on_the_2030_Agenda_for_Sustainable_Development.pdf)
- 7 G20 and Low income developing Country Framework, <https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/development/G20-Low-Income-Developing-Countries-Framework.pdf>
- 8 Targeting G20 Investments in Agriculture to End Rural Hunger, [https://www.g20-insights.org/policy\\_briefs/targeting-g20-investments-agriculture-end-rural-hunger/](https://www.g20-insights.org/policy_briefs/targeting-g20-investments-agriculture-end-rural-hunger/)
- 9 G20 Food Security and Nutrition Framework, <https://dwgg20.org/app/uploads/2021/09/g20-food-security-and-nutrition-framework.pdf>
- 10 G20 Food Security and Nutrition Framework, <https://dwgg20.org/app/uploads/2021/09/g20-food-security-and-nutrition-framework.pdf>
- 11 G20 Riyadh Statement to Enhance Implementation of Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems, <https://sherpag20indonesia.ekon.go.id/storage/riyadh/other-doc/17-riafs-statement.pdf>
- 12 Swati Malhotra and Rob Vos, G20 Matera Declaration calls for investing more and better in food systems to achieve Zero Hunger, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/g20-matera-declaration-calls-investing-more-and-better-food-systems-achieve-zero-hunger>
- 13 Japan's G20 Presidency: Innovation for Climate Action, <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/16598>
- 14 Climate sustainability, <https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/climate-sustainability-and-energy/>
- 15 Angela Solikova, G20 and the Ongoing Fight to Contain Climate Change, G20 Digest, Vol. 1, No.5, March-May 2020.
- 16 2016 Second G20 Sherpa Meeting Opens in Guangzhou, [http://www.g20chn.org/English/China2016/SherpaMeeting/201604/t20160408\\_2233.html](http://www.g20chn.org/English/China2016/SherpaMeeting/201604/t20160408_2233.html)
- 17 Japan's G20 Presidency: Innovation for Climate Action, [https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Japan%27s%20G20%20Presidency\\_Innovation%20for%20Climate%20Action.pdf](https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Japan%27s%20G20%20Presidency_Innovation%20for%20Climate%20Action.pdf)
- 18 'Leaders' Declaration,' G20 Riyadh Summit November 21 - 22, 2020, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46883/g20-riyadh-summit-leaders-declaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46883/g20-riyadh-summit-leaders-declaration_en.pdf)

- 
- 19 'G20 Rome Leaders' Declaration',  
Rome, October 31, 2021, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2021/211031-declaration.html>
- 20 Emissions are rising across the G20, again – warns a report, <https://iesr.or.id/en/emissions-are-rising-across-the-g20-again-warns-a-report>
- 21 'G20 Performance on Health', <https://www.g20-insights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/g20-performance-japan-health-1586886752.pdf>
- 22 <https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/en/international/g20-health.html>
- 23 <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2018/2018-10-04-health.html>
- 24 Declaration: G20 Meeting of Health Ministers, October 4, 2018, Mar del Plata, Argentina <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2018/2018-10-04-health.html>
- 25 <https://www.japan.go.jp/g20japan/index.html>
- 26 G20 Health Ministers' Declaration  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, November 19, 2020, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2020/2020-g20-health-1119.html>
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 <https://www.mef.gov.it/en/ufficio-stampa/comunicati/2021/The-G20-establishes-a-High-Level-Independent-Panel-on-financing-the-Global-Commons-for-Pandemic-Preparedness-and-Response-00001/>
- 29 [https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/G20-FHTF-Financing-Gaps-for-PPR-WHOWB-Feb-10\\_Final.pdf](https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/G20-FHTF-Financing-Gaps-for-PPR-WHOWB-Feb-10_Final.pdf)
- 30 'India's forthcoming G20 Presidency,' September 13, 2022, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias\\_forthcoming\\_G20\\_Presidency#:~:text=Whilst%20our%20G20%20priorities%20are,ranging%20from%20health%2C%20agriculture%20and](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias_forthcoming_G20_Presidency#:~:text=Whilst%20our%20G20%20priorities%20are,ranging%20from%20health%2C%20agriculture%20and)
- 31 India's G20 Presidency to focus on revival of growth, just green and digital transitions, <https://www.ris.org.in/en/node/3511#:~:text=India's%20year%2Dlong%20G20%20Presidency,achieve%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20by>
- 32 'Pandemic, prices, and poverty', <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/pandemic-prices-and-poverty>
- 33 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World', <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2022/en/>
- 34 Why Food, Agriculture and Nutrition should be at the Top of the Agenda for G20 nations? G20 Digest Vol. 1, No. 2, 2021, pp 35-38.
- 35 Dirk Willem Te Velde and Prachi Agarwal, 'Leveraging the Global Macroeconomic Environment for Recovery and Growth: Opportunities for G20 Under India's Presidency,' <https://www.orfonline.org/research/opportunities-for-g20-under-indias-presidency/>



## The R20: An Inter-Faith Platform in the G20

Côme Carpentier de Gourdon\*

**T**he existence of the R-20, an inter-religious forum created as part of the G-20 some years ago reflects the evolution of that body, which gathers twenty of the world's most significant economies, as a putative alternative United Nations Security Council, in the economic and social domains, given the basically unfair structure of the UNSC created by the winners of the Second World War and factually held hostage by the veto-wielding permanent members. Accordingly, the G-20 has taken on board the longstanding notion of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation in order to harness the world's principal faith-based organisations in the service of its global agenda and resolutions.

The difficulty of achieving concrete and constructive outcomes through inter-religious dialogue is well known. By definition, organised creeds depend on the support of their followers and are usually diffident about the consequences of supporting extensive interactions with other religions which are seen as potential competitors when not traditional adversaries and detractors. Whether or not they encourage and sponsor conversions, religious hierarchies wish to protect their flocks from extraneous influences and this is also true amongst the various sections of what we may broadly call faith families such as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, within which many deep and often bitter doctrinal and historical divisions

endure. Many religions also have no universally accepted leadership, unlike Catholicism where the last word in principle belongs to the Pope (although the Roman community is now deeply divided by Conservatives and 'Progressives'). Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and even Judaism have multiple branches and currents so that no one can be seen as the only authoritative spokesperson for them. In certain countries, religious bodies are under the control of the State or of a political party while other nations such as France describe themselves as strictly secular, so that religions have no official role in any public issue. On that background, it is not easy to achieve a comprehensive consensus in any inter-religious assembly, outside of general statements of principle which are unlikely to carry much meaning or weight.

The last few years have brought about a general deterioration in inter-religious interactions, despite some punctual and local commendable achievements. There is a process of radicalisation and growing intolerance in certain faith traditions and they are unfortunately the ones which tend to show greater dynamism and expand outside their traditional home-grounds. On the other hand, religions which have become less dogmatic and rigid by embracing modern non-denominational humanitarian ideas at the expense of their own core beliefs and practices have lost many faithful,

*\*Mr Côme Carpentier de Gourdon is currently a Distinguished Fellow with India Foundation and is also the Convener of the Editorial Board of the WORLD AFFAIRS JOURNAL. He is an associate of the International Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IISES), Vienna, Austria. Côme Carpentier is an author of various books and several articles, essays and papers*

---

in some instances to the point of near extinction. Apart from leaving behind an increasing number of confirmed atheists often professing to be only interested in material issues and benefits, the decline of old religions tends to feed in reaction the rise of new sects and more or less spiritual ideologies, usually under the authority of some charismatic figures who don't always show tolerance for any other creed. We allude here to certain Evangelical new churches in Latin America and elsewhere, to the disappearance of traditional African creeds and their replacements by variants of Christianity and Islam, to Neo-Paganism in Europe and the US, often based on a rather questionable reconstruction of long vanished beliefs (Scandinavian, Celtic or 'Aryan' cults) and even to some more or less openly 'demonic' chapels which attract people in search of the bizarre, the exotic and the erotic. The religious scene can thus appear to be increasingly heterogenous and confusing and makes it difficult to select, among the many influential faith leaders, those who can agree on a common agenda and still make it acceptable to members of their wider tradition.

One of the ills that continues to affect attempts to make religions come together or at least share certain common goals is the mutual rejection of many of their respective core beliefs. We witness everyday the effects of such disputes between Christians and Muslims, Jews and Muslims, Buddhists and Muslims, Muslims and Hindus, not to omit the hostile attitude that many Christian churches and movements display towards Hinduism which they routinely accuse of fascism, fanaticism and backwardness, in order to justify

the continuation of proselytising missionary inroads into India and adjoining countries.

Following these few reflections, I will now reproduce some relevant paragraphs of the official description provided by the G-20 online for the activities and aims of the R-20.

*The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) offers an annual platform where a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives engage on global agendas (primarily and including the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs) ... The G20 process has evolved since it was established in 2008, with various platforms (ministerial meetings, engagement groups) that allow different sectors and communities to present ideas and recommendations to global leaders.*

*The G20 Interfaith Forum builds on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting their rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. These include interfaith and intercultural organisations, religious leaders, scholars, development and humanitarian entities, and business and civil society actors.*

*Beginning in Australia in 2014, the G20 Interfaith Forum has convened annually in the G20 host country. The Forums have considered wide-ranging agendas, including economic models and systems, the environment, women, families, children, work, humanitarian aid, health, education, freedom of religion or belief, global security, governance, human rights, and the rule of law. The agenda for each Forum is framed taking into account the annual G20 priorities (outlined each year by the host government), together with topics that the*



---

*various networks of religious actors recommend that the G20 leaders' address.*

### **Mission**

*The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) advances global solutions by collaborating with religious thought leaders and political representatives. Global recognition is increasing for the vital roles faith and religion play in promoting peaceful and harmonious relationships within and between nations...The G20 Interfaith Forum is an annual event where such contributions can be shared, highlighted, and advanced.*

*The Forum features both international opinion leaders—including scholars, lawyers, and politicians—and global interfaith activists for three days of discussion and interfaith dialogue. In showcasing the broad, global impact of various faith traditions and philosophies from around the world, the Forum fills important gaps in the discussions of the G20 Summits. Social cohesion is strengthened between political representatives and religious thought leaders, and new opportunities are provided for relationship building among all participants.*

### **Objectives of the G20 Interfaith Forum**

*1. Exploring the links between economic development and religion and religious freedom through informed, scholarly discussion.*

*2. Facilitating constructive dialogue between societal leaders in faith, government, business, media, education and other social institutions, on how interfaith resources can*

*enhance social, economic and cultural policies and programs for the well-being of all.*

*3. Fostering communication channels between the different faiths and sharing ideas, experiences, and “best practices” in building peace and harmony.*

*4. Identifying and affirming common values, virtues, and principles among diverse faith and philosophic traditions*

### **A Network of Networks**

*The G20 Interfaith Forum has consistently sought to build and draw on an inclusive network of networks of public, religious, humanitarian, and academic institutions engaged in a variety of ways in promoting interactions of religious voices, religious studies, and religious communities with the public sector in formulating and implementing global policy initiatives.*

### **Working Groups**

*The G20 Interfaith Forum organises its work through a series of Working Groups which focus on areas of recurring relevance to G20 policy priorities. In particular, these standing Working Groups organise research, analysis, and Forum activities that relate to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and other matters of recurring concern. In any given year, additional task force groups may be set up to address issues of particular concern in light of the G20 host country's priorities or in response to other critical emerging issues. The following standing Working Groups have been established (with*

---

*sub-focus areas noted in several cases):*

- *Reducing Poverty and Inequality (includes job creation and zero hunger)*
- *Religion, Health, and Wellbeing (includes COVID-19 responses)*
- *Education (includes religious literacy)*
- *Gender Equality (includes equal pay issues and trafficking/slavery)*
- *Religion and the Environment*
- *Religion, Technology, Innovation, Infrastructure, and Media*
- *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (includes sacred sites, corruption, rule of law, freedom of religion or belief, peace building and diplomacy)*
- *Refugees, Displacement, and Migration*
- *Disaster Preparedness and Relief, Humanitarian Aid*
- *Children and Youth*

*In addition, an Anti-Racism Initiative has been established to examine how responding to the challenges of overt and systemic racism can be addressed across the entire spectrum of issues being addressed by the G20 Interfaith Forum. More information on the various Working Groups is available here.*

### ***Outputs of the G20 Interfaith Forum***

*Each year, the G20 Interfaith Forum develops policy briefs that are designed to provide substantive input benefiting from insights of a range of religious communities designed to be of assistance to those in official policy-making roles. In addition, each year's Forum develops prioritised concrete recommendations for those engaged in the G20 process—recommendations that are both designed to be delivered to G20 Summit leaders, but have broader relevance to policy-making at the level of public bodies operating at the international, regional, and national levels and to those concerned with global policy issues in religious, inter-religious, and academic settings.*

*We will have to wait for the outcome of the next R-20 meeting to be held in November to see if it is anymore concrete and impactful than the previous ones which did not attract much public notice. Most formally religious people tend not to show great interest in other faiths while those who are agnostic, atheistic or define themselves as 'spiritually curious but not religious' and pay little attention to the policies of mainstream religious organisations.*

### ***References:***

<https://www.g20interfaith.org/historical-support/>.



## Cultural Nationalism: Indian Scenario

S R Bhatt\*

The concept of cultural nationalism has for quite some time been on the centre stage of global debate and academic discussion. Culture, in all its facets and dimensions, is a crucial constituent and instrument of human development. It is a state of being, a mode of thinking, a way of living, and a set of commonly shared values, belief patterns, practices and efforts. It is a complex whole comprising stock of knowledge, beliefs, customs, conduct, morals, law, and artistic, scientific and technological pursuits, humanities and social sciences. It is an individual as well as social affair. It is a totality of heritage borne by a society. It is crystallisation of material, mental, intellectual and spiritual wealth generated and preserved by the society. It contributes to discovery of meaning of life and enhances quality of life. Thus, it enriches life, enlarges fullness of life, brings delight of mind, and sharpens intellect and ushers in plenitude of peace and bliss.

Indian culture has a hoary past and a pretty ancient history with inspiring ideas and ideals. India has the fortune of possessing one of the finest cultures in the world in the form of Vedic wisdom. It is characterised by integral, holistic and spiritual view of Reality and a way of life based on that. It advocates fundamental unity of all existences, both animate and inanimate. Every existence is at bottom spiritual, pulsating with life and consciousness. Everything in this cosmos has common source and sustenance. In fact, whatever existed, whatever exists and whatever shall come

into existence, all are manifestations of the same Divine Being, declares the *Puruṣa Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*. The *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* of the *Yajurveda* states that in this mutating world every element is divine and is permeated by the Divine. It is one, unitary, self-existing principle which manifests Itself diversely, says the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*. It is also experienced and expressed diversely.

It is a unique feature of Indian culture which exhorted not to have the mentality of “I versus thou”. Instead, it advocated the attitude of “I and we”. This is spiritual globalisation which is cherished and inculcated by Indian seers and sages all the times. The ‘other’ is not to be considered as external or alien or separate. The ideal to be emulated is universalisation of ‘self’, feeling oneness with the entire cosmos. In this schema of global family, there are both individual entities (*pinḍa*) and their organic totality (*brahmāṇḍa*), in a harmonious relationship. A distinction has to be drawn between the two but they are not separable. This attitude is due to its openness and catholicity to accommodate and absorb the diversity. It has displayed a remarkable symbiosis of two sensibilities of belongingness to the whole and of being a part of the whole, of relatedness and of self-identity. It advocates a communitarian or participatory mode of living implying distinctness of its members along with solidarity with the whole enjoying an individual existence and yet partaking and sharing experiences with the whole. It is an inclusive social pluralism.<sup>1</sup>

\*Prof. S. R. Bhatt is Chairman, Indian Philosophy Congress; Chairman, Asian-African Philosophy Congress; National Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Government of India Former Chairman, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, and Former Professor & Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi.

---

Indian culture has been holistic and integrated, catholic and symbiotic. This has provided it an inherent vitality. There are some noble ideas and ideals contained in it which are not only endearing but also liberating. That is why it has permeating influence within and outside India. This is what the Urdu poet Mohammad Iqbal has very convincingly pointed out some time back in his well-known poem, “*Sâre jahân se achhâ Hindusatân hamârâ*” in which he proudly declares that,

*Kucha baat hai ki hasti, mitati nahin humaari  
Sadiyon rahaa hai dushman daur-e-jahaan hamaara*

-Tarana-e-Hind, 1904<sup>2</sup>

*(There is something momentous in Indian culture because of which it could not be wiped out in spite of the onslaughts of inimical forces for centuries together.)*

Iqbal refers to the survival instinct of Indian culture which contains inherent vitality, the perennial force, the *elan vitae*. It has a vitalising and animating force of its own and yet it does not deny nourishment and nurture from extraneous sources as well by incorporating and absorbing them as its own. Both the variety and continuous identity are the assets of Indian culture. It is living and has vitality to live. Because of its organismic nature and character, it displays a unity-in-multiplicity and becomes conducive to self-identity and self-preservation as well as group solidarity and group-cohesion.

We have to remember that India is a nation which has essential identity with multiple diversity all intertwined. As Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya has put it in his Integral Humanism, “It is essential that we think about our national identity. Without this identity there is no meaning of independence, nor can independence become the instrument of progress and happiness. As long as we are unaware of our national identity, we cannot

recognise and develop all our capacities.”

Indian identity is embedded in the multi-faceted Indian culture, which has been eternal bedrock of India’s glorious past, adventurous present and bright future. In order to discern Indian identity, one has to look precisely to the diverse cultural and sub-cultural traditions, which have evolved over times, in which the Indian people have been born or nurtured and by which their general human sensibilities have been refined and shaped. This is so whether they are Indian citizens or Indian Diaspora or adopted Indians.

The Vedas constitute the pristine foundation of Indian culture. They exhort for establishment of a virtuous society (*vratî samâja*). They inculcate a healthy and robust attitude towards life. They have provided ideas and ideals, moral and spiritual values, beliefs and practices, and patterns of behaviour—individual and social—on the basis of deep insight into the nature of Reality, which have universal appeal and inherent vitality to survive in spite of all odds and vagaries of history and which still continues to provide life sap to its adherents and votaries. It would be certainly beneficial to the whole humanity if those sublime ideas are reiterated in their pristine purity so that the discerning human mind can evaluate and emulate them.

Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya floated a seminal concept of *Chiti* which comprehends individual consciousness, national consciousness and cosmic consciousness. *Chiti* provides self-identity and autonomy to all these. It is the animating principle. Upadhyaya particularly emphasised *Chiti* of a nation, calling it as the soul of a nation. It is on its foundation that a nation rises and develops and becomes strong and virile. Strength and energy activating a nation is ‘*Virât*’. It is like vital breaths (*prāṇa*). It infuses strength in every element of the nation. But it has to be channelized by *Chiti*. It

---

is *Chiti* which awakens a nation's *Virât*. Every nation should have this vital energy for its survival and enhancement. Every nation should try to preserve, protect and augment it. This is what Swami Vivekanand and Sri Aurobindo also insisted on in their discourses.

### **Cultural Nationalism**

Emphasising national identity and the necessity of national awakening Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya was against western type of narrow nationalism. His idea of nationalism was cultural, based on the principle of dharma which is the sustaining principle of the entire cosmos. Nation is an organic whole which is to function in harmony and cooperation with the entire cosmos. He rejected the idea of regional consciousness and advocated common national consciousness widening into cosmic consciousness. Pointing out the significance of national consciousness he maintained that there should ofcourse be political independence, but it becomes meaningful only in the context of national identity and cultural independence. Under alien subjugation, a nation, like individuals becomes a prey to numerous ills when its natural instincts get disregarded or mutilated and perverted. He argued that the diseased organs are to be amputated and healthy ones are to be nourished. He averred that it was essential that we think about our own national identity. Without this identity there is no meaning of independence, nor can independence become the instrument of progress and happiness. As long as we are unaware of our national identity, we cannot recognise and develop all our potentialities.

### **State and Nation not the same**

Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya highlighted the clear distinction between state and nation and the

respective roles of the two. Nation is an organic entity which comes into existence of its own. It is not created, but a nation creates institutions. Nation consists of several institutions and state is one of them. It is important but not supreme. It is to be based on Dharma. Dharma is sovereign. Dharma is depository of nation's soul and should permeate all its institutions. Fundamental principles of dharma are eternal and universal. But they are not rigid and need to be adapted to changing times and place. He retained the merits of the present day prevalent democratic patterns shorn of their demerits. According to him democracy is preferable form of governance but it should be based on dharma. It should be *dharmarâjya* or *Râmarâjya*, a *dharmocracy* and not theocracy.

Though the modern concept of nationalism has emerged in the given historical context of western social development, the underpinning spirit behind the Indian cultural nationalism is the universalistic and unifying dharma-centric world view and life vision sustained by the Sanatana dharma.

The concepts of Varnashrama dharma and Purushartha which were the guiding principles of the social, cultural, economic and political organisation of life in Vedic period were based on this dharma-centric vision of life. The historical experience derived from centuries of subjugated social, cultural, economic and political life of Indian people bring forth the fact that culture, as a key factor in promoting unity and solidarity among different social groups, has become only a wishful thinking. It is a social reality that majority of Indian people have historically been outside the dominant stream of Indian culture. The creative character of the Vedic culture was lost post Vedic period onwards, especially since the eclipse of *tmajñâna mârga* fostered and sustained by the ancient Guru and Rishi Paramparâs and the advent of the present

---

form of Hinduism and the caste system.

The universalistic and unifying life vision of Sanatana Dharma was misinterpreted and wrongly explained in conformity with the rising requirements of the caste system based social, cultural, economic and political organisation of Indian society. The caste system with its denial of knowledge and education for the majority of Indian population over a long period of time had contributed to the cultural, social, emotional and mental division of Indian masses leading to social disintegration and cultural decay of the society.

If the culture is to be the agent of social unity and solidarity the religious practices, traditions and customs that are contrary to the universalistic and sublime vision of the Indian culture and have segregated and divided people, they are to be identified and demystified grounding on the basic premises of the wisdom tradition of India.

Therefore, the objective of the present write up is to revisit and evaluate culture as means to foster unity and national integration and examine the factors that have historically disrupted and destroyed the creative transmission and progress of the Indian culture. It is also purported to explore and suggest the means by which the arrested social evolution can be resumed and cultural creativity and awakening achieved so as to bring about unity and solidarity of the people beyond caste and religion. Similarly, it is important to examine the religious and cultural onslaught of foreign powers and modern western civilisation on the Indian spirituality, religion, society, culture, economy and polity

and suggest appropriate measures to counter the same and establish the rationality and spiritual science behind Indian ethos, religious faiths and practices.

Several scholars and studies have questioned the relevance of cultural nationalism in the emerging Indian social scenario characterised by the rising conflicts and violence among various castes and social groups. With vested interested they have tried to project a distorted picture of age-old Indian culture and civilisation. Of course, they have failed in their nefarious design as the unbiased mind has not acceded to their sinister move but some are still active and more vehement out of frustration. They need to be enlightened as to what “India that is *Bharata*” has been and will continue to be so in spite of all malicious attempts by misguided or ill-minded persons. India has a pretty ancient history with sublime ideas and all these cannot be wiped out. However, while examining India’s robust cultural past and civilisational achievements, there appears to have future prospect to promote and develop cultural nationalism provided the spiritual masters, religious leaders and followers along with political leadership strive to promote cultural creativity and social change by de-fossilising the traditions and rectifying deviations and distortions in the religious faiths and practices. Indianness is based on the principles of cooperation and reciprocity regulated by the spirit of duties and obligations rather than demands and rights. Unfortunately, this base is dwindling very fast in modern times and there is an urgent need to revive, revitalise and consolidate it.

---

## References:

- 1 [http://www.asthabharati.org/Dia\\_Apr%20012/s.r..htm](http://www.asthabharati.org/Dia_Apr%20012/s.r..htm)
- 2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sare\\_Jahan\\_se\\_Accha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sare_Jahan_se_Accha)

