

India Takes World Centre-Stage with G20 Presidency

Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar

Introduction

India assumed the Presidency of G20 (the Group of 20 countries comprising 19 large economies and the European Union) for 2023 from Indonesia on 1st December, 2022. While accepting this responsibility, PM Narendra Modi said that India's G20 presidency will be "inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented."

India's assumption of the G20 presidency has decisively signaled its emergence as a significant player on the global stage. While most countries in the world, both developed and developing, have found it difficult to effectively handle the challenges thrown up by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India, through its bold leadership and prudent policies, has been able to successfully navigate the headwinds it has encountered over the last three years.

What is the G20?

The G20 is an international forum which represents the world's biggest economies encompassing both industrialized and developing nations. Its core mandate is to address the major challenges related to the global economy, developmental issues and financial architecture, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, sustainable development etc.

Together, the G20 members represent 85% of the global gross product; 75% of international trade, and two thirds of the world population.

Because the G-20 is a forum, its agreements or decisions are not legally binding but they do influence countries' policies and global cooperation.

The Setting

The Bali G20 Summit in November, 2022 was held at a particularly difficult and uncertain moment in international politics and economics.

The world has been subjected to huge instability and volatility over the last 3 years *inter-alia* due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has had global implications through high inflation, shortages of food, fertilizers and energy, unsustainable debts, supply chain disruptions and more. In addition, the challenges of climate change, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and others continue to unsettle the global economy and community. It is in these circumstances that India has been entrusted with the responsibility of steering the activities of the G20.

The Summit

India emerged as a “leader, solution provider and consensus builder” at the Bali Summit. The shadow of the Russia-Ukraine conflict loomed large over the deliberations in the run up to the Summit. It was not found possible to arrive at a mutually acceptable language on the conflict in several of the G20 meetings that preceded the Summit. India was able to act as a bridge between the opposing sides on the issue. A compromise solution was achieved which reiterated the assertion by PM Modi to Russian President Vladimir Putin in Samarkand on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit that “today is not an era of war,” and that the solution to the conflict should be found through “dialogue and diplomacy.”

The Declaration, a 19-page document addressed in considerable detail, the major challenges confronting the global economy and financial system.

In his remarks in the first session on Energy and Food Security, PM Modi clearly stated that the United Nations had failed to resolve the political and economic challenges afflicting the world. It is because of the failure of the multilateral organizations that the significance of G20 has increased. PM Modi exhorted the countries to evolve a new world order as had been done after the Second World War.

While speaking on the need to make digital connectivity truly inclusive, PM Modi asserted that “digital transformation is the most remarkable change of our era. The proper use of digital technologies can become a force multiplier in the decades-long global fight against poverty. Digital solutions can also be helpful in the fight against climate change.” PM Modi asserted that India’s experience of the past few years has shown that if digital architecture is made ‘inclusive’, it can bring about socio-economic transformation. He declared that the principle

of "Data for development" will be an integral part of the overall theme of India's Presidency "One Earth, One Family, One Future". Batting for sustainable growth, PM Modi stated that LiFE i.e. 'Lifestyle for Environment' campaign can make a big contribution to this. He encouraged the global community to make sustainable lifestyle a mass movement.

India's Presidency

During its Presidency, India will aspire to deliver outcomes in areas of critical interest such as integrating the climate and development agenda, accelerating progress towards achieving the SDG 2030 mandate, furthering development cooperation, supporting small and marginal farmers, enhancing food security and nutrition, addressing global skill gaps, women empowerment, promotion of blue economy and coastal sustainability, digital health solutions, green hydrogen and tech-enabled learning.

India hit the ground running on assuming the Presidency of the G20. Even before taking over charge, India organized a Special Briefing for envoys of G20 and invitee countries and International Organisations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on 26th November, 2022. Starting with the first 4-day Sherpa meeting in Udaipur from 4th December, 2022, India has already organized several substantive meetings including the first Finance and Central Bank Deputies Meeting in Bengaluru; first Meeting of the G20 Development Working Group in Mumbai; first Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion in Kolkata, and several more.

India has also emerged as a strong and clear voice of the global South. There is a persistent feeling among several small countries that their concerns and problems do not get the attention they deserve. In a remarkable path-breaking initiative, India organized the "Voice of the Global South for Human-Centric Development" virtual Summit on 12th-13th January, 2023. The theme of the Summit was "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose." The Summit brought together 125 countries of the global South to share their perspectives and priorities on a common platform across a whole range of issues. The Summit, as is evident from the numbers, received a strong, positive response across the world. This initiative was inspired by PM Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas' (the support of everyone, development for everyone, trust of everyone with everyone's effort), and was also underpinned by India's philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family).

The Summit was a platform to exchange ideas and solutions, and to unite in voice and purpose, the issues of concern and priorities for the Global South.

In his Opening Address, PM Modi declared that the Voice of the Global South will be the Voice of India and the priorities of the developing countries will be India's priorities. PM Modi gave a call for 4Rs - 'Respond, Recognize, Respect and Reform' in context of various priorities of the developing world. Prime Minister also announced a number of new initiatives by India. These include – AarogyaMaitri whereby essential medical supplies will be provided to any developing country affected by natural disasters or humanitarian crisis; Global South Centre of Excellence for research on development solutions to be implemented around the world; Global South Science and Technology Initiative to share expertise in areas such as space technology and nuclear energy; Global South Young Diplomats Forum; and Global South Scholarships.

While assuming the Presidency, PM Modi had said that India's G20 priorities would be shaped in consultation with not just G20 partners, but also with our fellow travellers in the Global South, whose voice often goes unheard. This Summit was an opportunity for those countries that are not part of the G20 process to share their ideas, concerns, aspirations and expectations. Several developing countries like Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Nigeria, Oman and the UAE have also been invited as “guest countries” by India to the G20 Summit in September this year.

Conclusion

Accepting the G20 Presidency, PM Modi declared that India will organize more than 200 G20 meetings in 55 different cities on 35 different themes around the country. Visitors to India will get the full experience of its amazing diversity, inclusive traditions, and cultural richness. He invited all G20 members and international organizations “to participate in this unique celebration in India, the 'Mother of Democracy' ”.

Assuming charge of the G20 at this critical moment is a huge challenge. It is also a great opportunity. The world is looking at India with hope and expectation to effectively deal with the turbulence engineered by the Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine conflict, global economic downturn, and climate change. India is committed to reach out to all countries of the North and the South, the East and the West to ensure as PM Modi said at the Bali G20 Summit that “next year

when the G20 meets in the holy land of Buddha and Gandhi, we will all agree to convey a strong message of peace to the world.”

India will hand over the baton to Brazil at the end of November, 2023. It is for the first time that the troika comprising of the current, past and future Presidencies of G20 will comprise of three major developing and emerging economies. This provides a unique opportunity to India, supported by Indonesia and Brazil, to make a significant contribution to peace, security, stability and prosperity in the world. India looks forward to its Presidency of the G20 with determination and confidence.

[The writer is former Indian Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Sweden and Latvia.]