



# The Importance of India's G20 Presidency



**T**he G20 Presidency is the most significant international event that India has hosted. Given the strong geopolitical polarizations that cut across the North-South and the East-West divide, the challenges and expectations from India's Presidency are onerous and exceptional. But despite these daunting challenges, what makes this moment

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unique is that the world is more confident than ever of India's capacity and skills to bridge these divides and successfully steer what Prime Minister Modi has called "a presidency of healing, hope and harmony."

India has taken over the G20 presidency at a very challenging and conflicted time in international order. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated by the Ukraine conflict, has evoked the threat of global recession, high inflation, and an energy and food crisis. The collateral has been the slowing down of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate actions. Moreover, the world is polarised more than ever before.

It's, therefore, reassuring to see that India is increasingly seen as a problem-solver and agenda-setter. The changing perception of India was evident at the first sherpa meeting held under India's presidency in the beautiful lake city of Udaipur in the first week of December. Sherpas not only got a taste of India's rich culture, but the country's digital and technological prowess.

India's G20 presidency has coincided with its month-long stint as president of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for December 2022, and presidency the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). These three signal diplomatic events has put spotlight on India's global leadership role.

In the last few years, India's global positioning has allowed it to secure a meaningful engagement with leading international partners, regional

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interlocutors and the developing world. India has been a regular invitee at the G7, consisting of major developed nations; it is a member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), consisting of the major emerging economies; Quad, with the United States (US), Japan and Australia; and the SCO, which includes Russia, China and the Central Asian nations. In addition, India has effectively engaged regional partners, as evident from recent summit-level meetings it has held with the European Union, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Central Asian States.

### Why G20 Matters

In these trying times, the international community will look for serious and credible measures to address uncertainties at the geopolitical and macroeconomic levels. The G20 uniquely offers a platform that has on board the world's major developed and emerging economies.

Both the G7 and the UN Security Council are reminders of the world order which prevailed immediately after the World War II. The G20, on the other hand, brings the G7 together with other major economies as equal partners. It also brings together the P5 with other major countries. This makes the G20 a relevant and



influential grouping in the world. Moreover, 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.

In the past, this group has delivered outcomes on issues of global importance. Its recent decisions to agree on a debt-suspension initiative for developing countries hit hard by Covid-19 and an equitable tax regime for multinationals have been well received.

However, the success of its broader composition can also contain the seeds of division. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has drawn a sharp focus on these traditional fault lines.

### **Resilient India**

The stresses and uncertainties the world faces call for visionary leadership and great qualities of statesmanship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's New India has steered

our country through the storm of Covid-19 and has turned India into one of the bright spots on the global landscape. It is a resilient India that has bounced back to become one of the fastest-growing economies. It is also an India that did not hesitate, in the most difficult of times, to share its resources and capacities for the greater global good.

Under the PM's vision, India's foreign policy has been inspired to work for the global common good in keeping with our ancient philosophy of Vasudeva Kutumbakkam, the world is one family with a shared future. At the G20 Summit convened by Saudi Arabia in March 2020 to respond to the pandemic, PM Modi called for a "people-centric globalisation".

In keeping with this larger vision, India's effort has been to leverage its domestic strengths and achievements to contribute globally. From Vaccine Maitri to Operation Sanjeevani and Co-WIN as an open-source digital platform for Covid-19 vaccination to the Oxygen

Express, India has offered assistance to countries during the pandemic. Its stellar achievements in developing renewable energy and disaster-resilient capacities have been extended globally through international bodies such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. As a first responder and net-security provider, Indian assistance to its extended neighbourhood during natural calamities and other emergencies has reached from Aceh in Indonesia to Mozambique on the eastern littoral of Africa.

### New Tech Order

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. For India, technology has always been a great equalizer, where citizens from all walks of life have used a veritable toolkit of digital public goods to access public services, make payments, and even address their collective grievances. In a world splintered by polarization and technological balkanization, India will strive to ensure that the world in the coming years is a just, equitable place with prosperous, inclusive societies at its core.

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India has one of the world's best digital public infrastructure models that includes such transformative structures as the Jam Trinity, UPI, Co-WIN, Ayushman Bharat, FASTag. Citizens from all walks of life have used a veritable toolkit of digital public goods to access public services, make payments, and even address their collective grievances.

India is today the fastest growing large economy, smartphone data consumer and global fintech adopter. At the Summit in Bali, the Prime Minister pointed out that over 40% of the world's real-time payment transactions took place through UPI last year. India's digital transformation, he said, has developed digital public goods whose basic architecture has in-built democratic principles, but sadly, citizens of most developing countries do not have any kind of "digital identity". India's experience in the past few years has shown that if digital architecture is made widely accessible, it can bring about socio-economic transformation. The proper use of digital technologies can become a force



## THE BIG PICTURE



multiplier in the decades-long global fight against poverty,”

Under our presidency, we would make efforts with other G20 partners to create mechanisms that strengthen the capacity of developing countries to tackle health crises like the Covid19 pandemic. India's G20 presidency will take forward efforts to create holistic, global health architecture that can respond better to future health crises like the pandemic.

At the G20, this model could be internationalized. Digital India must go global. A new tech order must combine cross-border flows of technology and investment with development and growth aspirations.

### India in UNSC

India's term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) will end in 2022. It has, however, already made its mark in this exclusive UN body. Under India's presidency in July 2021, the UNSC adopted a consensus-based presidential statement on maritime security for the first time. This was the first time in our history that an Indian PM presided over

a UNSC summit. In its two-year term at the UNSC, India has effectively engaged on various issues, from the international community's approach to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to peacekeeping and counter-terrorism. When it exits the UNSC, it will undoubtedly leave a distinctive mark of the contribution that will vindicate and reinforce the case for it to become a permanent member.

Imparting a new momentum to counter-terror cooperation, India hosted for the first time the United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee in New Delhi in October this year. This special meeting of the Counter Terrorism Committee focused on “countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes”. Hosting this meeting in Delhi and Mumbai was a milestone as the CTC usually meets in New York. The “Delhi Declaration” that was adopted then is a landmark document that will prevent extremists, radicals, and terrorists from exploiting new-age technologies for terror attacks. Looking ahead, the international community must combat the scourge of terrorism collectively, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said at a UNSC briefing on “Global Counter-Terrorism Approach.”

Prime Minister Modi's imprint on the international consciousness has been profound. His intellectual outreach through concepts such as SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region; One Earth, One Health; LiFE – Lifestyle for Environment; P3 or Pro-Planet People; International Day of Yoga; Panchamrit for climate commitment; One Sun One World One Grid on interconnected green grids; have created a global resonance on issues of the most significant importance

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to people not only in India but across the world, and have been institutionalised in the activities of the UN and other international organisations and bodies.

**Batting for Developing Countries**

India’s engagement has not been confined to the rich and influential. India enjoys the strong support of the developing world. As external affairs minister S Jaishankar pointed out, “India is widely being perceived as the voice of the global south”. As India prepares to take on the G20 presidency, it will represent the hopes and aspirations of the developing world while at the same time comfortably positioned to engage the developed world and the large emerging economies.

India’s wide acceptability in the international community, strong developing country credentials, independence in thought and action, and resilient scientific and economic base have uniquely positioned it to provide global leadership at a critical time in international affairs. We must use our presidency of the G20 to work with our key partners to replicate at a global level our recent achievements and experiences in digital transformations for socio-economic development, innovation for growth and the development of

alternative energy capacities for climate actions, among others.

As we enter the period of Amrit Kaal in the run-up to India@100, we are poised to shift trajectory to a path of high growth and inclusive development, fulfilling our collective aspirations to become a developed economy by 2047. Our inherent strengths place us in a unique position to provide constructive global leadership. India can provide solutions to the many global challenges that beset the world today, in leading us to a better tomorrow.

Going forward, India’s G20 Presidency would be a watershed moment in her history as it seeks to play an important role by finding pragmatic global solutions for the well-being of all. And in doing so, manifest the true spirit of One Earth, One Family, One Future and ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,’ the anthem of India’s G20 presidency. Indians have a unique opportunity in the presidency of G20 and a profound responsibility to showcase our rich cultural heritage and diversity, tourism potential and development prowess so that the world drives values from its interactions with us. ■

Harsh Vardhan Shringla is the Chief Coordinator of India’s G20 Presidency. Prior to this, he was Foreign Secretary of India. In a four-decade long Indian Foreign Service career, he has been Ambassador to the United States of America, Bangladesh and Thailand. He was also Consul General of India in Durban, South Africa and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He is also an experienced multilateral diplomat, having worked on two UN Security Council tenures, served in the Indian Mission to the UN in New York and as Permanent Representative to UNESCAP.