

INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY: WHAT TO EXPECT?

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



भारत 2023 INDIA

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

ONE EARTH • ONE FAMILY • ONE FUTURE

Source: India's official website of G20 at
<https://www.g20.in/en/g20-india-2023/logo-theme/>

On December 1, 2022, India assumed the presidency of G20 which is regarded as the world's most important and influential international forum. India assumed the presidency of this very important multilateral forum at a time when the world is still struggling with the effects of Covid-19, the Russia–Ukraine war, growing Sino-US hostility, and rising food and energy prices across the globe resulting in global inflation and global climate emergency.

Founded in 1999 following the Asian financial crisis, the Group of Twenty, or G20 as it is commonly known, consists of 19 states and the European Union. The 19 countries are further divided into five groups. Of these five groups, four groups consist of four member states that include; (1) Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia and the US; (2) India, Russia, South Africa, Turkey; (3) France, Germany, Italy and UK and (4) China, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea, whereas, the fifth group consists of Brazil, Argentina and Mexico.¹ Hence, G20 members represent 85 percent of the global GDP and around 75 percent of the global trade and two-thirds of the world population.²

The logo and theme for the G20 Presidency were unveiled by Prime Minister Modi on November 8, 2022, which attracted much noise and displeasure from many, particularly those belonging to the Indian National Congress Party. Dismissing all criticism of the logo that places a lotus flower prominently (lotus flower is Bharatiya Janata Party's poll symbol), Prime Minister Modi stressed that the lotus was declared a national

¹ "G-20: How did India attain Presidency and what issues can it drive forward?," The Quint, November 16, 2022, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/g20-india-how-is-president-chosen-what-issues-will-india-focus-on-in-2023-summit#read-more>

² Official Indian website of G20 at <https://www.g20.in/en/about-g20/#overview>

flower in 1950 by the then Congress Party.³ The seven petals of the lotus represent seven continents of the world as well as seven notes of music. Prime Minister Modi hoped that the G20 would bring the world closer in harmony.⁴ Whereas, the theme of India's G20 Presidency is "Vasudhavia Kutumbakam" or One earth. One family. One Future.⁵

Besides summit meetings, India intends to hold around 200 meetings of 32 different sectors across the country during its G20 Presidency from December 1, 2022, till 30 November 2023.⁶ The meetings will take place on different tracks like (1) the Sherpa Track where 13 working groups and 2 initiatives will meet to discuss issues like Anti-corruption, digital economy, culture, agriculture, education, development and employment; or (2) the Financial Track to deal with issues like global economic outlook and monitoring of global economic risks; reforms for a more stable global financial architecture; international taxation; sustainable finance; financial inclusion; financial sector reforms and financing for future health emergencies and investments in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response; or (3) the Engagement Group where non-governmental participants give their recommendation to the G20 leaders on issues like women20, labour20 and science20.⁷

Many scholars believe that time for India's presidency could not be more appropriate as India has recently emerged as the fifth largest economy replacing the UK.⁸ This presidency gives India a chance to present itself as a leading power in the world. India is expected to act as a bridge between the developed and developing nations of G20 on key global issues such as acting as the voice of the global south and ensuring the global supply of foods and medical products. In line with its theme, India is expected to reduce the polarisation that is prevalent in the world, work extensively to reduce carbon footprint and promote green energy. During this time, India is also expected to raise issues relating to emerging economies, for example, climate justice, access to health care and entrepreneurship.

Meeting all these expectations, India would also face some challenges. The war in Ukraine and condemnation of the Russian invasion across the globe is one such example. Another such example is growing competition between the US and China or even China and India. In their article, KV Rajan and Atul K Thakur have pointed out that there is growing risk of use of nuclear weapons amid the growing irrelevance of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). As India itself is a nuclear power but has shied away from signing NPT, does India

³ "Lotus in G20 logo: Cong claims PM promoting party symbol; don't denigrate national flower, says BJP," Indian Express, November 10, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-g20-presidency-logo-lotus-congress-bjp-8258088/>

⁴ "India's G20 logo depicts a lotus. PM Modi explains what it means," NDTV, November 8, 2022, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indias-g20-logo-depicts-a-lotus-pm-modi-explains-what-it-means-3501997>

⁵ Official Indian website of G20, op.cit

⁶ "India can bring world together for better future, says PM Narendra Modi," Business Standard, November 9, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/g20-presidency-india-to-chart-path-to-progress-in-a-chaotic-world-says-pm-122110801610_1.html

⁷ Official Indian website of G20, op.cit

⁸ Harsh V. Pant & Sameer Patil, "India's G-20 presidency is a golden opportunity," Foreign Policy, November 25, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/25/india-g20-presidency-opportunity-multilateralism/>

have a moral ground to initiate thinking on how the world can be saved from any unimaginable devastation?⁹ In the same breath, one can argue that since India has not been able to resolve its differences with its neighbours, can it actually expect to inspire other countries to come together and grow in harmony? Having violated all norms, international laws, bilateral commitments and promises made to world bodies like the United Nations Security Council and Kashmiri people, can India instil the spirit of rule-based global order?

Only time will tell to what extent India will be able to deliver on these expectations as well. From Pakistan's perspective, even a remote suggestion that India would hold some of its G20 meetings, particularly those focusing on the tourism sector in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) is a matter of great concern.¹⁰ Any such move would not by any means dilute the fact that IOJK is a disputed territory and its people are still waiting to exercise their right to self-determination under UN auspices. On the other hand, suggestions floated by the former chief minister of IOJK Farooq Abdullah that following assuming the presidency of G20, India could engage with Pakistan over the Kashmir dispute.¹¹ Any such move though will be a welcome development provided such an engagement is meaningful and is conducted with the intention of finding a lasting solution of the Kashmir dispute that reflects, above all, the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

⁹ K V Rajan & Atul K Thakur, "India's G20 Presidency: Shaping the post-pandemic world," Observer Research Foundation, November 22, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-g20-presidency-shaping-the-post-pandemic-world/>

¹⁰ "Kashmir as G20 meetings venue," Kashmir Observer, September 22, 2022, <https://kashmirobsvber.net/2022/09/22/kashmir-as-g20-meetings-venue/>

¹¹ "India can use G20 presidency to engage Pakistan on Kashmir: Farooq Abdullah," The Tribune, November 21, 2022, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/j-k/india-can-use-g20-presidency-to-engage-pakistan-on-kashmir-farooq-abdullah-453242>