

G20 in India: The Story so far

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India holds the Group of 20 (G20) presidency from 1 December 2022 - 30 November 2023, after swapping it with Indonesia in 2022, and the 18th edition of the Leaders' Summit is going to be organised on 9-10 September 2023 in New Delhi.¹ Around thirty heads of states and governments from the member and invited countries are expected to attend the event.² In the run-up to this mega-event, the Government of India (GoI) is hosting 200 meetings across 32 different workstreams round the year in over 50 cities.³ Preparations by the GoI for organising the year-long series of G20 events have been spectacular on multiple counts.

Firstly, what is in public display is the self-congratulatory claim of India as the 'Mother of Democracy'⁴, a phrase that complements the current ruling regime's another audacious vision,

¹ Subhajt Roy (2020), Swap with Indonesia: India to host G-20 Summit in 2023, The Indian Express. See link: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/swap-with-indonesia-india-to-host-g-20-summit-in-2023-7061693/>; also see link: <https://www.g20.org/en/g20-india-2023/new-delhi-summit/> (both accessed on 13.08.2023)

² Devjyot Ghoshal (2022), Explainer: India G20 presidency 2023: what does it mean and what can we expect, Reuters. See link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-g20-presidency-2023-what-does-it-mean-what-can-we-expect-2022-12-02/> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

³ See link: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseSelfframePage.aspx?PRID=1882356#:~:text=Drawing%20inspiration%20from%20its%20G20,the%20opportunity%20to%20offer%20G20> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

⁴ Smriti Kak Ramachandran (2022), Time for world to know India is mother of democracy: Modi, Hindustan Times. See link: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/time-for-world-to-know-india-is-mother-of-democracy-modi-101670435822087.html> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

India as the “Vishwaguru” (Teacher of the world).⁵ The GoI has left no stone unturned to make an advertisement blitz around the G20 presidency at the expense of taxpayers’ money.⁶ Paintings and graffiti with the G20 India logo accompanied by images of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in all public spaces and transport present a classic example of public relations marketing. Secondly, the entire country witnessed the demolition drives and forced evictions of thousands of vulnerable communities from their living spaces in cities where the G20 events are being hosted.⁷ As a public hearing report on these stories of displacement noted, the ruination of the urban poor and the marginalised people has been done in the name of “beautification drives” or “clearing of encroachments” or “protection of monuments” or similar pretexts.⁸

Given this extravagant image-building exercise at the cost of taxpayers’ money and livelihoods of vulnerable people, it is pertinent to take stock of things and ask: what has happened so far? This paper thus looks at the journey of G20 under India’s presidency followed by a brief analysis of the outcomes of different workstreams.

India and the G20

The G20 is an intergovernmental forum of 20 members (19 countries and the European Union) that calls itself “a premier forum for international economic cooperation.”⁹ The members include: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. Spain is a permanent guest of the forum. Formed in 1999 in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, the G20 in its initial years functioned as a platform of the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) of the world’s most advanced and emerging market economies who deliberated on global macroeconomic issues to ensure financial stability. In 2008, following the global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to the level of heads of states and governments who meet annually to discuss policy decisions regarding international financial architecture and other pressing concerns of the world. In absence of a permanent secretariat, the G20 Leaders’ Summit is organised rotationally by one of the member countries. The G20 functions in a system of troika consisting of the current host

⁵ Kate Sullivan de Estrada (2023), What is a vishwaguru? Indian civilizational pedagogy as a transformative global imperative, *International Affairs*, Volume 99, Issue 2, pp. 433–455

⁶ Manjari Chatterjee Miller and Clare Harris (2023), Modi’s Marketing Muscle, *Foreign Policy*. See link:<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/20/india-modi-g20-presidency-pr-marketing-elections/>; also see: <https://www.newslaundry.com/2023/07/01/indias-g20-presidency-government-incurs-expenses-of-rs-506-crore-on-outdoor-ads> (both accessed on 13.08.2023)

⁷ See link: <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/delhi-s-g20-preparations-calls-for-eviction-drives-brings-horror-to-its-vulnerable-news-260099> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

⁸ See link: <https://wgonifis.net/2023/07/12/the-forced-evictions-across-india-and-g20-events-2/> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

⁹ See link: <https://www.g20.org/en/about-g20/> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

country, the predecessor and the successor. As the G20 is an extra-institutional platform, unlike the UN, the resolutions taken in its summits are non-binding in nature. Nonetheless, the G20 is an influential bloc because of: (a) its nature of being an extension of the G7 (the group of seven most advanced countries) and serves latter's politico-economic interests, (b) the size and scope of the markets that the G20 encompass and the contribution of its members to global GDP, (c) the percentage of the world population it covers, and (d) the impact of its decisions, implemented through regulatory bodies such as the Financial Stability Board (FSB), on the global financial system, national economies, environment and climate, and most importantly, people's livelihoods, rights, and entitlements. It is the rotational presidency of this influential forum that lies behind the hullabaloo in India this year.

The theme of G20 India is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and its motto is 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. For its presidency year, India has set the following areas of priorities: (a) Green Development, Climate Finance & Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE), (b) Accelerated, Inclusive & Resilient Growth, (c) Accelerating progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (d) Technological Transformation & Digital Public Infrastructure, (e) Multilateral Institutions for the 21st century, and (f) Women-led development.¹⁰ These jargon-loaded expressions may sound fantastic but they make little sense to a lay person. It is therefore necessary to decode these phrases and understand what is actually happening in these mega-events.

India: Voice of the Global South?

For quite some time now, India has been projecting itself as the voice for the Global South.¹¹ The G20 presidency offers the country an opportune moment to flag and address the real issues and concerns faced by the low-income and developing countries from the geographical regions of Africa, Central and Latin America, and Asia.

After becoming the G20 chair on 1 December 2022, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked, "During our G20 Presidency, we shall present India's experiences, learnings and models as possible templates for others, particularly the developing world. Our G20 priorities will be shaped in consultation with not just our G20 partners, but also our fellow-travellers in the global South, whose voice often goes unheard."¹² A month later, India hosted a Voice of the Global South Summit (VoGS) on 12-13 January 2023, a virtual gathering attended by 125 countries with a dedicated session on G20.¹³ In the VoGS summit, Indian External Affairs

¹⁰ See link: <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/group-twenty-g20> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

¹¹ Esha Banerji (2023), India: The Voice Of The Global South. See link: <https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/opinion-india-the-voice-of-the-global-south-6917011.html> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

¹² See link: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseSelfframePage.aspx?PRID=1880141> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

¹³ See link: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36119/Summary_of_Deliberations_Voice_of_Global_South_Summit_2023_January_1213_2023#:~:text=Search-

Minister, S. Jaishankar, assured the participants that India will ensure that their inputs receive cognizance in the G20 deliberations.

To substantiate this representative claim, India has invited Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Nigeria, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, to participate in G20 India as guests. More importantly, India has proposed and has written to the G20 members to include the African Union (AU), a regional forum of 55 African countries, as a full member in the G20 Leaders' Summit in September.¹⁴ The proposal got support both from the US, the EU, Russia, and other countries.¹⁵ If the proposal gets accepted in September, it will be a watershed moment in the brief history of the G20 as it may potentially dilute the forum's existing reputation of being "an elite club" that essentially provides legitimacy to the neoliberal agenda and policies of the G7.¹⁶ However, what needs to be kept in mind is that the G20 leaders in the Hamburg Summit (2017) agreed on an initiative called the 'G20 Partnership with Africa' where the focus was on private investments to finance development.¹⁷ The G20's current zeal to include the AU thus needs to be evaluated with a pinch of suspicion.

G20 India: What's happening?

Following the standard format of G20 meetings, the deliberations in India too happened in two parallel tracks: (a) the Finance Track (FT), and (b) the Sherpa Track (ST).¹⁸ These two tracks are sub-organised into different thematic working groups (WG). While the Finance Track is led by FMCBGs of member and guest countries, the Sherpa Track is coordinated by the Sherpas who are the personal emissaries of the state leaders. In addition, there are multiple Engagement Groups such as civil society organisations, parliamentarians, think tanks, women, youth, labour, special audit institutions, businesses and researchers of the member countries who contribute to these discussions based on their domain expertise. Further, the list of G20 delegates as usual includes representatives of international institutions and multilateral development banks (MDB) like the UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO, WHO, ILO, FSB, OECD, AU Chair, NEPAD Chair, ASEAN Chair, ADB, ISA and CDRI. Leaders and delegates also hold bilateral meetings on the sidelines which are often crucial in terms of diplomatic relations. For instance, US President

,Summary%20of%20Deliberations%3A%20Voice%20of%20Global%20South%20Summit%202023,January%2012%2D13%2C%202023)&text=India%20hosted%20a%20two%2Dday,countries%20of%20the%20Global%20South. (accessed on 13.08.2023)

¹⁴ Gulshan Sachdeva (2023), Dynamics of African Union's G20 membership, Deccan Herald. See link: <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/african-union-india-g20-european-union-indiag20-1229788.html>; also see: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/pm-modi-proposes-g20-membership-for-african-union/articleshow/101072145.cms> (accessed on 13.08.2023)

¹⁵ Sachdeva (2023), op.cit.

¹⁶ Sonal Raghuvanshi (2022), Reading the Rhetoric: The G20, Its Politics and What the 2023 Presidency means for India?, Centre for Financial Accountability. See link: https://www.cenfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Reading-the-rhetoric_G20-Briefing-Paper_English_SonalRaghuvanshi.pdf (accessed on 13.08.2023).

¹⁷ Jens Martens (2017), The G20 and the 2030 Agenda - Contradictions and conflicts at the Hamburg Summit, Henrich Boell Stiftung. See link: <https://www.boell.de/en/2017/09/26/g20-and-2030-agenda-contradictions-and-conflicts-hamburg-summit> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

¹⁸ See link: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1882356> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

Biden and Chinese premier Xi held a bilateral meeting in G20 Bali to ease tensions between the two countries.

The Finance Track

The FT focuses on global macroeconomic and financial matters, including monetary and fiscal policies, financial regulations, economic growth, and green finance. The outcomes of WGs are compiled into communiqués that inform G20 leaders to facilitate policy making. In India, the FT consists of the Framework Working Group (FWG), International Financial Architecture (IFA), Sustainable Finance Working Group (SFWG), Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPFI), Joint Finance and Health Task Force (JFHTF), and the FMCBG.

The FWG, co-chaired by India and the UK, met thrice to discuss issues such as inclusive growth, food and energy insecurity, macroeconomic impact of climate change and transition policies, inflation, financial globalization, and stability.¹⁹ The IFA, led by South Korea and France, addressed the ways to modernize IFIs, and tackling challenges like the climate crisis, sovereign debt sustainability, and Central Bank Digital Currencies.²⁰ The SFWG, chaired by the US and China, concentrated on aligning with the Paris Agreement (2015) and SDGs. It discussed ways of finding “specialized intermediaries to fund the SDGs” and called for private investments in eco-friendly technologies.²¹ The GPFI, led by Italy and Russia, deliberated on digital financial inclusion, innovations in payment systems, developing financial plans for the MSME sector, and the Financial Inclusion Action Plan for 2023.²² The JFHTF, chaired by Italy and Indonesia, dealt with global health priorities such as pandemic preparedness, pharmaceutical collaboration, and health sector digitization. The FMCBGs held three meetings addressing topics such as MDB funding, climate change, economic risks, infrastructure, international taxation, and regulatory frameworks for crypto-assets.²³ A new forum, namely, the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable (GSDR) was formed to discuss debt treatment, while the IMF and the FSB were tasked with synthesizing perspectives on crypto assets for policy formulation.²⁴ World Bank chief Ajay Banga emphasized on China plus one strategy for India, and urged for attracting private investments and capital injections into renewable energy projects for achieving net-zero

¹⁹ See link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/kochi-to-host-3rd-g20-framework-working-group-meeting-from-june-13-14/article66960927.ece> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²⁰ See link: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1930533> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²¹ See link: <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/g20-sfwg-recommends-projects-to-develop-ppps-best-practices-to-finance-sdgs-11687360484363.html> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²² See link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/g20-global-partnership-for-financial-inclusion-meeting-in-kolkata-from-jan-9-11/article66353694.ece> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²³ See link:

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1940536#:~:text=Nirmala%20Sitharaman%2C%20and%20Governor%2C%20Reserve,of%20India%2C%20Shri%20Shaktikanta%20Das> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²⁴ See link: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/india-to-push-g20-to-raise-share-of-taxes-on-firms-where-they-earn-excess-profit-sources/articleshow/101795067.cms> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

emissions.²⁵ Concessional finance and blended funding methods (jointly by MDBs, governments and the private sector) for sustainable projects were discussed under the FT.

These discussions, broadly speaking, revolved around three main issues: ways to attract private investments to achieve climate and development goals, addressing debt distress, and keeping the institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and FSB at the core of international financial architecture as regulatory bodies. This is not something new in G20 talks. What needs to be pointed out therefore is that a push for private investments in climate and SDG funding, as scholars have argued, essentially lead to “financialisation of nature” under the rhetoric of sustainable development.²⁶ For example, Tamra L Gilbertson’s research shows carbon markets in Colombia proliferated allowing rampant coal mining under the guise of ‘carbon neutrality,’ resulting in devastating consequences for the livelihood needs of the local Afro-Colombian communities.²⁷ On the question of debt burden, the prescriptions of the G20 like the DSSI, as observers noted, have benefitted the private creditors, ignored the concerns of middle income countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and failed to bring the traditional and new donors on the same page.²⁸ In response to the recent GSDR too, many civil society organizations have written to the Indian PM, the IMF and the World Bank to make these consultations more representative, transparent and under traditional institutional settings involving UN agencies.²⁹ Finally, the central role given to the IMF, the World Bank, the FSB along with other IFIs under the FMCBG meetings show how a country, claiming to be the voice of the global South, is in practice representing and legitimizing the interests of the rich countries of the global North. For example, it is no secret that projects funded by the World Bank in India (like the Tata Mundra power plant) have ruined the environment and livelihoods of local communities, and yet the big bank could not be held accountable in courts.³⁰ Similarly, MDB funded projects such as the China-led AIIB-financed Mandalika Project in Indonesia showed how these big banks flout safeguards and displace local communities from their living spaces.³¹

²⁵ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-should-cash-china-plus-one-strategy-world-bank-chief-2023-07-19/> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²⁶ Tamra L Gilbertson (2021), Financialization of nature and climate change policy: Implications for mining-impacted Afro-Colombian communities, *Community Development Journal*, Volume 56, Issue 1, pp. 21–38

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Biswajit Dhar (2023), G20 Countries Have a Grossly Inequitable Debt Management Strategy. That Needs to Change. *The Wire*. See link: <https://thewire.in/economy/g20-countries-have-a-grossly-inequitable-debt-management-strategy-that-needs-to-change>; also see:

<https://debtjustice.org.uk/news/open-letter-to-g20-finance-ministers-central-bank-governors-and-the-imf-on-special-drawing-rights> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

²⁹ See link: https://www.eurodad.org/global_sovereign_debt_roundtable (accessed on 13.08.2023).

³⁰ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/legal/transactional/indian-coal-plants-world-bank-lender-immune-enviro-suit-2021-07-07/>; also see: <https://www.cenfa.org/case-against-afc-at-us-supreme-court-disappointed-with-the-outcome-quest-for-justice-continues/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

³¹ Wawa Wang (2023), Indonesia’s Mandalika Project Reveals the Dark Side of AIIB Lending, *The Diplomat*. See link: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/06/indonesias-mandalika-project-reveals-the-dark-side-of-aiib-lending/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

The Sherpa Track

The focus of the WGs under the ST was no different. The WG on agriculture engaged with the questions of food security, the impact of the pandemic, climate change and Ukraine war on supply chains, capacity building for sustainable food production, and bolster fertilizer supply chains. The WG initiatives included Call for Action on Food Security and Nutrition, the Deccan High-Level Principles on Food Security, and celebrating the UN International Year of Millets. The Call for Action, however, had little to offer the vulnerable who face hunger, starvation and malnutrition.³² Observers have pointed out that the Indian agriculture minister failed to use the G20 platform to renegotiate the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (that promotes agribusiness driven agriculture) or “ask the US and EU to review their obstructive stance on the issue of the permanent peace clause required for the security of public food stocks needed to maintain public distribution system.”³³ India’s position is not surprising as the incumbent government is keen on promoting private investments in the agricultural sector. For instance, the Gol introduced three farm laws in 2020 that had the backing of IFIs (such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO) who had been putting pressure on India to cut farm and food subsidies and destroy its public stockholding.”³⁴

The WG on Digital Economy focused on showcasing India's digital public infrastructure (DPI), promoting digital technologies in key sectors like agriculture and health, and establishing digital governance frameworks. On the sidelines of these meetings, India has signed four MoUs on DPI with Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, and Antigua and Barbuda. One, however, needs to keep in mind that the Indian experience with digital technologies has been what Usha Ramanathan calls a “function creep,” that is, when a technology launched for a certain purpose eventually gets expanded beyond its original intent.³⁵ The case of the Aadhar, for example, not only benefited private businesses, but more importantly, it made access to basic welfare schemes and government services for the common people unimaginably complicated thereby increasing the digital divide, let alone surveillance. The issue of digitalisation of services was reiterated in the WG meetings in other sectors such as trade and investment, labour, education and health. For instance, the delegates highlighted the need for a meta portal for MSMEs, and India showed its ‘e-shram’ portal (a national database for informal workers) and proposed to create a Global Medical Countermeasures Coordination platform and Global Initiative on

³² See link: <https://wgonifis.files.wordpress.com/2023/07/g20-and-agriculture-under-indian-presidency-stock-taking-of-initiatives-2.pdf> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vijoo Krishnan (2022), The Farmers' Struggle Against the Three Farm Acts: A Participant's Memoir, *Review of Agrarian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1.

³⁵ For details, see Usha Ramanathan (2017), The Function Creep That Is Aadhaar, *The Wire*. See link: <https://thewire.in/government/aadhaar-function-creep-uid> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

Digital Health.³⁶ Here, it needs to be added that the EU has raised data privacy concerns on the MSME portal.³⁷ Moreover, all these proposals were floated with the agenda of serving the interests of the big corporations and promoting privatization of public services. For example, several representatives of the developing countries claimed that the health agenda pushed forward by India is “likely to serve the interests of the developed countries and philanthropic foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.”³⁸ One commentator wrote, “India’s apparent desperation to showcase the success of its G20 presidency has also allegedly forced it to support the developed country agenda of One Health and Platform for MCM (medical countermeasures) in WHO and the UN General Assembly,” thus making India a “satellite country” of the Global North instead of the voice of the Global South.³⁹

A couple of new initiatives were discussed under the ST such as High Level Principles for India’s behaviour-based proposal of LiFE, Early Warning System and Disaster Resilient Infrastructure for disaster risk reduction, the Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Industry Coalition (an industry-led initiative promoting resource efficiency and circular economy practices), and Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre and the Global Biofuel Alliance.

The Engagement Groups

There are eleven Engagement Groups that provide technical and expert inputs to the G20, viz. Business20, Civil20, Labour20, Parliament20, Science20, SAI20 (Supreme Audit Institutions), Startup20, Think20, Urban20, Women20, and Youth20. The Startup 20 is a new engagement group that has been established this year. Interestingly, the political character of most of the participating organisations in this workstream seem to be one-sided and aligned with the current ruling regime in India. The chair of the Youth20, for instance, is a member of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the youth wing of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).⁴⁰ Similarly, the chair of the Civil20 is an influential and controversial godwoman Mata Amritanandamayi.⁴¹ Moreover, the core group of the Think20 has representation from right-

³⁶ See links: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/indias-g20-presidency-trade-and-investment-working-group-to-meet-in-bengaluru-for-discussions-on-global-trade-and-technology-11684495004660.html>; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/indore/india-presents-natl-database-of-unorganised-workers/articleshow/101972246.cms?from=mdr>; <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/policy/g20-health-working-group-meeting-in-hyderabad-from-june-4-6-to-focus-on-medical-counter-measures/100729240> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

³⁷ See link: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/eu-raises-data-privacy-concerns-over-proposed-g20-msme-portal/articleshow/102702527.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

³⁸ Ravi Kanth Devarakonda (2023), India’s G20 Health Agenda Undermines Its Credibility Among Traditional Allies, The Wire. See link: <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/indias-g20-health-agenda-undermines-its-credibility-among-traditional-allies> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vadodara/barodian-is-track-chair-for-y20-at-g20/articleshow/96752652.cms> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁴¹ See links: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/president-visits-amritanandamayi-math/article66631065.ece>;

<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/controversy/story/20140310-embraced-by-scandal-800327-2014-02-28>;

<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/religion/story/20030929-devotees-flock-from-across-the-globe-to-celebrate-50th-birthday-of-mata-amritanandamayi-792085-2003-09-28> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

wing think-tanks such as the Vivekananda International Foundation.⁴² In short, the composition of the engagement groups, in many cases, seems to be politically oriented which undermines the representation of diverse voices in different sectors in the G20 deliberations.

G20 India: Analysis of the Outcome

Broadly speaking, the most pressing issues that were deliberated upon in the G20 events and are likely to be taken up in the Leaders' Summit are: (a) development goals, (b) debt vulnerabilities, (c) climate change and just energy transition, (d) reform of IFIs to attract private capital investments, and (e) the war in Ukraine.

Although the ST has drafted a joint communique on development goals, little consensus has been achieved on many of these issues in the FMCBG meetings.⁴³ Firstly, a focus area in the talks was international debt architecture.⁴⁴ A report of a G20 expert panel recommended that USD 1.8 trillion per year should be spent for sustainable infrastructure and an additional USD 1.2 trillion per year is required in other sectors such as health and education.⁴⁵ The report further noted, "The international development finance system should be designed to support this spending by providing USD 500 billion in additional annual official external financing by 2030, of which one-third (should be) in concessional and non-debt creating financing and two-thirds in the form of non-concessional official lending." However, despite the pressing debt concerns of the low and middle income countries, the talks on debt restructuring failed to generate a consensus.⁴⁶ Countries such as Germany and the UK did not send their ministers in the FMCBG meetings and others such as Argentina, Brazil, France and Mexico sent their junior officials. The absence or low attendance of ministerial delegation slowed down the consensus building process. As many G20 countries are themselves facing economic challenges, there was no agreement on a debt restructuring model. Moreover, differences among the members in the wake of the Ukraine war halted the possibility of a breakthrough on the debt architecture.⁴⁷ Countries such as China, a major lender to African and Asian LMICs now, resisted the one-size-fits-all debt restructuring formula endorsed by the traditional creditors of

⁴² See links: <https://t20ind.org/about-us/>; <https://theprint.in/india/how-the-right-is-tackling-lefts-intellectual-hegemony-in-delhi-one-think-tank-at-a-time/341760/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁴³ See links: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/3rd-g20-sherpa-meeting-under-indias-presidency-focusses-on-developmental-goals/articleshow/101803251.cms>; <https://www.voanews.com/a/g20-finance-ministers-meeting-in-india-ends-without-consensus/7186148.html> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

⁴⁴ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/g20-discuss-international-debt-architecture-more-loans-developing-nations-2023-07-13/> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

⁴⁵ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/multilateral-banks-need-major-changes-boost-lending-g20-panel-2023-07-18/> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

⁴⁶ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/debt-restructuring-talks-g20-meet-hurt-by-differences-low-attendance-2023-07-17/> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

⁴⁷ See link: <https://www.dw.com/en/g20-meeting-in-india-split-on-debt-relief-and-ukraine/a-66275439> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

the Paris Club countries. The failure of the G20 FMCBGs to reach a consensus on the debt question was considered by UNDP as a matter of “grave concern.”⁴⁸

Secondly, the G20 members, who contribute to 80 percent of the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, failed to reach a consensus on climate crisis goals.⁴⁹ According to the aforementioned G20 expert panel, an additional spending of USD 3 trillion per year by 2030 is required to meet climate action and other developmental agenda. The FMCBGs, as reported in the media, “could not agree on all critical actions needed to stick to the Paris Agreement goals of keeping global warming well below 2°C, let alone target the more ambitious 1.5°C threshold beyond which the world is expected to see devastating floods, droughts and natural calamities.”⁵⁰ Neither the G20 members could agree on reducing GHG emissions, nor could they build a consensus on cutting down fossil fuel.⁵¹ On the one hand, US and India, at a bilateral level, agreed on working on “an investment platform to deliver a lower cost of capital and increased private investment to speed India's energy transition”, and on the other, countries such as South Africa and Indonesia pushed for a Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P) to accelerate the transition from fossil fuel to renewable energies.⁵² Further, India wants a JET-P on its own terms, i.e., “no phase out of coal and funds for clean energy expansion in the form of grants, not loans.” In short, the FMCBG talks around climate action and just energy transition exposed the divide between the Global North and the Global South and also resulted in a blame game, particularly between China and the EU.⁵³ The failure of the G20 ministerial meetings demonstrate once again the inability of the G20 to build consensus at the multilateral level.

Thirdly, reform of MDBs (such as the World Bank, AIIB and ADB) lay at the heart of India's G20 agenda. However, the expert panel's roadmap to reform the MDBs was not endorsed by FMCBGs.⁵⁴ The Independent Expert Group on Strengthening MDBs noted that USD 740 billion worth of private financing per year is required to meet the overall goals of additional climate and sustainable development-related finance.⁵⁵ In tandem with the G20 goals, the report called for better coordination between MDBs (like AIIB, ADB, AfDB, IDB, EBRD, IFC, IBRD) to draw private investment, raising new forms of capital, and utilising balance sheets. The media also

⁴⁸ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-agency-says-no-breakthrough-debt-talks-g20-grave-concern-2023-07-17/> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

⁴⁹ See link: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/g20-fails-to-reach-agreement-on-critical-climate-steps-in-ministerial-talks-101690569561332.html> (accessed on 14.08.2023)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See links: <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/no-g20-consensus-emissions-mitigation-targets-talks-source-2023-07-28/>;

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/g20-draft-tweaked-reflect-dissent-cutting-unabated-fossil-fuels-2023-07-22/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵² See link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-working-with-india-platform-speed-its-energy-transition-yellen-2023-07-17/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵³ See link: <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/china-denies-reports-it-obstructed-g20-climate-discussions-2023-08-02/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵⁴ See link: <https://thewire.in/economy/g20-finance-ministers-meet-falls-short-of-endorsing-report-on-multilateral-development-banks> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵⁵ See link: <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/g20-expert-group-on-mdb-suggests-greater-engagement-with-private-sector-8849164/> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

opined to utilise India's G20 presidency to make AIIB and NDB as the new World Bank and the IMF, and reform the existing Bretton Woods model of international financial architecture.⁵⁶ Suggestions from MDBs focussed on attracting more private investments. World Bank chief Ajay Banga said that India has a three to five year window to utilise the opportunity of China+1 investments.⁵⁷ Similarly, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa met Prime Minister Modi and proposed to invest USD 25 billion over a period of five years to support India's development priorities.⁵⁸ India also proposed that China-led AIIB should invest in infrastructural development.⁵⁹ The push for private investments and de-risking them with public money, as the deliberations indicated, is most likely to impact the poor masses and deprive them of their rights and entitlements. To give an example, big corporations such as Apple and Foxconn have in the recent past called for reform of Indian labour laws as a condition for investing in the country.⁶⁰ Such conditions put forth by the private corporations mean an increase in working hours and other dilutions in labour rights.

Finally, although India claimed that the war in Ukraine is not its priority, the deliberations witnessed heated exchanges between delegates on this burning issue resulting in a deadlock.⁶¹ It is yet to be seen how the issue is dealt with in the final declaration after the Leaders' summit.

The Coming Days

The world is closing watching the preparations of the G20 Leaders' Summit in early September. The venue 'Bharat Mandapam' has been inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi on 26 July 2023, and recce teams of G20 countries have started visiting the venue. A communal violence in the neighboring state of Haryana has put the authorities on alert to avoid any such disturbances before the final Summit.⁶² At a time when climate action talks are failing, thirty mobile pollution control teams to control air quality and water-logging in case of heavy rains have been deployed in New Delhi before the final summit.⁶³ The dogs of Delhi have also hit the news as an order to remove them from the streets was issued only to be withdrawn later after criticism

⁵⁶ See link: <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/g20-should-aim-to-make-aiib-and-ndb-the-new-imf-and-world-bank-11670531563490.html> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵⁷ See link: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-has-3-5-year-to-cash-in-on-the-china1-window-world-bank-president-ajay-banga/articleshow/101970626.cms> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵⁸ See link: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/adb-president-meets-pm-modi-proposes-25-bn-support-to-indias-development-priorities/article66539182.ece> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁵⁹ See link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/finance-minister-nirmala-sitharaman-suggests-aiib-to-use-innovative-financing-ways-to-address-infra-needs/articleshow/101800165.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁶⁰ See links: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-21/apple-seeks-india-labor-reform-in-push-to-diversify-beyond-china>; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/12-hour-shifts-night-time-work-for-women-apple-foxconn-pushed-for-labour-reforms-to-advance-indian-production-plans/articleshow/98544594.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 15.08.2023)

⁶¹ Suhasini Haider (2023), Ukraine war not a priority of G-20 presidency, says India; The Hindu. See link: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ukraine-war-is-not-our-priority-indian-g-20-sherpa-amitabh-kant/article67076674.ece> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁶² See link: <https://thewire.in/government/haryana-violence-g20-summit-and-delhi-dog-relocations> (accessed on 14.08.2023).z

⁶³ See link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/mcd-withdraws-order-to-remove-stray-dogs-for-g20/articleshow/102463390.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 14.08.2023).

from animal activists. The people of the national capital, as per a media report, may be asked to stay indoors on the days of the Summit.

The stage is set. Now, the question is: can the Vishwaguru live up to the expectations of the people, or even the G20? One needs to wait and watch.



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