

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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TOPIC: INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

Great G20 power, great responsibility

India will have the opportunity to assume centre stage in setting the global agenda



RAJESH MEHTA & MOHIT ANAND

September is a hectic month in India's diplomatic calendar. On September 5-6 in New Delhi, a 'Senior Officers Meeting' was held of the Quad, which comprises India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. On September 8, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and their Japanese counterparts held the second India-Japan '2+2' Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo to take forward strategic cooperation in areas such as joint exercises, defence manufacturing and emerging technologies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to attend the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Samarkand in Uzbekistan on September 15-16. This will be the first in-person summit of the SCO since the COVID-19 pandemic. This visit will be watched closely by the West and by India's Quad partners for India's engagement with Russian President Vladimir Putin, as the Russian war in Ukraine has completed more than six months. This will also be the first time that Mr. Modi will be meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping face to face, since the transgressions of the People's Liberation Army at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) began in April 2020. The Indian government has said India and China will take up remaining issues along the LAC when the disengagement at Patrolling Point 15 in Gogra-Hot Springs is completed; therefore, any contact with the Chinese leader will be significant. India will be assuming rotational presidency of the SCO at the end of the Samarkand summit and will hold it for a year until September 2023. It will host the SCO summit next year.

It will also preside as President of the United Nations Security Council for December 2022.

Presidency of G20

But before that, in November, the 17th G20 Heads of State and Government Summit will take place in Bali. After Indonesia, India will assume the presidency of the G20 from De-



File photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) at the G20 summit in Osaka in 2019. - Reuters

ember 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023. It is slated to host several ministerial meetings, working groups, and events before the G20 Head of State summit next year.

By hosting the summit of the G20, the world's most influential economic multilateral forum, India will have the opportunity to assume centre stage in proposing and setting the global agenda and discourse. The G20 holds a strategic role in securing global economic growth and prosperity. Together, its members represent more than 80% of the world's GDP, 75% of international trade and 60% of the world's population. It will arguably be the most high-profile event ever hosted by India. The country's leadership potential and diplomatic foresight in organising such a big-ticket event and in arriving at meaningful outcomes will be tested.

In a world affected by the pandemic and the Ukraine conflict, the rise of an assertive China, economic challenges such as stagflation, terrorism, and climate change, to name a few, it needs to be seen what role India can play under its watch as President of the G20. To begin with, India can take cues from Indonesia's presidency and observe how it is managing the group which is deeply divided on various issues. Indonesia has focused on three key pillars: global health architecture, sustainable energy transition, and digital transformation. This template could be useful for India in forging a compre-

hensive agenda.

India can assert its political, economic and intellectual leadership while hosting the G20 presidency. But it will have to perform a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, we have the West, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and G7 partner nations setting the agenda. And on the other, we have an emerging nexus between China and Russia, which are taking divergent views from the first group. India might be caught in the middle as it is part of both the Quad and the SCO which somewhat lie on the opposing sides of the geopolitical spectrum. So, India might have to address issues that help in bridging the emerging divide in the world order.

Notwithstanding the noise and opposing views at this forum, India can find a common ground for setting its G20 agenda by addressing issues of global concern. Simultaneously, it needs to promote its specific priorities related to domestic and regional issues such as economic recovery, trade and investment, unemployment, patent waivers on diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines to tackle COVID-19 and terrorism. More specifically, India could forge greater cooperation with many G20 members such as the European Union, the U.K., and Canada, thereby accelerating their coordination on realising free trade agreements. The overarching issues could be related to charting a road map for quick global economic recovery, focusing on the

supply chain resilience mechanism and stressing on green and digital transformations in the economy and its impact on societal well-being. This would ensure a sustainable and inclusive growth for the global economy.

G20 is a unique global institution, where developed and developing countries have equal status. It offers India an opportunity to also champion the causes of developing and least developed countries so as to ensure that this summit does not turn out to be a western-dominated high table gathering of one where large economies impose their aspirations on the world. India could invite and engage countries from Africa and South America to ensure better and more balanced representation at the G20. Areas such as technology transfer, assistance towards green economy, greater access to trade for developing countries, addressing debt distress of countries by offering sustainable aid and loan programmes, tackling food and energy prices/security for vulnerable economies etc. could be relevant. As Harsh V. Shringla, India's chief G20 coordinator and former Foreign Secretary, recently said, "Our G20 Presidency would place India on the global stage, and provide an opportunity for India to place its priorities and narratives on the global agenda."

A testing time

The coming months will be a testing time for Indian foreign policy and diplomacy as the country prepares to host the G20 and SCO summits next year. India will be central in outlining key priority areas and in ensuring that the forum does not remain just a 'talk shop' but translates into a 'walk shop' in terms of meaningful actions and outcomes. Only this will give credibility to India's pivotal role in the international community.

On its 75th year of independence, India could start charting a meaningful agenda and contribute towards the international community. Its role towards either brokering or breaking deals could define the coming years and decades of global discourse and avenues of cooperation.

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G20

- ✓ The G20 is an informal group of 19 countries and the European Union, with representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- ✓ The G20 membership comprises a mix of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies. Together, the G20 members represent more than 80% of world GDP, 75% of international trade and 60% of the world population.

- ✓ The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.
- ✓ Spain as a permanent, non-member invitee, also attends leader summits.
- ✓ The G20 Presidency rotates annually according to a system that ensures a regional balance over time.
- ✓ TROIKA: Every year when a new country takes on the presidency, it works hand in hand with the previous presidency and the next presidency and this is collectively known as TROIKA. This ensures continuity and consistency of the group's agenda.

TOPIC: INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

India raises Sri Lankan Tamil issue in UN

It voices concern over lack of 'measurable progress' on Colombo's commitments of a political solution

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

India on Monday voiced concern over the "lack of measurable progress" in Sri Lanka's promised political solution to the long-pending Tamil national question, while making an unusual reference to the crisis-hit island nation's "debt-driven" economy in the context of its current crisis.

In its statement at the 51st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, India said it has "always believed in the responsibility of states for promotion and protection of human rights and constructive international dialogue and cooperation" guided by the UN Charter. "In this regard, the Indian delegation notes with concern the lack of measurable progress by Government of Sri Lanka on their commitments of a political solution to the ethnic issue – through full implementation of the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, delegation of powers to

Provincial Councils and holding of Provincial Council elections at the earliest," India said. The terms of Sri Lanka's nine provincial councils expired about three years ago, and they have remained defunct since.

India's statement comes ahead of a resolution on Sri Lanka that will likely face a vote at the Council. Since 2009, India has voted thrice in favour of the UN resolution on Sri Lanka – two were critical – and abstained twice, in 2014 and 2021. Irrespective of its vote, India has consistently underscored the need for a political settlement "within the framework of a united Sri Lanka, ensuring justice, peace, equality and dignity for the Tamils of Sri Lanka," as it reiterated on Monday as well.

Over 13 years since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war, in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed and disappeared, survivors continue demanding justice and accountability for war-time



India made the statement at the 51 session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. ■TWITTER/@UNGENEVA

crimes. In the post-war years, Sri Lanka's human rights defenders have frequently flagged concerns over persisting militarisation, especially in the Tamil-majority north and east; repression, and the shrinking space for dissent.

In her latest report on Sri Lanka, the UN Human Rights chief said "embedded impunity for past and present human rights abuses, economic crimes and corruption" were among the "underlying factors" that led to the country's "devastating"

economic crisis.

India has extended nearly \$4 billion crucial assistance to Sri Lanka this year but has not made any public remark on the island's economic choices so far. However, at the 'Interactive Dialogue' segment of the ongoing Council session, India said Sri Lanka's current economic crisis "demonstrated the limitations of debt driven economy and the impact it has on the standard of living". China, Japan, and India are Sri Lanka's three main bilateral creditors, while the is-

land nation owes the biggest chunk of its foreign debt to International Sovereign Bond holders.

"It is in Sri Lanka's best interests to build capacity of its citizens and work towards their empowerment, for which devolution of power to the grass roots level is a pre-requisite," the Indian delegation said, apparently connecting the long-pending promise of power devolution to citizens' empowerment in the context of the economic recovery. "In this connection, operationalisation of Provincial Councils through early conduct of elections will enable all citizens of Sri Lanka to achieve their aspirations for a prosperous future. We therefore urge Sri Lanka to take immediate and credible action in this regard," the delegation said.

Making a statement at the session, China said it "firmly supported" Sri Lanka to "safeguard its sovereignty and independence", maintain social stability and achieve economic recovery.

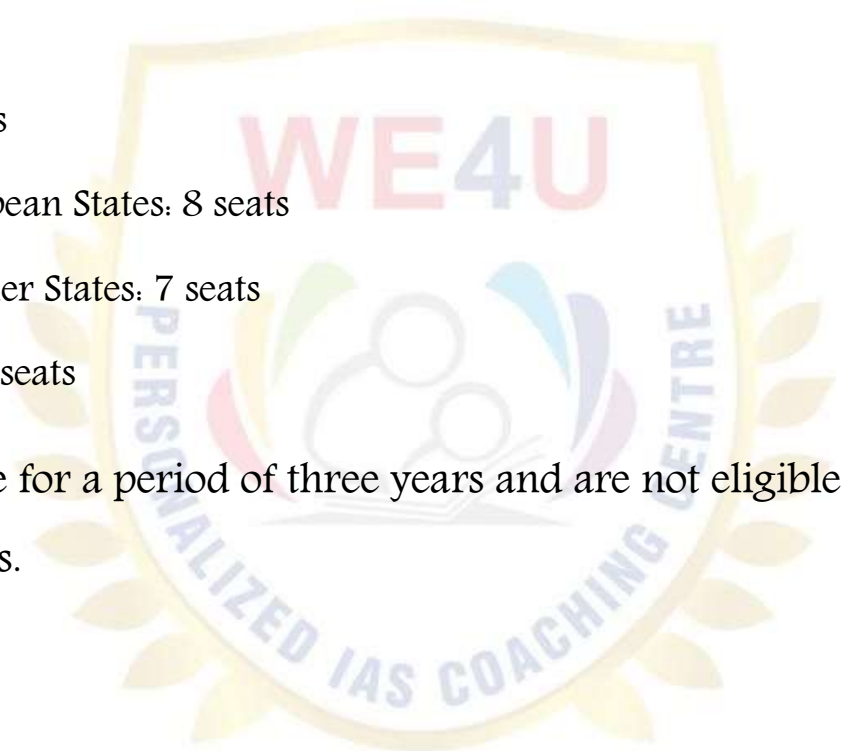
UN Human Rights Council

- ✓ The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the world.
- ✓ The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006.
- ✓ It is made up of 47 United Nations Member States which are elected by the UN General Assembly (UNGA).
- ✓ The UNGA takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.

✓ The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution. Seats are distributed as follows:

1. African States: 13 seats
2. Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
3. Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
4. Western European and other States: 7 seats
5. Eastern European States: 6 seats

✓ Members of the Council serve for a period of three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.



TOPIC: INFLATION

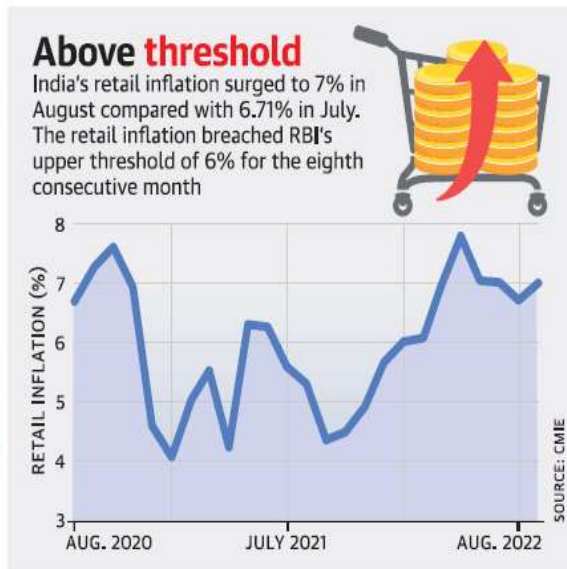
Retail inflation resurges to 7% as food prices mount

Industrial output growth drops to 2.4% in July

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

India's retail inflation resurged to 7% in August from 6.71% in July, fuelled by a 7.62% uptick in food prices paid by consumers, even as industrial output growth in July dropped to the lowest level since April at just 2.4%, with output levels dropping 2.75% month on month.

This is the eighth successive month that retail inflation has stayed above the central bank's upper tolerance threshold of 6% inflation for the economy, and constitutes a setback to households' spending power among the poorer sections.



Consumer Price Index

- ✓ It measures price changes from the perspective of a retail buyer. It is released by the National Statistical Office (NSO).
- ✓ The CPI calculates the difference in the price of commodities and services such as food, medical care, education, electronics etc, which Indian consumers buy for use.
- ✓ The CPI has several sub-groups including food and beverages, fuel and light, housing and clothing, bedding and footwear.

✓ Four types of CPI are as follows:

1. CPI for Industrial Workers (IW).
2. CPI for Agricultural Labourer (AL).
3. CPI for Rural Labourer (RL).
4. CPI (Rural/Urban/Combined).

✓ Of these, the first three are compiled by the Labour Bureau in the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Fourth is compiled by the NSO in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

✓ Base Year for CPI is 2012

TOPIC: CITIZENSHIP

CAA petitions to be heard on Oct. 31

CJI asks parties to draw road map, highlight issues; case to go to 3-judge Bench

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court fixed the hearing in 220 petitions challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019 on October 31 and said it will refer the case to a three-judge Bench.

The petitions came up before a Bench of Chief Justice of India U.U. Lalit and S. Ravindra Bhat on September 12 after a hiatus of many months. The hearing of the case was interrupted by the pandemic.

Chief Justice Lalit asked the parties, including the Centre, to draw a “road map” highlighting the issues involved in the case, their division into various segments and the formulation of questions of law.

Lawyers said the petitions linking the CAA with the As-



A recent protest in Guwahati against the CAA. ■PTI

sam National Register of Citizens (NRC) ought to be a different segment of its own and heard separately.

The CAA fast-tracks the citizenship-by-naturalisation process for “illegal migrants” from six religious communities, other than Muslims, who have fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

The Act and its implemen-

tation had seen ordinary citizens protest across the country. Police action on the protesters had drawn heavy criticism.

The government had maintained that the amendments made to the Citizenship Act of 1955 was meant to protect and welcome religiously persecuted people fleeing the three neighbouring countries where Muslims form the majority.

Dissenting voices

The top court had earlier issued a formal notice admitting the petitions filed by people from all walks of life and faiths, from parliamentarians to retired High Commissioners and service officers to lawyers, students, activists, professional associations to Opposition parties, cutting across regions

and ideology and NGOs.

The petitions have argued that the law welcomes “illegal migrants” into India selectively on the basis of their religion and pointedly excludes Muslims. It has an “unholy nexus” with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise and is against principles of secularism, right to equality and dignity of life enshrined in the Constitution, the petitions said.

The petitions have argued that the law effectuates discrimination on the basis of the intrinsic identity of an individual, that is, his religious identity as a Muslim. While Muslim migrants would have to show their proof of residency in India for at least 11 years, the law allows illegal migrants from the six communities to be naturalised in five years’ time.

TOPIC: INDIA- U.S RELATIONSHIP

Three to tangle

The Pakistan factor should not undermine India's close security ties with the U.S.

India is understandably upset with the U.S.'s decision to refurbish the F-16 fighter fleet of Pakistan. The fleet has been the backbone of the Pakistan Air Force since the early 1980s, upgraded, and replenished periodically. As the partnership between the two countries grew over the years, including and particularly in the defence sector, India continuously raised its concerns on this account with U.S. interlocutors. Successive U.S. administrations have maintained that the defence partnership with Pakistan, which is a major non-NATO ally, is a critical component of its global war on terror – a point contested by India. In 2016, the U.S. Congress stalled the Obama administration's move to give more F-16 fighters to Pakistan. New Delhi's apprehensions came true in February 2019, a day after the Balakot air strike by the Indian Air Force, when Pakistan deployed its F-16s to target Indian military bases close to the Line of Control. The Indian Army recovered debris of the Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile fired by the F-16s. On September 7, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified a possible Foreign Military Sales worth \$450 million for engine, electronic warfare and other hardware and software upgrades and spares for Pakistan's F-16s. Though it said that the proposed sale does not include any new capabilities, weapons, or munitions, the move clearly marks a thaw in the U.S.'s attitude towards Pakistan.

The External Affairs Ministry has chosen to maintain its silence on the issue, unlike its public expression of summoning the U.S. Ambassador in 2016. The U.S. move strains its relationship with India which has been making great strides, though it is not without obstacles. New Delhi and Washington have been skilfully managing their differences over Afghanistan, the crisis in Ukraine, and the lingering threat of U.S. sanctions under its Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. Washington's new warmth with Islamabad also comes amid a flurry of India-U.S. diplomatic and military engagements. India and the U.S. have committed to deepening defence and security cooperation, but the indulgence of Pakistan dampens that spirit. The Trump administration had tried to hold Pakistan accountable for duplicity in its approach towards terrorist groups operating from its territory, which amounts to running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. To stay in Afghanistan, the U.S. needed Pakistan; now to stay away from Afghanistan it needs Pakistan even more. While the U.S. may have its reasons to keep Pakistan humoured and incentivised, India's concerns are immediate and real. Terrorism against India has been Pakistan's state policy for decades. Far from seeking accountability, the U.S. is rewarding Pakistan, and more on the same lines may in the offing. India and the U.S. need to work to ensure that the spectacular gains made in bilateral ties are preserved and nourished.



THANK YOU

