

EDITOR'S NOTE

India very successfully hosted the G20 heads of state at a two-day event on September 9-10, 2023, at New Delhi. India's presidency is till November. Consensus was finally reached on the wording of the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration and was signed. The African Union (AU) was made the 21st member, and the G20 has now become G21. The theme set by India in the year of its presidency was *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (One Earth, One Family, One Future). India had chosen to showcase its diversity and culture, and events were held in 60 cities covering practically the entire length and breadth of the country.

Planet, people, peace and prosperity comprised the theme of the 34-page joint declaration. The declaration covered the need and actions for strong, sustainable, and inclusive growth. Advancing financial inclusion, fighting corruption, accelerating progress on sustainable development goals, eliminating hunger and malnutrition, handling food and energy insecurity, strengthening global health through collaboration, delivering quality education, green development pact for a sustainable future, climate change and transition of lifestyles for sustainable development were highlighted. Implementing clean, sustainable, just and affordable energy transitions was important. Conserving, protecting, sustainably using and restoring ecosystems and harnessing and preserving the ocean-based economy, and ending plastic pollution were emphasised. Reducing disaster risk and building resilient infrastructure, and the need to strengthen multilateral institutions for the 21st century were agreed on. Managing global debt vulnerabilities, technological transformation and digital public infrastructure and secure, trustable digital economy was desired.

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence (AI) responsibly, gender equality and empowering women and girls, and bridging the gender digital divide were required. It was decided to create a working group on the empowerment of women. Countering terrorism and money laundering and creating means for this was evolved.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with the leaders of Singapore, Bangladesh, Italy, the USA, Brazil, Argentina, Mauritius and UAE, launched the Global Biofuel Alliance on the sidelines of the G20 Summit. To stimulate economic development through enhanced connectivity and economic integration, it was decided to launch the India-Middle East-Europe mega economic corridor. Upon completion, it will provide a cost-effective cross-border ship-to-rail transit network to supplement existing maritime and road transport routes. India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe will benefit.

The 15th BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Summit was hosted by South Africa in Johannesburg. It was the first in-person gathering since 2019. The theme was "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism". It was decided to expand the membership from five to eleven countries, reflecting a concerted effort to enhance its global standing. Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Ethiopia, and Argentina were the new members that will join from January 1, 2024.

India's Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft for lunar exploration was launched on July 14, 2023. The mission consisted of a lunar lander 'Vikram', and a lunar rover 'Pragyan'. The lander touched down near the lunar South Pole region on August 23, making India the fourth country to successfully land on the Moon and the first to do so near the lunar South Pole. The two have completed all the initially assigned tasks.

On September 2, 2023, India launched the Aditya-L1, a coronagraph spacecraft to study the solar atmosphere. It will be orbiting at about 1.5 million km from the Earth in a halo orbit around the L1 Lagrange point between the Earth and the Sun where it will study the solar atmosphere, solar magnetic storms, and their impact on the environment around the Earth. These two events once again

proved India's scientific and technological acumen and earned praise from the world.

This issue of *Defence and Diplomacy* covers many important geo-strategic issues. Pakistan is currently stuck in political and economic quicksand. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan has been jailed for corruption. His face-off and power struggle with the powerful military establishment has tried to undermine their authority with a hope of increased influence ahead of elections which are now likely to be held early next year. Meanwhile, the nation grapples with its worst economic crisis and a surge in terrorist activities. Reviving the cash-strapped economy while fulfilling the conditions laid down by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will not be easy for the caretaker government. The army has started calling the shots again. The unchecked inflation has brought great pressure on the poor masses to make ends meet.

As the US-China competition in Southeast Asia hots up, US President Biden flew from the G20 summit straight to Vietnam. There he signed the 'comprehensive strategic partnership' with his counterpart, to bring Vietnam closer to the United States. In the recent past, he had hosted the Philippines' president, and the Indian prime minister at the White House and his Japanese and South Korean counterparts at the Camp David presidential retreat. The signals were clearly for China which has been aggressive in its military and economic posture. "We're not looking to hurt China, sincerely, we're all better off if China does well—but does well by the international rules," President Biden said in Vietnam. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries cannot antagonise their large neighbour China, but want to befriend a counterweight as insurance cover. India is already a part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which is a grouping to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, and carrying out regular military exercises. India's Act East policy has brought it closer to many Southeast Asian countries that are concerned about Chinese hegemony and arm-twisting.

Climate change is resulting in higher temperatures, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events that are causing floods or droughts. These could result in migrations and other security dimensions. Climate change requires concerted global action, more

so from the developed nations, which have been the major polluters of the planet. The issue is being discussed at all multilateral forums, including the G20. In fact, countries like India have acted much more responsibly and set ambitious goals to reduce carbon emissions. A balance would have to be maintained between economic growth and reduced carbon footprint.

As China prepares to operationalise its third aircraft carrier in next two years, there are murmurs that the PLA Navy (PLAN) could sail one into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) around 2025. China has built a significant presence in the IOR through the ports at Gwadar, Djibouti, Hambantota, and those of other friendly countries. India has befriended many of its neighbours, and, in partnerships with like-minded democracies, has secured its interests. India's maritime and air power needs to supplement the political and diplomatic efforts to keep the IOR free of military rivalry.

The Integrated Review of Security published by the UK in March 2021 gives greater emphasis to the Indo-Pacific. It also places much greater focus on UK-India relations. India and the UK have already elevated their bilateral relationship to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership", covering many areas of economic and defence cooperation.

India has had historic cultural and commercial relations with Central Asia. After the partition of India, the land route to Central Asia got interrupted by an unfriendly Pakistan. Central Asia is geo-strategically important, being rich in natural resources like crude oil, natural gas, gold, copper, aluminum, and iron ore. But there are challenges of terrorism, narcotics trafficking and arms smuggling. India has treated the region as an "extended neighbourhood." In the recent past, China has tried to woo some of these nations. India formulated its Connect Central Asia Policy in 2012 which essentially promotes regional well-being, economic cooperation, connectivity and people-to-people contacts through developmental assistance. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that will connect India to Europe through Central Asia is crucial. Another alternative route has now been proposed during the G20 summit. India cannot match the deep pockets of China. A possible Russia-

China-Pakistan axis could have its dynamics, but India is too important for Russia to allow complications.

Communications through submarine cables began in the middle of the 19th century. Modern cables are optical-fibre, and carry huge financial and other data. A 25,000-km-long submarine cable connects Southeast Asia to Europe via Egypt. The cables cannot be kept under constant surveillance. The adversary can snoop for information or even damage the cable to disrupt data flow. Just end-to-end encryption is not enough, physical security and redundancy are also important. Repairing damaged cables is an expensive and skilled task. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), there are 17 international subsea cables landing in 14 distinct cable landing stations in five cities across India: Mumbai, Chennai, Cochin, Tuticorin and Trivandrum. India is at the centre of the Indian Ocean Submarine Cable Network. There are also domestic submarine cables connecting the Indian mainland to its island territories. Since data is the new oil, securing the cables has become important.

A blockchain is a distributed database or ledger shared among a computer network's nodes. Though initially meant for commercial applications, it is finding greater applications in defence and aviation.

This issue of *Defence and Diplomacy* covers all this in greater detail. Technology is making a major change in the way we live and transact. We continue to try and bring detailed analysis on all contemporary issues.

Happy Reading.
Jai Hind!

Air Marshal **Anil Chopra**
Director-General
Centre for Air Power Studies