

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

September 2023



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 14

Issue 6

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 14

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

– The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

The Russia-Ukraine war is characterized by the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive, which is marked by steady gains but also many losses. Despite incremental territorial gains, a breakthrough is yet to be seen. Months of preparation had gone into the counteroffensive, which was accompanied by highly advanced weapons given by western countries, such as Patriot missile defence system, HIMAR and MLRS rockets, advanced armored vehicles, Challenger and Leopard 2 main battle tanks, long range cruise missiles, artillery shells and ammunition etc. The original plan – as seen in leaked US documents – was to conduct a lightning offensive, to take back territories occupied by Russia and give a blow to Russian positions in eastern and southern Ukraine.

However, in the first two weeks of the counteroffensive, Ukraine lost about 20% of the weaponry it got from the West and had to change tactics from conducting a lightning operation to taking back small villages along the frontline. What the Ukrainian counteroffensive has managed to achieve is to put Russia on the defensive. Ukraine has managed to take the fight to Crimea, Black Sea and even to Moscow through drone and missile attacks. It has also delivered a blow in terms of Russian manpower and military losses.

Diplomatically, increasing Russian dependence on China is reflected not only in the form of weakening Russian power across Central Asia and South Caucasus, but also within Russia itself, where China is greatly expanding its influence. While earlier Chinese influence and investments were concentrated

in Russian Far East, along the Northern Sea Route, China is now expanding among Russian republics like Tatarstan and Middle Volga, conducting independent trade deals with them, and giving these republics a sense of greater independence and leverage over Russia. Besides, Chinese engagement with the Arctic has also increased substantially, not only in the form of increasing scientific research, but also engagement with Russian littoral regions.

Besides China, Russian engagement with international pariah, North Korea, also saw momentous upswing, with leaders of both the countries meeting in Russian far east region – a rare foreign visit by the North Korean leader. Their rising relations are underlined by defence partnership and alliance against the US, with North Korea committing to supplying weapons to Russia, in return for Russian supply of technology to North Korea.

SPECIAL PARLIAMENT SESSION

After much speculation, the four-day special session of the Parliament was held, commemorating India's 75-year journey from Independence. It also marked the historic operationalization of the new Parliament building and the passage of a landmark bill.

On the first day of the session, lawmakers of both the Houses – Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha – held a discussion on the 75-year journey of the Indian Parliament, in the old Parliament building. The following day, after a ceremony in the Central Hall of the old building, the lawmakers walked down to the new building. One of the landmarks bills to be passed in this session was the fulfilment of the long-pending (nearly three decades old) demand for women's reservation in

legislative bodies, in the form of the Women's Reservation Bill or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, which is the Constitution (One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill.

Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023:

The bill aims to reserve 33% seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies and was passed by both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in this session. Additionally, this reservation will also extend to SCs and STs.

Demands for women's reservations in legislative bodies has been a contentious issue since Independence. During the Constituent Assembly Debates, women members in the Constituent Assembly were not in favour of granting reservation or special representation to women. Their argument was that reservation merely represented an aspect of formal or institutional equality, as opposed to the substantive and comprehensive socio-economic justice that women were seeking. Therefore, this issue languished for many decades. In the decades following Independence till up to the 1990s, women's movement and issues were broadly focused on this quest for justice, which took the form of pressure upon government, judiciary and legislatures to address ills like dowry, rape, custodial deaths, caste discrimination against SC women etc.

Reservation for women was provided for the first time in 1992 with the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, reserving 33% seats for women in institutions of rural and urban local governance viz. Panchayats and municipal bodies. Thereafter, demands for extending this reservation to Parliament and state legislative bodies also gained

ground. Multiple failed attempts were made in this regard, over the decades. Bills amending the Constitution to reserve seats for women in Parliament and state legislative assemblies have been introduced in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2008. The first three Bills lapsed with dissolution of their respective Lok Sabhas. The 2008 Bill was introduced in and passed by Rajya Sabha, but, due to lack of political will by the UPA government, no attempt was made to pass it in the Lok Sabha.

These initial bills were beset by much controversy. The newly emergent Mandal parties, who were powerful during the then coalition era, were not in favour of women reservation unless it was also accompanied by sub-reservation for women belonging to OBC category. Many of the leaders of the Mandal parties argued that only rich, educated and urban women will benefit from reservation. At that time, Nitish Kumar, opposing this reservation, said that reservation should also be made for OBC women in proportion to their population.

The present bill also does not provide for OBC reservation. It will become effective after the delimitation of constituencies based on the census which will be conducted in 2026. The 42nd constitutional amendment froze the process of delimitation until the census of 2001. Thereafter, due to political compulsions, it was frozen for another 25 years through a constitutional amendment. The bill also stipulates that the reservation will be provided for 15 years, and its extension will be subject to any further laws made in this regard by Parliament.

The landmark passage of the bill goes to the political credit of the ruling BJP. It has come at a time when women are becoming a significant and powerful vote-bank across the Indian

political landscape. It signifies the grant of formal political equality to women. However, given that it will not be implemented till almost another decade, this is more of a symbolic victory for the BJP.

THE G-20 SUMMIT: A LANDMARK MOMENT IN INDIAN SOFT POWER

The G-20 summit held in New Delhi in September marks a landmark moment in Indian diplomacy.

G20 – A Background

The G20, or the Group of Twenty, is an informal forum for international cooperation on various economic and developmental issues. It comprises 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States) and the European Union.

The G20 emerged in the late 1990s in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consolidation of the liberal, capitalist world order. The post-1990s world order also saw the rise of developing countries as powerful emerging economies, which wanted to pursue reforms of the existing global economic and financial system. In addition, the Asian financial crisis of 1997 also acted as a wake-up call regarding the fragility of the existing financial system. Therefore, it was in the context of this crisis that the G22 was set up in 1998. While initially conceived as a one-time crisis-response meeting, in 1999, two more meetings were convened including 33 members (G33) to discuss reforms of the global economic and financial system. It was in late 1999 that the G20, with its

current composition, was finally founded as an informal forum for Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of its members to meet annually.

The G20 was upgraded to a political level in the form of a Leaders Summit format only after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Thereafter, the first G20 Leaders' Summit was convened in Washington DC in 2008. Annual summits have been held ever since. Last year, the G20 summit was held in Bali, Indonesia.

G20 in India

The summit in India, this year, was particularly important. The months of preparation that went into it, spanning over 200 meetings in 60 Indian cities, reflected in the tangible outcomes of the summit. India marked a unique shift in holding the G20 in a standard single-venue template and turned it into a momentum-driven process which even the public could relate to, thereby popularizing what is otherwise considered as a staid, official event. Not only this, but PM Modi also stated the decision to hold a virtual review meeting in November 2023 to take stock of implementation of decisions adopted, before India gives up its G20 Presidency.

The G20, thus, became a platform for the visibility of the Indian soft power, geopolitical importance and rising place in the world in general. What was striking was that while G20 is an annual summit, held in different countries, it has rarely had such a widespread symbolic import. This was partly due to the efforts of the Indian government to situate the G20 within Indian democratic traditions, with the focus on this being a "People's G20." The theme of this G20, "One Earth, One Family, One Future" reflected in its outcomes.

In this context, the following significant observations need to be made:

First, amongst the most significant outcomes of the G20 summit was the Delhi Declaration. Several months – nearly 300 bilateral meetings, 200 hours of non-stop negotiations and 15 drafts – went into the negotiating of a common, joint declaration and it was arrived at merely hours before the formal summit due to the efforts of the Indian negotiating team. Due to the prevalent geopolitical conditions in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, there was no certainty that India would be able to bring all parties together for such a joint declaration. While the Western bloc wanted an unequivocal condemnation of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Russia-China grouping was persistent in blocking this description.

Ultimately, due to the last-minute Indian efforts, a compromise could be struck, acceptable to all sides, where, in the context of the war, the joint declaration affirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every state, affirmed the inadmissibility of use or threat of use of nuclear weapons and noted the adverse consequences of the war for the developing world. It also emphasized the need to revive and sustain the Black Sea Grain deal Initiative. Japan also played a key role, as the chair of G7, in bridging the divide between India and the West. As a result of these efforts, the Declaration emphasized the need for “a comprehensive, just, and durable peace in Ukraine.”

The joint declaration also highlights other important issues like financial issues encouraging regulation of cryptocurrency, strengthening multilateral development banks lending capacity and the use of digital public infrastructure to expand financial

inclusion. Besides, the Declaration also focused on finance mobilization for the developing countries, Green Development Pact, Action Plan on Sustainable Development Goals, principles on anti-corruption, multilateralism, constructive role of technology, and the need to reform global governance.

The issue of climate change occupied an important position in the outcome. The following important elements were noted in that regard:

- For the first time, the G20 Declaration formally recognized the amount of finance required to make the climate transition globally. The Declaration noted the need for “\$5.8-5.9 trillion in the pre-2030 period required for developing countries...as well as \$4 trillion per year for clean energy technologies by 2030 to reach net zero by 2050.”
- The Declaration also recognized the need to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030 (relative to 2019 levels) and achieve global peaking of emissions by 2025.
- The Declaration encourages tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030, and voluntarily doubling the rate of energy efficiency by 2030.

Second, the present G20 summit was significant in symbolizing a shift in global power. In this context, the expansion of G20 into G21 at this summit was an important achievement steered by Indian efforts, with the African Union (AU) joining the G20. The AU, despite being the largest regional organization, has limited voice at the high tables in most international fora.

The inclusion of AU represented a tangible gain for the idea of the Global South, whose leadership role India has

been championing. This was further complemented by the fact that India used the opportunity presented by the summit to organize, as part of G20, a Voice of Global South summit, which saw of the participation of over 125 countries.

These initiatives have a tenor of a discernible symbolic shift in power, within G20, from Power-11 bloc (consisting of G-7, US allies like Australia and South Korea, and Russia and China) to Developing-9 bloc (consisting of Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey and African Union).

Third, important geopolitical and diplomatic agreements were arrived at. These include India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), and the Global Biofuels Alliance.

- The Global Biofuels Alliance was launched for the purpose of accelerating the energy transition away from fossil fuels. It aims to secure the affordable supply of biofuels for clean energy and ensuring that they remain sustainable. In particular, it focused on taking the blending of ethanol with petrol to 20% globally. The Alliance was launched by India, along with US, Brazil, Bangladesh and Italy, along with other observer members.

- The PGII and IMEC were launched by India, Saudi Arabia, US and EU, as importance infrastructural connectivity initiatives. The IMEC, if successfully implemented, could be a potentially powerful alternative to the debt-conditioned Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Like the BRI, it involves building infrastructure and enhancing connectivity through land and sea. The corridor will provide India direct access to Europe

via UAE, without having to go through Pakistan. It would involve building of railway line across Arabian Peninsula, developing shipping connectivity, and would be used to transport energy through pipelines and data through optical fibre links

Fourth, from a political perspective, the absence of China and Russia made no impact on the G20, despite speculations to the contrary, especially regarding Chinese absence. These speculations have ranged from the fact of deteriorating in India-China relations over the last few years, and the fact that China has consistently opposed the inclusion of Russia-Ukraine war as part of G20 Declarations, arguing that G20 is solely an international forum for economic cooperation in which geopolitical issues cannot be included.

Whatever be the reasons surrounding Chinese absence, this absence enhanced the grouping further by reinforcing the centrality of India. Interestingly, the absence of Xi Jinping was partly linked to the dressing down he received from the Chinese elder politicians for mismanagement of internal and external affairs of China. This happened at the annual gathering of incumbent and retired leaders of the Chinese Communist Party at Beidaihe. The message conveyed to Xi was that continued political, economic, and social turmoil without effective countermeasures could erode the party's support and threaten its rule.

In this context, it is important to note the series of missteps made by the Chinese government under Xi Jinping, spanning its brutal zero-COVID policies, eroding a developing relationship with India through the Galwan conflict, support for Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war, rising confrontations with Taiwan, intensifying trade war with the US, and most importantly,

a major economic slump which continues to prolong and is visible in the form of slump in property bubble, sluggish trade, declining foreign investment and rising youth unemployment.

Therefore, despite the politicization of absence of China, the G20 remained a stellar success. Its key outcomes reflect the success of Indian G20 diplomacy, and the important space occupied by India in forging a new global consensus amid rapidly changing political equations.

A SEASON OF COUPS IN AFRICA

In recent months, several African countries have witnessed a series of coups – Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger. The ease with which military generals have seized power in these countries has created a ripple effect of its own. The most recent countries to witness this trend were Niger and Gabon. What is distinctive about these coups is not only the military take-over of power, but also the widespread public support that many of these military dictatorships are garnering from the people. Since many of these countries had partnerships with the West, these coups have come as a setback to the Western countries, such as France, which have been engaged in the exploitation of the natural resources and raw material of Africa. For example, the most recent country to fall prey to coup – Gabon – is an oil-rich member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Despite being one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of per capita income, a third of its population lives in poverty. It's family-run government has traditionally got French protection in return for business favours to France. The military capitalized on this anti-regime discontent among the people and Opposition to seize power.

In many of these countries, the military came to power in these countries by promising better security against Islamic militancy and better development, as opposed to the corruption-ridden reign of previous governments. The patterns of change of power across Africa show that traditional regimes are increasingly coming under attack from mass-supported generals. This shows signs of a populist dictatorships. Further, these developments are also impacting the region geopolitically. All the recent countries that have witnessed military coups are former French colonies over which France continued to exercise an economic hold. This gap is now rapidly being filled by Russia and China. Mali and Burkina Faso have seen the expansion of Russian influence post-coup, while Gabon has seen the rise of Chinese influence.

BY-POLLS IN STATES

The recent by-elections held across six states are a significant indicator of political headwinds. They were especially keenly awaited as they were the first elections to be held after the formation of the Opposition-led INDIA alliance, although in Kerala and West Bengal the INDIA parties did not fight in alliance. In these by-polls, the Opposition managed to get four seats, while the BJP won three seats. Three of the seats were earlier held by the BJP, while one each was with the Congress, the SP, the CPI(M) and the JMM.

While the tally was the same, BJP lost Dhupguri in West Bengal to TMC, and gained Boxanagar in Tripura from CPI(M). In UP, the Ghosi seat was won by SP. It was earlier held by a former SP MLA who had left SP and re-joined the BJP. The BJP retained Dhanpur in Tripura and Bageshwar in Uttarakhand. In Jharkhand, the JMM retained the Dumri Assembly seat. In

Kerala, where there was no alliance between INDIA parties, the Congress-led UDF defeated the CPI(M)-led LDF to retain the Puthupally assembly seat.

INDIA-CANADA DIPLOMATIC ROW

India-Canada diplomatic relations are plumbing lower depths in a rapidly deteriorating political environment. While relations between the two countries have worsened since Justin Trudeau became the Prime Minister of Canada in 2015 and Indian government, under PM Modi, intensified the crackdown on overseas Khalistani terrorists, the trigger for the most recent and serious episode was the alleged assassination of Khalistani terrorist, Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, on whose head India had placed a cash bounty in July 2022, leading to his shooting in June 2023 outside a Gurudwara in Canada.

The public accusation by PM Trudeau in the Canadian Parliament holding India responsible for the assassination on Canadian soil has created a global furor. The following pertinent observations should be noted in this regard:

First, the accusation by Trudeau came sometime after the successful G21 summit hosted by India. It is recorded that in this summit, India raised the issue of safe haven provided to Khalistani terrorists by Canada. There were also indications that Trudeau has been attempting to pressurize the G-7 allies of Canada to raise the Nijjar killing issue with India during the G21 summit, but to no avail. The relations between the two countries have deteriorated rapidly thanks to the dependence of Liberal Party of Trudeau on Canadian pro-Khalistani and anti-India, Jagmeet Singh and his political party, the NDP. Under Trudeau, Indian officials in Canada have faced threats while calls for violence against Hindus have been on the rise.

Therefore, the fact that Sikhs form a major vote-bank for Trudeau has played a significant part in fundamentally skewing India-Canada relations over the last few years.

Second, it appears that the public statements made by Trudeau in this case have backfired considerably. This is, both, due to inconsistency and multiple U-turns made. While in his initial statement, Trudeau declared that there were credible allegations linking India to Nijjar killing, he later changed his stance to the assertion that there were credible reasons to believe that India was involved in Nijjar killing. He claimed to base these reasons and allegations on so-called credible intelligence inputs – gained from the Five Eyes western intelligence alliance – but is unable to supply proof of the same. It is also an oxymoron that intelligence inputs could be allegations – either its one or the other. This lack of clarity has not done Trudeau any favour.

Thereafter, seeing the strong position taken by India – something Canadian government may not have anticipated – Trudeau and his government made multiple U-turns publicly, suggesting that they do not wish to harm India-Canada relations and seek Indian cooperation in investigating this issue. This was again ironic. For, if Trudeau has credible intelligence inputs, he should reveal them and pursue an internal investigation and show the results of this investigation. But instead of this, asking India to cooperate in an investigation in which he has already accused India beforehand defies all reason. It is akin to asking India to cooperate in maligning itself.

Third, these inconsistencies and U-turns of Trudeau have not earned him any favour with his western allies. Neither the Five Eyes countries – US, UK, Australia and New Zealand –

nor other western countries have outrightly supported Trudeau on the basis of mere allegations. Even the US – beyond saying that they support an impartial investigation – has remained largely non-committal on this issue. Canada is now attempting to mobilize global public opinion by raising the issue of India and the need to uphold the rule of law in his telephonic conversations with various world leaders – something which Pakistan used to often do.

Not only this, Trudeau is also facing headwinds within Canada due to number of other missteps, which reflects in his rapidly deteriorating popularity ratings compared to the Conservative party.

Finally, the reaction of India has been unapologetic and severe – something that Canada did not, perhaps, expect. Soon after the public allegations by Trudeau, India raided and seized properties and assets in India of all the key Khalistani terrorists who are based overseas. Diplomatic relations have also suffered immensely, as India declared Canada to be a safe haven for terrorists. India suspended visas to Canadians, gave a massive dressing down to the Canadian Ambassador and asked Canada to remove much of its diplomatic staff from India and bring it to parity with Indian staff in Canada.

Even when the dust settles on this controversy, the implications of actions will continue to resonate.

DEMOCRACY AND LIBERTY

“Democracy is by no means a sure preservative of liberty; on the contrary, we see today the democratic system of government march steadily towards such an organised annihilation of individual liberty as could not have been dreamed of in the old aristocratic and monarchical systems. It may be that from the more violent and brutal forms of despotic oppression which were associated with those systems, democracy has indeed delivered those nations which have been fortunate enough to achieve liberal forms of government, and that is no doubt a great gain. It revives now only in periods of revolution and excitement, often in the form of mob tyranny or a savage revolutionary or reactionary repression. But there is a deprivation of liberty which is more respectable in appearance, more subtle and systematised, more mild in its method because it has a greater force at its back, but for that very reason more effective and pervading. The tyranny of the majority has become a familiar phrase and its deadening effects have been depicted with a great force of resentment by certain of the modern intellectuals;¹ but what the future promises us is something more formidable still, the tyranny of the whole, of the self-hypnotised mass over its constituent groups and units.”

– Sri Aurobindo
(CWSA 25: 508-09)