

GREAT RESPONSIBILITY: ON INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY

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The Government launched its year of the G-20 presidency on December 1 with some pomp, and 100 monuments from Kashmir to Kanyakumari lit up with India's G-20 logo symbolising the motto "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, or "one earth, one family, one future". In an editorial essay, Prime Minister Narendra Modi committed to making India's year of chairmanship as one that will focus on "healing our 'One Earth', creating harmony within our 'One Family' and giving hope for our 'One Future'". There are plans for about 200 G-20 meetings across India. The preparatory and ministerial meetings will culminate in grand plans for a G-20 Summit, which will bring leaders of the 'P-5' countries and others to New Delhi next September. India has taken the baton from Indonesia, which had a difficult time in even scheduling meetings and ensuring full participation due to differences over the Ukraine war. There was even uncertainty till the end over whether all major leaders would attend; whether they would agree to a joint photo-opportunity (they did not), and whether there would be a joint statement — which was eventually forged. Like Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Mr. Modi will have to travel abroad to ensure that all G-20 leaders and invitees attend at the highest level. And officials will have to burn more midnight oil to achieve consensus on statements.

Symbolism and logistical coordination aside, the Government has a tough task ahead in conducting substantive negotiations to bring together a comprehensive G-20 agenda, where officials said they would focus on counter-terrorism, supply chain disruptions and global unity. In 2008, the first G-20 summit-level meeting in the U.S. was during a moment of crisis for the world's financial systems. In 2022, the task for Mr. Modi and his team is equally crucial, given the lasting effects of the Russian war in Ukraine, western sanctions on energy that will deepen this month, economic downturns, pandemic worries and climate change issues that are testing the foundations of globalisation and an interconnected global economy. In his editorial, Mr. Modi said India would forge its G-20 agenda through its tradition of "collective decision-making" that, like India's national consensus, would be made "... by blending millions of free voices into one harmonious melody". At a time India itself faces economic distress and social and communal tensions, the Government should be prepared for more scrutiny on upholding such ideals. Having raised the pitch on India's global prominence as G-20 President, and its power to shape the global narrative, the Government may find that with great power comes great responsibility, and a greater spotlight on its ability to translate its global dreams into the domestic landscape as

well.

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