

LEADING FROM THE FRONT: ON VOICE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH SUMMIT AND G20 PRESIDENCY

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The Government's summit for developing nations, called the ["Voice of the Global South Summit"](#), as its first big [leadership-level G20 event](#), is an extremely important signal. It is also a departure from New Delhi's looking towards the "high-table" of global leadership, involving its relationship with the UNSC P5 and G-7 (the most developed economies), to focusing on a more just view of the world and how the developing world is being affected by global inequities. In his opening remarks at the virtual summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explained the reasons for the shift: how "challenges of the COVID pandemic, rising prices of fuel, fertilizer and foodgrains, and increasing geopolitical tensions have impacted our development efforts". [External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar](#) too spoke of India's need to envision a common future with the Global South and acknowledge India's "common past" with the Global South, many of whom have suffered colonialism. Over 10 different sessions, India and representatives of 125 countries, of the 134 that make up the G-77, agreed that the key issues include the fragmentation of the international landscape, shortages in grain exports, oil and gas, and fertilizer as a result of the Ukraine war, and terrorism. Of note was Mr. Modi's push for "human centred" globalisation countering the "first world's" view of expediting climate change goals at the cost of development, ensuring immigration and work mobility for skilled populations of the global south, and resilient renewable energy access. The summit appears to mark a reset in India's foreign policy outlook in its year as G20 president: one which has made the Government reclaim the true meaning of non-alignment, in the wake of the Ukraine war where it refused to take sides. Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi's visit to Cuba as it took over G77 chairpersonship (a grouping India has shunned) and the invitation to the President of Egypt, a NAM co-founder, as Republic Day chief guest were significant too.

Of note were some of the summit's exclusions: Pakistan and Afghanistan. Of note too was the inclusion of Myanmar, whose junta regime has not been recognised but with which India has chosen to forge closer ties. It is hoped that the collective South-South understanding of global issues will lead to a more inclusive meeting at the summit level, particularly with reference to South Asian and the subcontinent's regional problems. It is also of note that the grouping did not release a common or joint statement, and much of the narrative on outcomes is built on what Mr. Modi and Mr. Jaishankar said. For India to be heard as the 'Voice of the Global South at the G20', it must reflect on the aspirations of the other nations and amplify them, as a true leader of the developing world at the G20 summit later this year.

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