



Time for action

The G20 meeting has come at a critical moment for the global political economy

At their first in-person meeting in two years, leaders of the G20 did not shy away from re-engaging with the biggest issues facing the global community today, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, a major tax agreement, and steps to address concerns regarding global economic growth and stability. On coordinated efforts to mitigate the pandemic, the focus was on vaccine production and distribution, with assurances of support to WHO's target of inoculating 40% or more of the global population against COVID-19 by 2021, and at least 70% by mid-2022. The implicit assumption in this commitment by G20 leaders is that initiatives to boost the supply of vaccines in developing countries will succeed, and cooperation will help the world overcome supply and financing constraints. On climate change, the Group leaders recommended their nations to providing \$100 billion a year toward adaptation, mitigation, and green technologies, focusing on the needs of developing countries. However, in this sphere, a divergence of views still exists across developing and developed nations: ahead of this summit and the 2021 climate conference in Glasgow, India had rejected the call to announce a target of zero emissions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi appears to have scored a victory in this regard as the post-summit communiqué commits the G20 to limiting global warming to 1.5° C and identified sustainable and responsible consumption and production as "critical enablers".

The world community is on shakier footing regarding the fragile post-COVID economic recovery underway after paralysing lockdowns. Unsurprisingly, given the rising inflation, spiking energy prices, and alarming supply chain bottlenecks, G20 leaders were quick to affirm that national stimulus policies would not be removed prematurely. Even so, it would remain a challenge to walk the tightrope between preserving financial stability and fiscal sustainability. Perhaps in a bid to avoid potentially debilitating wobbles in global finance, the G20 leadership agreed to slap multinationals with a minimum 15% tax to create "a more stable and fairer international tax system". This would impact the tech titans of Silicon Valley, as this initiative would make it harder for such companies to benefit from locating themselves in relatively lower-tax jurisdictions. This OECD-led reform enjoys the support of 136 countries, which account for more than 90% of global GDP, and is likely to enter into force in 2023 or after. Nations such as the U.S. are divided on whether to approve this proposal domestically, and unless there is unanimity amongst the discussants, the initiative risks facing implementation delays. The G20 meeting has come at a critical moment for the global political economy. If it results in timely, effective, coordinated action across major nations, hope for recovery will remain afloat.

A vote for stability

The vote for Fumio Kishida underlines the dominance of the LDP in Japan's politics

Defying expectations, Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) stormed to an outright majority in the country's parliamentary elections on Sunday. The elections were the first major test for the new Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, who took over last month amid enormous challenges. He followed the short-lived tenure of Yoshihide Suga, who succeeded Shinzo Abe. Japan's longest serving Prime Minister, Mr. Abe stepped down in 2020 citing health reasons. Mr. Suga's year-long term was marred by his government's poor handling of COVID-19 and economic woes. Facing the lowest approval ratings of any Japanese leader in years, he resigned. Entering the election in these circumstances, the LDP, which held 276 seats in the 465-seat House of Representatives before the polls, was bracing for a poor show, with wide expectations that it would need to rely on its coalition with the Komeito party to cross the halfway mark. But it coasted to victory unencumbered by coalition considerations.

Mr. Kishida now has to deliver on a range of pressing challenges, including the pandemic, the economy and on the security front, relations with China. He has committed to bolstering support to hospitals to ensure a far better response should Japan face another wave. On the economy front, he has put forward a "new capitalism" aimed at an economic revival keeping the interests of the middle class as a priority. He has pledged to come up with an ambitious stimulus package this month. On foreign policy, he will have to keep in mind the wishes of his party's conservative bloc which is calling for significant increases in defence spending. Those are voices he cannot ignore considering that the new leader—Mr. Kishida was also a Foreign Minister—has no real popular support to call upon and will be beholden to what his party wants. In the election campaign, the LDP said it would double defence spending to 2% of the GDP. China's recent air incursions into Taiwan were cited as one major reason, as also North Korea's missile tests. Mr. Kishida has said he will focus on shoring up relations with Washington, and in his early days, has already reached out to the leaders of the Quad. He has also spoken with China's President Xi Jinping, with positive noises about getting relations on track. Ultimately, matters at home will decide which of his two predecessors Mr. Kishida ends up emulating. Given the flagging reputation of the LDP towards the end of Mr. Abe's term and through Mr. Suga's turbulent time in office, the vote appears to be as much an endorsement for stability as it is for his government. It also reaffirms the LDP's unchallenged position in domestic politics regardless of the troubles it has faced in recent years, underlining there is no serious challenger to its continued dominance.

Kashmir's fragility has more complex reasons

To limit what is happening in J&K solely to the impetus created by a Talibanised Afghanistan could cost India dear



M.K. NARAYANAN

Fear is the prevailing sentiment across many parts of Kashmir today. It has, in turn, led to comparisons with the situation that existed during the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century. In the past few weeks, several civilians as well as security and armed forces personnel, have been killed by terrorists, some of the latter being labelled as hybrid terrorists, though it is not clear what this phrase signifies.

Ground realities

A predictable reaction to the situation has been the exodus of Hindus, especially of the Kashmiri Pandits, and of migrant labour, fearing for their lives and their future. Side by side with this, an impression has been created of increasing support to militancy, though it is unclear whether this is indeed the case. However, as in all situations of this kind, it is apparent that impressions often appear more real than actual ground realities.

Latterly, Kashmir had managed to stay away from the headlines despite concerns expressed in different quarters about the 'disciplined democracy' being practised ever since the dilution of Article 370 and the restructuring of the erstwhile State of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) into two Union Territories. In the absence of an agile press, it has not been possible to fathom the intensity of protests against the existing order, and whether they constitute a rejection of the changes effected.

Incidents of violence have, however, continued. Notwithstanding this, given the hullabaloo in the immediate aftermath of the changes effected in August 2019, a degree of surface calm seemed to prevail, not very different from that which existed previously. Whether this was peace brought

about through controlled conditions, or otherwise, has been difficult to discern.

Given the recent recrudescence of violence, it is, nevertheless, evident that the situation remains fragile. Whether this means that the changes effected since August 2019 were merely a 'triumph of wishfulness over prudence', an overestimation of belief on what was possible ignoring the history of several decades past, and the failure of many previous attempts to change the *status quo*, is hence worth examining.

Pakistan apart

More important is what could possibly be the reasons for the revival of aggravated violence in Kashmir. While assessing the ground situation in Kashmir, Pakistan has always tended to be a factor. It is, however, again possible that the lessons of the past on what needed to be done – to effectively checkmate insurgency from across the border or inflame Kashmiri opinion – might have gone unheeded in the euphoria of having succeeded in altering the character of J&K and Delhi establishing a degree of direct control. Promises made and an unwillingness to use the time and opportunity to create fresh opportunities for dialogue with communities in Kashmir, allied with reputational interest in not accepting that the many steps taken, were inadequate to defeat the machinations from across the border, could also, perhaps, be additional reasons.

By this reckoning, Kashmir might well seem, in some remote way, to reveal the same attitude as many post-conflict, pre-modern, hybrid societies with mixed populations. It would imply that in the case of Kashmir, making a transformation to a more stable society will always prove difficult. In addition, Kashmir has difficult neighbours such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and China, which leaves little scope for experimentation – a true test for decision-making of any kind.

As violence escalated in J&K, it became commonplace to link it with the Taliban takeover of Af-



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ghanistan. This could, however, be a highly simplistic answer to a more complex situation. In the current context, geopolitics is something that cannot and must not be ignored. The sudden surge in violence in Kashmir needs a more careful evaluation of the facts rather than simplistic answers. It is a fact, for instance, that India's world view has steadily expanded, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, and several, including some relatively unknown, tension points have emerged. All these will need to be carefully assessed before coming up with an answer – more so since India is wedged between two known antagonists (Pakistan and China), has a Talibanised Afghanistan as its neighbour, and there has been a resurgence of international terror groups, notably the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

The China factor

Of particular consequence in this context is China's continuing cooperation with Pakistan in many matters, its growing assertiveness in regard to its territorial claims, *vis-à-vis* India, its opposition to the prominence given to India by the West in both Asian and global forums, etc. All these have further helped cement the nexus between China and Pakistan. Intertwined with this is again the battle raging for spheres of influence between China and India, which has intensified under China's President Xi Jinping. The latter is intent on establishing an Asian system in which China sits at the summit of a hierarchical re-

gional order. All this is altering the ground realities and it is worth considering whether Kashmir is emerging as a pressure point in this context.

Intelligence is critical

What it all boils down to is the need for hard and better intelligence. Hard intelligence is critical to avoid misperceptions and miscalculations. The (recent) history of the world is replete with stories of intelligence failures, misperceptions and miscalculations, which had led to grave situations, and which might well have been avoided had there been better intelligence. The serious miscalculation about Iraqi President Saddam Hussein possessing nuclear weapons based on wrong intelligence led to unnecessary involvement by the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Iraq, followed by an unfortunate train of events that continues to haunt the world to this day. As tensions between India and China, and between India and Pakistan, intensify, the need for hard intelligence is thus vital to be able to control the train of events and avoid any serious miscalculations.

What is common to most, perhaps all, intelligence agencies – irrespective of their degrees of competence – is their limited capacity for imagination, *viz.*, to imagine future events and possibilities. Intelligence agencies, by and large, are adept at providing insights about yesterday's threats rather than future ones, specially those that exist just beyond the horizon. Moreover, as intelligence agencies become more wedded to technology, they need to realise that advances in technology tend to be a double-edged sword insofar as intelligence is concerned. It should not negate the need for improved analysis and also how important it is to provide decision-makers with information on what is taking place in the minds of their opposite numbers.

In the extant situation, Indian intelligence agencies must avoid the kind of lapses of both imagination and analysis displayed by western intelligence agencies

some years ago, who misread, misunderstood and failed to anticipate the role of Sayyid Qutb and his preachings which later set the stage for the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York and other targets in the U.S. Had they understood what Sayyid Qutb preached, *viz.*, that martyrdom was a necessary part of 20th century jihad, they would not have underestimated the influence exerted by Islamist theology on the terrorist mindset.

It is, thus, important that the 'missing dimensions' of intelligence in most cases, *viz.*, thinking imaginatively and improved analytical capabilities, receive the close attention of India's intelligence agencies. Only then will it be possible to understand the nature of current events as a precursor of future threats. This is important to ensure that they do not ignore signals that may not be all too obvious at this time, and keep chasing more obvious and current aspects. Too narrowly focussed intelligence requirements, limited to current events such as, for example, tensions with China on the border, or Pakistan's attempts to push in 'irregulars' and aid the Lashkar and Jaish elements to cross over into India, may prove self-defeating. The arc of intelligence needs to be much wider and Indian intelligence agencies such as the Intelligence Bureau, the Research & Analysis Wing as also the National Security Council Secretariat should ensure that they have the necessary capabilities.

Linked to this is also the danger of 'intelligence adjustment', *viz.*, avoiding challenging conventional assumptions, which could undermine their ability to provide a more accurate picture of the larger threat. Today, when India faces problems all around it, to limit what is happening in Kashmir solely to the impetus created by a Talibanised Afghanistan without fully analysing all the facts could cost the country dear.

M.K. Narayanan is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

Finding a way out of India's deepening water stress

In any new National Water Policy, the aim should also be to encourage conserving water resources and efficient usage



THOMAS VARGHESE

The complexity and scale of the water crisis in India calls for a locus specific response, that can galvanise and integrate the ongoing work of different Ministries and Departments through new configurations. Such an integrated approach must necessarily cut across sectoral boundaries and not stop at the merger achieved between the two Ministries of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, which led to the formation of the Ministry of Jal Shakti in 2019.

Understanding sources used

Seeing India's looming water crisis through the locus of 'urban' and 'rural' not only allows a better grasp of the causative factors but also enables a stronger grip on the strategies to be deployed to reverse the water crisis. Fundamental to this is a preliminary understanding of the sources from which the country draws water to meet its varying needs. In the rural areas, 80%-90% of the drinking water and 75% of the water used for agriculture is drawn from groundwater sources. In urban areas, 50%-60% of the water supply is drawn from groundwater sources, whereas the remaining is sourced from surface water resources such as rivers, often located afar, in addition to lakes, tanks and reservoirs.

According to the composite wa-

ter management index released by the think tank NITI Aayog in 2019, 21 major cities (including Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad) were on the brink of exhausting groundwater resources, affecting about 100 million people. The study also points out that by 2030, the demand for water is projected to be twice the available supply.

The Chennai example

A significant, and by no means less worrying, example of the water crisis that unfolded before our eyes was in Chennai in 2019, where life came to a standstill and parts of the city went without piped water for months. Though this may well have been forgotten, Chennai remains a spectacle of the impending tragedies brought about by the city's inability to meet the basic needs of citizens, *vis-à-vis* drinking water, cooking and sanitation.

A closer look at the factors that brought about the water crisis in Chennai is inescapable, should we gain a better grasp of the underlying problems, especially as this was a city which among others like Mumbai had suffered from floods previously. Many have cited the poor rainfall received in Chennai in the previous year as one of the main reasons for the water crisis. Though it is true that rainfall was low, which was 50% less than normal, focusing on this factor alone would absolve responsibility by blaming the vagaries of the rainfall patterns to a fast-changing climate, without understanding the ground-level steps (or missteps) which have been equally responsible factors.

Chief among these is that the city has been built by incrementally encroaching floodplains and paving over lakes and wetlands that



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would have otherwise helped the process of recharging groundwater. The lack of space for water to percolate underground prevented rainwater from recharging the aquifers.

This was further exacerbated by the loss of green cover (which would have otherwise helped water retention) to make way for infrastructure projects. Such a situation, on the one hand, leads to flooding during normal rainfall due to stagnation, and on the other hand leads to drought-like conditions due to the prevention of underground water storage. It is only that this situation was more magnified in Chennai, but other cities in India would echo these manifestations in varying degrees owing to a lack of sustainable urban planning.

There is also the example, in Mumbai, in 2019, when 2,141 trees were felled at the Aarey colony, amid massive protests, to make space for a shed for the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited.

Need for synergy

If the Government is serious about addressing the water crisis in urban areas, the Ministry of Water Resources must reconfigure its relationship with other Ministries and Departments (Urban Development, Local Self-Government and Environment). This would be for enhanced integration and coordi-

nation through effective land and water zoning regulations that protect urban water bodies, groundwater sources, wetlands and green cover while simultaneously working to enhance waste water recycling and water recharge activities targeting aquifers and wells through rainwater harvesting.

Lessons from rural Punjab

In rural areas, the situation is no different, as the acute water crisis in Punjab shows. The draft report of the Central Ground Water Board concluded that Punjab would be reduced to a desert in 25 years if the extraction of its groundwater resources continues unabated; 82% of Punjab's land area has seen a huge decline in groundwater levels, wherein 109 out of 138 administrative blocks have been placed in the 'over-exploited' category. Groundwater extraction which was at 35% in the 1960s and 1970s, rose to 70% post the Green Revolution – a period which saw governments subsidising power for irrigation that left tubewells running for hours.

Concomitantly, cultivation of water intensive crops such as paddy have further aggravated water depletion, even turning water saline. Immediate measures need to be taken to manage and replenish groundwater, especially through participatory groundwater management approaches with its combination of water budgeting, aquifer recharging and community involvement.

Such an approach to water conservation again beckons new configurations between sectors and disciplines. At the sectoral level, the Ministries and Departments of water resources must coordinate efforts with their counterparts in agriculture, the environment and

rural development for greater convergence to achieve water and food security. At the disciplinary level, governance and management should increasingly interact and draw from the expertise of fields such as hydrology (watershed sustainability), hydrogeology (aquifer mapping and recharge) and agriculture sciences (water-sensitive crop choices and soil health). Again, the importance given to groundwater conservation should not ignore surface water conservation including the many rivers and lakes which are in a critical and dying state due to encroachment, pollution, over-abstraction and obstruction of water flow by dams.

Protecting resources

The Ministry of Jal Shakti, last year, had announced an ambitious plan to provide water connections to every household in India by 2024. In view of the ongoing erosion of water resources and an ever-increasing demand for water, the thrust should not be on promising water supply. Instead the aim should be towards protecting and conserving water resources on the one hand and minimising and enhancing efficiency of water usage on the other. As the expert committee constituted under the Union Water Resources Ministry drafts a new National Water Policy, one hopes it would be rooted in locus specific realities and allows greater flexibility for integrating the insights and work of multiple departments and disciplines making way for new configurations to sustainably manage the country's water resources.

Thomas Varghese is a researcher and consultant working on sustainable development in Kochi, Kerala

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Briefing the Governor

Any new Governor of a State in India is entitled to be briefed about the important activities and schemes in the State. All this information is already available in the office of the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary since continuous review takes place. In this

case, the Tamil Nadu Governor could have been quietly briefed by the Chief Secretary and the Finance Secretary. There was no need for the Chief Secretary to write to the Secretaries to make a presentation to the Governor. This was a mistake that could have been avoided (OpEd page,

"The DMK's gubernatorial test", November 1).

M.G. DEVASAHAYAM,
Chennai

On ECE

As far as early childhood education (ECE) is concerned, and children of low-income families, the anganwadi system can play

an effective role. A proper ECE can be ensured by appointing an exclusive and trained anganwadi worker/teacher to devote their full time to ECE in anganwadis. This will also ensure that class dropouts are nil or minimal.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

New Zealand match

Losing is very much a part of cricket which every team, however strong, experiences at times. However, what is baffling is skipper Virat Kohli's reported post match statement about the team. Nothing could be more demotivating for any team

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than the leader speaking in defeatist language especially considering that the tournament is not over yet for India. There are pertinent questions about the team's composition too.

A. MOHAN,
Chennai