

G20: India wants action, not just political statements

Les Echos – Richard Hiault – 2nd December 2022

India is counting on its G20 presidency to defend its approach to multilateralism. From the fight against climate change to the reform of world trade rules and food security policies, India has high ambitions.

For Jawed Ashraf, India's ambassador to France, the G20 remains the only forum that represents [today's](#) world in its diversity.

No less than 200 meetings across the country will punctuate India's G20 presidency this year, which began on [Thursday](#). Although the forum is currently suffering from the geopolitical tensions caused by the war in Ukraine, it is nevertheless the most suitable format for responding to current global challenges. "In the current context, it may not be the most ideal, but there is no better international forum to discuss the full range of global challenges we face," confirms the Indian ambassador to France, Jawed Ashraf.

And it is certainly not the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) that can replace the G20, despite the willingness of several countries to join the group. "The BRICS are not an alternative. The fact that the G20 was able to meet during the Covid pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine proves that each of the countries that make up the G20 considers this forum to be the most representative of the diversity of [today's](#) world," adds the ambassador. And India intends to use its presidency to put forward its ideas.

The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in an article published [Thursday](#) in France by L'Opinion, believes that the G20 could go even further. During its presidency, India intends to rely on its model to advance issues. "We have tried to make national development not a top-down governance exercise but rather a citizen-led 'people's movement'," he writes. "We need to go beyond mere political declarations and develop action plans with concrete results," Jawed Ashraf stresses.

In terms of combating climate change and safeguarding biodiversity, New Delhi advocates a different approach. "So far, the response has been technological, with increased production of green energy, for example. Most of the efforts have been made by governments. But we have to adapt our way of life and citizens have to change their behaviour. This is a new idea," says the ambassador. Similarly, India intends to accelerate efforts on the oceans. "To date, we have focused too much on land preservation," the Indian diplomat regrets.

Faced with the risk of food insecurity and potential famine, the ambassador is convinced that initiatives are possible. "We must ensure that we transfer surplus agricultural production to countries that need it. But certainly not by leaving it to the market alone. Poor countries cannot afford to pay the current prices. A change in the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is probably necessary. On this point, the Indian government believes that it is possible to move forward with a broad reform of the organisation as the G20 countries are the most active members.

Asked about criticism at the WTO of his country's food security policy and export restrictions on wheat and rice, Jawed Ashraf began by pointing out that "India has never been a major exporter of grain given the size of the country's population. I would add that this year we have never exported so much. It is an all-time record.

Above all, faced with rising demand that led to soaring prices, New Delhi could have taken advantage of this windfall with the risk of facing domestic shortages. "When there was a sudden increase in demand and a rise in prices, we did not want it to lead to a situation where some people started buying from the market, hoarding and exporting at high prices in an uncontrolled manner. This could have led to shortages in India and would not have benefited the poorest countries. We remain ready to supply them at preferential rates so that their people do not have to pay exorbitant prices."

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