

## **India's G20 moment Delhi's resurgence**

- *Amitabh Kant\**

As India bids farewell to its G20 Presidency on November 30, it leaves in its wake a capital city that has undergone a stunning metamorphosis, reflecting the nation's ascendance on the global stage. While the international community applauds the unanimous adoption of the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration and the shared pursuit of common goals, it's crucial to underscore the backdrop in which such a diplomatic feat was made possible.

This G20 Summit marked Delhi's grandest international event since the 2010 Commonwealth Games, surpassing even the significance of the Asian Games in 1982 and the NAM and CHOGM Summits in 1983. As such, efforts at beautification for the G20 Summit were planned well in advance, and coupled with the execution of infrastructure development projects already in the pipeline, Delhi's revitalization was expedited and holistic. The city welcomed 40 Heads of states, various government officials, and international bodies with a level of precision and hospitality that was quintessentially Indian.

The G20 meetings and Leaders' Summit served as a catalytic springboard, propelling Delhi into an ambitious phase of urban rejuvenation. Leveraging the global platform, the city seized the opportunity to not only host an exemplary international event but strategically implemented infrastructural and aesthetic enhancements, effectively transforming its image on the world stage. This synchronized effort became a blueprint for sustainable urban development, showcasing Delhi's commitment to progress and leaving a lasting legacy for its residents.

From the moment one stepped out of the Indira Gandhi International Airport, the change was palpable. Sardar Patel Marg, Shanti Path, and nearly every road in New Delhi radiated a festive cleanliness. Larger-than-life sculptures adorned the thoroughfares, depicting lions, elephants, horses, cenotaphs, and fountains. Even historical landmarks like Delhi Gate, Raj Ghat, and areas extending to ISBT were adorned, erasing the dust-laden memories of a encroached pavements and roads in disrepair.

The city's resilience and commitment shone through after the July rains wreaked havoc on its basic infrastructure, especially at crucial venues like Raj Ghat that were poised to host visiting dignitaries.

In certain places, the water had reached an astounding 8 feet high. The colossal task of preparation fell on the shoulders of the new Lieutenant Governor, V.K. Saxena. Despite the initial setback, a silent yet determined effort began, transforming Delhi into a world-class capital touched with the creativity of diverse Indian cultures.

As the days leading up to the Summit in Delhi drew nearer, a concerted yet discreet effort took shape, led by the new Lieutenant Governor, V.K. Saxena, who assumed office in May 2022. One of his initial endeavours involved the revamping of the roads leading to and from the Airport. Notably, approximately 700,000 potted plants adorned the streets and pavements. The cityscape further boasted over a hundred sculptures and statues, featuring symbolic representations such as *Yakshinis* signifying the guardians of burgeoning Indian wealth, lions emblematic of India's growing power, elephants representing the wisdom and stability of Indian civilization, Lord Buddha as a perpetual symbol of peace, and *Vighnaharta* extending well-wishes to every visitor to and from the city.

A substantial clean-up effort covered 61 roads and 17 hotels, creating a pristine setting to host visiting delegations. Trees along the route, from the Airport to the city centre and the Summit venue, were adorned with garlands—a first-time spectacle. Delhi saw a departure from its long-standing clutter of political and commercial posters; walls, pillars, and poles remained free of visual noise.

During the Summit, despite the movement of 40 high-security VVIP cauldades, Delhi maintained its regular rhythm. In contrast to cities often disrupted during such high-security events, Delhi functioned normally. Except for specific core areas, public transport, shops, and commerce operated as usual. The absence of the usual protests, common during global events, highlighted not only the commendable job done by the Delhi Police in maintaining law and order, but the pervading sense of ownership and pride experienced by the citizens of India. Even areas prone to mischief remained incident-free, emphasizing Delhi's capability to navigate significant international events seamlessly.

In a city often hindered by bureaucratic complexities, a remarkable display of coordination unfolded among various agencies and departments, spanning from Government of India entities like the CPWD, DDA, NHAI, Indian Air Force to Delhi's own agencies such as PWD, Delhi Jal Board, Transport, and Civic Bodies like the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, New Delhi Municipal Council, Delhi Cantonment Board, the Delhi Police, and the Delhi International Airport Ltd. (DIAL).

A continuous 24x7 vigil featured the strategic placement of tractor-mounted heavy-duty 50 HP pumps, ready to clear excess water as needed. Complementing this effort were

the Mechanical Road Sweeping (MRS) vehicles, equipped with heavy water jetting machines to address accumulated mud and silt on roadsides, along with a super sucker designed to clear clogged drains and sewer lines.

Operated in 12-hour shifts, these vehicles were manned by a diverse team comprising an MRS operator, Sanitary Inspector, Helper, and a Probationer IAS/DANICS officer—a pioneering initiative. Accompanied by a vehicle carrying workmen and equipment to handle civil works on the roads, this comprehensive approach ensured a multifaceted response to the city's needs.

Passersby witnessed Lieutenant Governor Saxena personally overseeing repairs, laying flower pots, and inspecting fountains. The teams exhibited an unwavering commitment, working with a sense of dedication that extended from officers to ordinary laborers, as if they had all pledged themselves to the betterment of Delhi.

For the local residents, this overhaul brought about a palpable improvement in the quality of urban life. The greening of streets with a staggering number of potted plants not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal but also contributed to improved air quality. The revitalized infrastructure, including cleaned roads and adorned landmarks, created a sense of pride and ownership among the residents, fostering a renewed connection to their city.

On the international stage, this transformation significantly elevated Delhi's image. The city, once grappling with infrastructural challenges, emerged as a capable and aesthetically pleasing host for international events. The meticulous preparations for the G20 Summit showcased Delhi as a dynamic and progressive capital, leaving a lasting positive impression on the global community. This not only bolstered India's reputation as a capable host but also contributed to reshaping perceptions about the country's urban development.

Beyond the immediate visual impact, the makeover had broader implications for the city's economy and tourism. The improved infrastructure and aesthetics attracted not only international dignitaries, but also a surge in tourism. The enhanced appeal of the city as a destination for events and conferences will translate into economic opportunities, fostering growth in sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and local businesses. Additionally, the lasting assets created during the preparations for the G20 Summit will continue to contribute to Delhi's development and identity for years to come.

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