

The Big Picture

Topic - Reforms in UN and other impaired blocks

Special reference - India's demand for expansion of UNSC. Reforms of other agencies are given only a passing reference

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Note:

- Following is the summary of 'The Big Picture' discussion, which was aired on RSTV.
- Host: Frank Rausan Pereira.
- Panellists: Gurjit Singh (Former Ambassador), K.P. Nayar (Strategic Analyst), Pramit Pal Chaudhuri (Foreign Editor, Hindustan Times)

Context:

- India's permanent representative, while speaking in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, pointed to the **lack of movement on reforms in the UN Security Council**. There has not been a single negotiating text on the issue till now.
- He said that **Intergovernmental Negotiations Framework (IGN)** (see inset) has been more like a platform for debate in a university, rather than being a result-oriented institution.
- At the **BRICS virtual summit, PM Modi** echoed similar emotions, while reiterating **India's commitment to reformed multilateralism**.
- He emphasized on the need for reforms in multilateral institutions like the United Nations, World Trade Organisation, World Health Organisation, to enhance their credibility.

Intergovernmental Negotiations Framework (IGN) - This is composed of groups, working for reforms in the UN system. It articulates **positions of different organisations** vis-a-vis each other. The groups include G-4, CARICOM, African Union, Arab League, Ufc (Uniting for Consensus, also known as Coffee Club)

BRICS - BRICS is an informal grouping of nations **comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**.

- The term was **coined** by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neil in 2001.
- India is a **member of BRICS** and will be hosting the 13th BRICS summit in 2021.
- Recently, the BRICS summit was hosted by **Russia in 2020**.

Need for Reforms:

- **Equitable world order** - There is a need for a more equitable world order to uphold the **principles of democracy** at the global level.
- **Inclusivity** - Developing countries like the African countries, need to be made stakeholders in the multilateral institutions and **involved in the decision-making process**.
- **Mitigation of new threats** - In the era of corona pandemic, rising protectionism, increased incidents of terrorism and the threat of climate change, multilateral system must become more resilient and responsive.
- **Desperate times call for desperate measures** - There is already a precedent of expansion of G-20 in the face of 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

G-20 - G-20 is an international forum of 19 leading international economies and the European Union.

- Collectively, G20 members represent around **80% of the world's economic output, two-thirds of global population and three-quarters of international trade.**
- **India** is also a member of G-20.
- Recent G-20 summit was hosted by Saudi Arabia in Nov 2020

What reforms are required in the United Nations

- **Rules of Procedure of General Assembly** - For e.g. the type of majority required to pass a resolution, requirement of approval of the United Nations Security Council etc.
- **Methods of working of General Assembly** - For e.g. before a document is adopted, each document must be translated to six languages. After that, many times the discussion veers towards the accuracy of the 6 languages. This process has many times **delayed** the adoption of texts in the UN
- **Membership of United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, including the permanent membership and veto power - Since its inception, the UNSC has been enlarged only once. Even after that, the Permanent members of UNSC have remained fixed. This is problematic as the membership of UN has grown almost four times since its formation.
 - **Veto Power** - veto power has been the exclusive domain of P5 members. Many countries have put question mark on the existence of veto, which is **contrary to democratic principles**. Others have questioned the **exclusivity of veto**, which is limited to the P5 nations, as stated earlier.

General Assembly-

- It is one of the **six principal organs** of the United nations, the other 5 being Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat.
- It can be loosely called the **parliament** of the United Nations Organisation.
- Some decisions like budget, **admission** of new members and peace and security are taken by **two-thirds majority** to be **passed**. Other decisions require only a **simple majority**.

United Nations Security Council -

- As stated **earlier**, it one of the six principal organs of United Nations Organisation
- It has the **primary responsibility** of **maintenance of peace and security** in the international community.
- It **comprises** of 15 members, which can be divided in 2 categories:
 - **Permanent members**: Also called as the P-5 members. It is comprised of US, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom. They have **veto powers**, which essentially means that passing of a decision in the UNSC must have each P5 member's concurrence.
 - **Elected Members**: There are 10 non-permanent members. They are **elected by the General Assembly** and have a **tenure of 2 years** each.

Challenges to reforms and Indian demand:

- Making a change in UN is a **laborious process** as the rules of procedure lean towards rigidity
- **Lack of Consensus** - Although there is a general agreement towards change in the system, but different countries have **different perceptions** of the requirement for change. For e.g. - G-4 nations demand a seat each as a permanent member, UFC asks for expansion of non-permanent seats, African union wants its representation at any cost etc

G4 - It is a grouping of 4 countries, which have staked their **claim for permanent membership** of United Nations Security Council.

- G-4 includes **India, Brazil, Japan and Germany**

Uniting for Consensus (UFC) - This is a grouping which opposes the G-4 countries claim for permanent membership of United Nations Security Council

- It is also called as **Coffee Club**
- Pakistan, Italy, Spain, Argentina, Turkey are some of its prominent members
- India is not a member of UFC

- **Narrow political considerations** - Countries view change in their own **self-interest**, rather than taking a wide world view. For e.g. - many countries would like an expansion in the non-permanent space, so that they have an increased chance of getting elected to the membership of UN
- **PGA's (see inset) opposition to India's demand** - Yet another Challenge to India's demand for recognition of India, specifically, and G-4, in general, as the permanent members of UNSC is the current PGA of UN. The **current PGA belongs to Turkey** and is not friendly to India's demand. In fact, he is biased towards Pakistan-led Coffee Club, which seeks to limit expansion of permanent membership of UNSC
- **Veto power of P5** - Support of all five permanent, veto-wielding members is required for expansion of UNSC. India must be cautious that it keeps on enjoying support from all P5 members, especially China, which so-far has been ambiguous towards India's candidature as a permanent member of UNSC
- **African position** - India has been generally supportive of African position where it has demanded one seat for its nominee. The problem is that **Africa wants to reserve the right to nominate the country by itself**, rather than leaving it to the UN General Assembly. This is not acceptable to many members.
- **Lack of Records** - One major issue is the lack of records of ongoing negotiations. Every time the meeting starts, the negotiations must **start from scratch**, as no records are maintained of previous discussions.

PGA - President of the General Assembly of UN - This is a position which is voted every year by the members of UN General Assembly. The PGA is the **chair and presiding officer of United Nations General Assembly**. Currently, the position is held by Volkan Bozkir from Turkey.

Way Forward:

- **India's stint at United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** - India has been the **most elected member** of UNSC outside the P5. From January, India will start another stint as the elected member of UNSC. This position can be leveraged to show India's eagerness and maturity to be recognised as a **responsible global power**. India can also use this opportunity to **break the procedural logjam**, as explained earlier.
- **Diplomatic outreach** - India needs to build upon its strengths through a diplomatic outreach to the major nations with whom it has friendly relations. For e.g. India is the **only nation whose candidature to United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is not opposed by any veto-wielding nation**. Even China, with whom India has been engaged in a border standoff, has never publicly opposed India's stance (although, in all fairness, China has also not supported India's demand for a permanent seat at UNSC)
- **India's soft power** - India has continuously supported **Least Developing Countries (LDCs) of Africa and Small Island nations** in their developmental efforts. This has led to

development of India's image as a **benevolent** and friendly country. We need to leverage this positive perception by reaching out and making such countries support India's demand for a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

- **Contributions to United Nations** - India needs to keep an **eye on China**, which has now become the biggest contributor of funds to the United Nations. Also, China has now started sending troops to United Nations peace-keeping missions, with the agenda of rebuilding its global reputation
- **Long drawn strategy** - United Nations Security Council reform is a long-term project and would require **continuous, non-tiring efforts** from Indian diplomats. There is a need to approach it based on a step-by-step approach. For e.g. - The first step should be finalisation of a draft text. Once it is finalised, the contrasting viewpoints can be added and reconciled based on negotiations.
- **Diversification** - Apart from United Nations Security Council, India needs to diversify its energy towards **other agencies** like International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation, World Health Organisation, to create a perception where it is considered as a natural leader. For e.g. - Indian Prime Minister recently spoke at Economic Council (ECOSOC) to attach a sense of importance to the institution
- **Debate on India's strategy** - Reforming some institutions might require sacrifice on India's part, for which we should have a **clearly outlined strategy**. For e.g. - India has been a major beneficiary of World Bank loans. If we need a leadership position, we might need to give up on these loans.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) -

- It is also one of the 6 principal organs of United Nations
- It works to further **economic, social and environmental development** of the global community

Passing reference in the debate:

Reforms in other organisations -

1. **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** - The chief opposition is towards IMF's **conditionalities before granting a bail-out package** to the developing nations, which is considered as discriminatory by many countries.
2. **World Health Organisation (WHO)** - Recently, WHO was called out by many nations including the US for its ineffectiveness in dealing with the corona pandemic and its **soft stance towards China**.
3. **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** - The ongoing **election of Director General** of WTO has an African candidate in the lead. However, US is opposed to her candidature despite it being the will of nations around the world.