

Maldives wins UN General Assembly Elections

June 8, 2021

In a first for the Maldives, Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid was elected the President of the United Nations General Assembly for 2021-22, winning 143 votes or nearly three fourths of the 191 countries that voted in the annual election, while his rival, former Afghanistan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul won 48. This is the first time Maldives will be occupying the office.

In news: Maldives FM Abdulla Shahid wins presidency of 76th UN General Assembly

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions

- UNGA
- Powers and Functions of the General Assembly
- President : Elections, Power and Functions
- India' role in the Elections

Content:

UNGA:

What is it?

- The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN).
- It serves as the **main deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ** of the UN.
- Its powers, composition, functions, and procedures are set out in **Chapter IV of the United Nations Charter**.

Composition:

- **All 193 members of the United Nations** are members of the General Assembly, with the addition of the **Holy See and Palestine as observer states.**
- **All members have equal representation** in the UN General Assembly.
- The United Nations General Assembly may grant observer status to an international organization or entity, which entitles the entity to participate in the work of the United Nations General Assembly, though with limitations.
- Observer status allows them to participate and speak in General Assembly meetings, but not vote.
- Observers are generally intergovernmental organizations and international organizations and entities whose statehood or sovereignty is not precisely defined.

The criteria for admission of new members to the UN are set out in **Chapter II, Article 4** of the UN Charter:

- Membership in the United Nations is open to all peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and, in the judgement of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations.
- The admission of any such state to membership in the United Nations will be effected by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.

A recommendation for admission from the Security Council **requires affirmative votes from at least nine of the council's fifteen members**, with none of the five permanent members using their veto power.

The Security Council's recommendation **must then be approved in the General Assembly by a two-thirds majority vote.**

Powers and Functions of the General Assembly:

- The Assembly is **empowered to make recommendations to States** on international issues within its competence.
- The UNGA is responsible for the UN budget, appointing the non-permanent members to the Security Council, appointing the Secretary-General of the United Nations, receiving reports from other parts of the UN system, and making recommendations through resolutions.
- It also **establishes numerous subsidiary organs** to advance or assist in its broad mandate.
- The General Assembly is entrusted in the United Nations Charter with **electing members to various organs within the United Nations system**. The procedure for these elections can be found in **Section 15 of the Rules of Procedure** for the General Assembly.
- The **most important elections for the General Assembly include** those for the upcoming President of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice.

According to the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly may:

- Consider and approve the United Nations budget and establish the financial assessments of Member States
- Elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council and the members of other United Nations councils and organs and, on the recommendation of the Security Council, appoint the Secretary-General
- Consider and make recommendations on the general principles of cooperation for maintaining international peace and security, including disarmament
- Discuss any question relating to international peace and security and, except where a dispute or situation is currently being discussed by the Security Council, make recommendations on it

- Discuss, with the same exception, and make recommendations on any questions within the scope of the Charter or affecting the powers and functions of any organ of the United Nations
- Initiate studies and make recommendations to promote international political cooperation, the development and codification of international law, the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and international collaboration in the economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, educational and health fields
- Make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of any situation that might impair friendly relations among countries
- Consider reports from the Security Council and other United Nations organs

President : Elections, Power and Functions:

- The President of the United Nations General Assembly is the **chair and presiding officer of the General Assembly**.
- The session of the assembly is scheduled for every year starting in September—any special, or emergency special, assemblies over the next year will be headed by the President of the UNGA.
- The **presidency rotates annually between the five geographic groups:** African, Asia-Pacific, Eastern European, Latin American and Caribbean, and Western European and other States.
- It is customary that a **permanent member of the United Nations Security Council does not ever serve as UNGA president**.
- Because of their powerful stature globally, some of the largest, most powerful countries have never held the presidency, such as the People's Republic of China, France, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- The General Assembly meets under its president or the UN

Secretary-General in annual sessions at UN headquarters in New York City

India held the presidency of UNGA in 1953. **Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit** was the **8th President of the United Nations General Assembly**. She was also the first woman president of UNGA.

India' role in the Elections:

- The election of the President of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly took place in the General Assembly Hall on 7 June 2021, in line with Rule 30 of the Rules of Procedure.
- In accordance with the established regional rotation, the President of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly was elected from the Group of Asia-Pacific States.
- Indian diplomats had been active behind the scenes in helping the Maldives canvass for Mr. Shahid, after Maldives announced its candidate for the 76th General Assembly Presidency a year ago.
- India had made it clear to Afghanistan's government that it would be unable to support Mr. Rassoul as it had declared its support for Maldives publicly in November, long before Afghanistan announced its candidature in January this year.
- The announcement had caused an awkward tussle within the Asia Pacific group, whose turn it is to take the Presidency of the General Assembly, and especially for India, which has close ties with both countries.
- Mr. Shahid's win will also come as a relief for New Delhi, given adverse comments against India by the previous PGA from Turkey Volkan Bozkir on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir.
- In contrast, it is expected that Mr. Shahid's tenure, which will last until September 2022 while India's tenure at the UN Security Council will last until December 2022, will see a period of smooth coordination

between India and the Maldives at the UN.

Mould your thought: Discuss the composition, powers and functions of the UN General Assembly.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss the UNGA mandate
- Write about the composition – members of the UNGA
- Discuss the powers and functions of UNGA
- Conclusion