



Delhi Policy Group

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Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group is among India's oldest independent think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. Over the past decades, the Delhi Policy Group has established itself in both domestic and international circles, particularly in the area of national security.

In keeping with India's increasing global profile as a leading power and the accompanying dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the Delhi Policy Group has expanded its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role; India's initiatives to strengthen its strategic periphery; India's political, security and connectivity challenges and policies across the Indo-Pacific; and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise. To support these goals, the DPG undertakes research, publishes policy reports and organises conferences on strategic and geo-political, geo-economic, and defence and security issues.

DPG Foreign Affairs Review

DPG Foreign Affairs Review is compiled by our research team from publicly available information and open source media to provide an overview of significant developments related to India's foreign affairs during the month. Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Mohit Musaddi at mohit@dpg.org.in.

Cover Photographs:

(Photographs top to bottom)

EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar greets Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Seychelles Mr. Barry Faure in New Delhi on March 20, 2020. Source: MEA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with SAARC leaders via video conferencing on March 15 to discuss Covid-19. Source: MEA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attending the Extraordinary G20 Virtual Leaders' Summit via video conferencing on March 26 to discuss Covid-19. Source: Twitter/PMO

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I. Asia

1. [Prime Minister participates in the birth centenary celebrations of 'Jatir Pita' Bangabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#)

On March 17, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi participated in the centenary celebrations of the birth of Bangladesh's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through a video message. The Prime Minister described Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as one of the greatest figures of the last century and said that Bangladesh's "Jatir Pita's" inspired the youth of the times to face the challenges of liberating the country.

He also commended Bangladesh's progress, inspired by Bangabandhu, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina with inclusive and development-oriented policies. He added that Bangladesh is setting new benchmarks for the economy, other social indices and sports. The Prime Minister praised Bangladesh's unprecedented progress in many fields such as skills, education, health, empowerment of women and microfinance. He also said that Bangladesh is not only India's largest trading partner in South Asia, but also a development partner. He listed the cooperation between the two countries in a number of connectivity-enhancing sectors, such as electricity distribution, Friendship Pipeline, Road, Rail, Internet, Airways and Waterways, which connect even more people from both countries.

Mentioning the coming milestones of the two countries, the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's liberation next year and the 75th anniversary of India's independence in 2022, the Prime Minister was confident that both of these milestones will not only bring the development of India and Bangladesh to new heights, but will also strengthen the bond of friendship between the two countries.

2. [Telephonic Conversation between External Affairs Minister of India and Foreign Minister of China](#)

On March 24, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar had a telephonic conversation with State Councillor and Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi. The two discussed the need for India and China to work together in combating COVID-19 and agreed to build further on the bilateral efforts in this domain.

Foreign Minister Wang expressed appreciation to the Indian side for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's letter of sympathy to President Xi Jinping and India's help to China when it was at a critical moment in battling COVID-19. Wang said that China and India, as the only two countries with a

population of more than one billion, need to continue to support each other and overcome the difficulties brought by the virus, together. China is also ready to step up cooperation with India within the G20, BRICS and other frameworks to push for stronger international unity and coordination and jointly uphold regional and global public health security.

3. [Telephone Conversation between External Affairs Minister of India and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal](#)

On March 20, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar had a telephonic conversation with Hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, Mr. Pradeep Kumar Gyawali. During the conversation, both the Foreign Ministers held a discussion on enhancing cooperation and measures to combat the threat posed by the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. They underscored the necessity for maintaining smooth supply of goods and medical items and discussed the need for effective surveillance at the border to minimise risk and vulnerabilities associated with Covid-19.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal thanked the Government of India for offering help to Nepal to prevent Covid-19, including through the services of a Rapid Response Team of doctors and specialists.

4. [Agreement between India and Brunei for Exchange of Information notified](#)

The Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Brunei Darussalam for the exchange of information and assistance in collection with respect of taxes was notified in the Gazette of India (Extraordinary) on March 9.

The Agreement enables exchange of information, including banking and ownership information, between the two countries for tax purposes. It is based on international standards of tax transparency and exchange of information and enables sharing of information on request as well as automatic exchange of information. The Agreement also provides for representatives of one country to undertake tax examinations in the other country. Moreover, it provides for assistance in collection of tax claims.

The Agreement will enhance mutual co-operation between India and Brunei Darussalam by providing an effective framework for exchange of information in tax matters which will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.

II. North America

1. [Defence Minister of India and the Defence Secretary of the United States review bilateral defence co-operation](#)

On March 20, Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh held a telephonic conversation with his United States counterpart Secretary of Defence Dr Mark T Esper. The two Defence Ministers reviewed the progress in the India-US bilateral and multilateral defence co-operation and agreed to expand military-to-military engagements and defence trade & industry as part of India-US comprehensive global strategic partnership.

The two Ministers exchanged views on the grave situation arising out of COVID-19 and expressed confidence that through open communication and mutual support, the world can overcome the pandemic. Minister Rajnath Singh briefed Secretary Esper about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to coordinate COVID-19 relief efforts in South Asia.

III. Europe

1. [Telephonic Conversation between Prime Ministers of India and the United Kingdom](#)

On March 12, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Mr. Boris Johnson. The two leaders expressed their desire to further strengthen the India-UK Strategic Partnership in the new decade. The leaders expressed their satisfaction at the cooperation between India and UK in the field of climate change and Prime Minister Modi thanked Prime Minister Johnson for the invitation to COP-26 in Glasgow later this year. The two Prime Ministers also exchanged views on the COVID-19 epidemic.

2. [Telephone Conversation between Prime Minister and H.E. Ursula Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission](#)

On March 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation with Ms. Ursula Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission. The two leaders discussed the global situation in the context of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

While expressing his condolences for the loss of life in the European Union due to COVID-19, the Prime Minister emphasised on the need for coordination and cooperation among all the countries to fight the pandemic. The Prime Minister also dwelt on the steps taken by India to contain the spread of the coronavirus infection.

Ms. Von Der Leyen mentioned that the Prime Minister's leadership in taking early measures has been the key to preventing a rapid spread of the disease in India. She also expressed her appreciation for the assistance rendered to the European citizens in India in this situation.

3. [Telephonic conversation between Prime Minister and Vladimir V. Putin, President of Russia on COVID-19](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with the President of the Russian Federation Mr Vladimir V. Putin on March 25. The two leaders discussed the global situation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The two leaders agreed on consultation and cooperation in adequately addressing all challenges faced by this major global crisis, including those pertaining to health, medicine, scientific research, humanitarian matters and impact on global economy. They stressed the significance of

international cooperation for unitedly fighting COVID-19, including within the framework of G20.

The two leaders also agreed to continue their close cooperation for maintaining the excellent momentum and the warmth of the cordial and time-tested bilateral relations. They reiterated that they looked forward to several in-person interactions during the course of the year.

4. [Telephonic conversation of the External Affairs Minister with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy](#)

On March 24, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar held a telephonic conversation with the Vice President and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles. The two reviewed the Covid-19 situation and exchanged views on their respective challenges. The EAM assured Mr. Fontelles of India's full support in the return of EU citizens from India.

5. [Danish Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee visits India](#)

The Danish Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee led by Chairman Martin Lidegaard met EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar in New Delhi on March 3. The Committee held conversations with Dr. Jaishankar on India's developmental priorities and the global outlook. They agreed that stronger relations with Europe and Denmark would help drive a mutually beneficial green strategic partnership.

6. [Telephone Conversation between Prime Minister and the President of the Republic of France](#)

On March 31, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation with the President of the Republic of France, Mr. Emmanuel Macron. The leaders discussed the domestic and international aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and underlined the importance of global collaboration and solidarity in the present situation. They agreed that the expert teams of both countries would actively share information on measures to prevent the spread of the virus, and research on treatment and vaccines. The leaders also underlined the importance of not losing sight of other global concerns like Climate Change, which impact humanity as a whole. They stressed the need to devote special attention to the needs of less developed countries, including those in Africa, during the present crisis. Both leaders agreed that the India-France partnership could contribute to advancing a spirit of human-centric solidarity in the present difficult times.

IV. West Asia

1. [Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister of Israel](#)

On March 12, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi received a telephone call from the Prime Minister of Israel, H.E. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu. The leaders reviewed the excellent progress in bilateral relations. They also exchanged views on the global situation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. [Prime Minister's Telephone Conversation with Crown Prince Mohd. Bin Salman of Saudi Arabia](#)

On March 17, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, His Highness Mohammed bin Salman. The two leaders discussed the global situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Modi emphasised the need for coordinated efforts to adequately address this global challenge, which has impacted not only the health and well-being of several hundred thousand people but also threatens to adversely affect the economy in many parts of the world.

3. [Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanges greetings with Afghanistan President](#)

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation with President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan on March 24. Both the leaders exchanged Navroz greetings noting that the festival symbolises the shared heritage and cultural linkages between the two countries. The Leaders discussed the evolving situation in the region particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and reaffirmed their commitment to boost cooperation.

4. [Telephonic Conversation between PM and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 26 had a telephonic conversation with His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. The two leaders exchanged information and views on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in their respective countries, as well as the steps being taken by their Governments. They agreed that the next few weeks would be crucial to control the spread of the virus, and required concerted and coordinated efforts by all countries.

Both leaders emphasised the importance they attach to the strength and richness of the bilateral relationship. They agreed to maintain regular

consultations between their officials in the present situation, particularly to ensure continuity of logistical supply lines.

5. [Telephonic Conversation between PM and Amir of the State of Qatar](#)

On March 26, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation today with His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al Thani, the Amir of the State of Qatar.

The two leaders discussed the ongoing developments related to the COVID-19 global pandemic and its social and economic impact. They exchanged notes about the measures taken in their respective countries to contain the spread of the virus. The Prime Minister also informed the Amir about the recent regional initiatives among the SAARC countries, and the Virtual Summit among G-20 Leaders.

Both leaders expressed hope that the efforts and the measures being taken to stop the spread of the disease by all affected countries would yield early and positive results. They emphasised the importance of international solidarity and information-sharing in fighting the pandemic.

V. Africa

1. [Seychelles Secretary of State visits India](#)

Barry Faure, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Seychelles visited India on March 20 where he met EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar. The two exchanged views on the Covid-19 response and discussed ways to further expand the strong bilateral cooperation between India and Seychelles.



EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar greets Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Seychelles Mr. Barry Faure in New Delhi on March 20, 2020. Source: MEA

2. [Cabinet approves MoU between India and Côte d'Ivoire for cooperation in the field of Health](#)

On March 4, the Union Cabinet approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on Cooperation in the field of Health.

The MoU covers cooperation between India and the Ivory Coast in areas such as Exchange and training of medical doctors; Regulation of drugs and pharmaceutical products; Medical and health research development; Collaboration and research in the field of HIV/AIDS; Exchange of best practices in primary health care; Health promotion and disease prevention; and Non-Communicable diseases, among others.

A Working Group will be set up to further elaborate the details of cooperation and to oversee the implementation of this Memorandum of Understanding.

VI. Multilateral Fora

1. [President of India meets Chairman of the Arctic Circle](#)

Mr. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, former President of Iceland and the Chairman of the Arctic Circle called on the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi on March 5. President Kovind conveyed India's commitment to contribute to Mr. Grímsson's endeavours and remarked that India deeply appreciates his efforts to address climate change and environmental issues in the Arctic. The President also appreciated Mr. Grímsson's initiative to get all stakeholders together on one global platform – the Arctic Circle.

Mr. Grímsson's praised the Indian government for focusing attention on the melting glaciers. He further stated that due to the intertwined nature of the world, the future of India will be determined by the Arctic and the future of the Arctic will be determined by India and other Asian countries.

EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar also met Mr. Grímsson on March 3 and appreciated his insights on the Arctic issues and climate change.



EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar with the President and Chairman of the Arctic Circle, Mr. Grímsson in New Delhi on March 3, 2020. Source: Twitter/Dr. S. Jaishankar

2. [Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit](#)

An Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit coordinated by the Saudi G20 Presidency was convened on March 26 to discuss the challenges posed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to forge a global coordinated response. At the meeting, G20 Leaders agreed to take all necessary measures to contain the pandemic and protect people. They also supported strengthening of the WHO's mandate in the fight against pandemic, including delivery of medical supplies, diagnostic tools, treatments, medicines and vaccines. The Leaders also committed to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic and social costs of the pandemic and to restore global growth, market stability and strengthen resilience. G20 countries committed to inject over USD 5 trillion into the global economy to counter the social and economic impact of COVID-19. The Leaders also agreed to contribute to the WHO led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund on a voluntary basis.

In his remarks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted the alarming social and economic costs of the pandemic. He added that 90% of the COVID-19 cases and 88% of deaths were in G20 countries even as they share 80% of world GDP and 60% of world population. He called on the G20 to come out with a concrete action plan to fight the global pandemic. The Prime Minister called on the Leaders to help usher in a new globalization, for the collective well-being of humankind and have multilateral fora focus on promoting the shared interests of humanity.

At the end of the Summit, a G20 Leaders' [Statement](#) was issued which called for a coordinated global response to fight the pandemic, adopting measures to safeguard the global economy, minimising trade disruption and taking steps to enhance global cooperation.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi attending the Extraordinary G20 Virtual Leaders' Summit via video conferencing on March 26 to discuss Covid-19.

Source: Twitter/PMO

3. [Prime Minister interacts with SAARC leaders to combat COVID-19 in the region](#)

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi interacted with the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) over a video conference on March 15 to chalk out a strategy to fight the coronavirus. Stressing on the ancient people to people ties and interconnectedness of societies of the SAARC countries, he said it is imperative for the nations to prepare to face the challenge together. In the spirit of collaboration, Prime Minister Modi proposed creation of a COVID-19 Emergency Fund based on voluntary contributions from all the countries, with India making an initial offer of US \$10 million for the fund. He also suggested the creation of a common Research Platform to coordinate research on controlling epidemic diseases within the South Asian region. He suggested further brainstorming by experts on the long-term economic consequences of COVID-19, and how best to insulate internal trade and local value chains from its impact. PM Modi's guiding mantra of 'prepare, but don't panic' was well received by all the leaders.

President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani said that the greatest vulnerability of Afghanistan is an open border with Iran. He proposed modelling diffusion patterns, creation of common framework for telemedicine and greater cooperation amongst the neighbouring countries.

President of Maldives, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih thanked the Indian government for the medical assistance from India to deal with COVID-19 cases and for evacuating nine Maldivians from Wuhan. He highlighted the negative impact of COVID-19 on tourism in the country and its impact on the nation's economy. He proposed closer cooperation between the health emergency agencies of the countries, the formulation of an economic relief package and a long-term recovery plan for the region.

President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa recommended that SAARC leaders work together to help economy tide over the difficult period. He also recommended establishment of a SAARC Ministerial level group to share best practises and coordinate regional matters on combating COVID-19.

Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina thanked Prime Minister Modi for bringing 23 Bangladeshi students back from Wuhan along with Indian students during the quarantine period. She proposed continuance of the dialogue at a technical level through video conference between the Health Ministers and Secretaries of the region.

Prime Minister of Nepal, KP Sharma Oli apprised the SAARC leaders of the steps taken by Nepal to combat COVID-19. He said that the collective

wisdom and efforts of all the SAARC nations could help in devising a robust and effective strategy to deal with the pandemic.

Prime Minister of Bhutan Dr. Lotay Tshering said that the pandemic does not follow geographical boundaries, hence it is all the more important for the nations to work together. He said the pandemic will affect the smaller and vulnerable economies disproportionately, talking about the economic impact of COVID-19.

Pakistan PM's Special Assistant on Health, Dr. Zafar Mirza, proposed that SAARC Secretariat be mandated to establish a working group of national authorities for health Information, data exchange and coordination in real time. He proposed hosting SAARC Health Ministers' conference and development of regional mechanisms to share disease surveillance data in real time.

It should be noted that in addition to India's contribution of USD 10 million, contributions have also been committed by Sri Lanka (USD 5 million), Bangladesh (USD 1.5 million), Nepal (USD 1 million), Afghanistan (USD 1 million), Maldives (USD 200,000) and Bhutan (USD 100,000) thus taking the total amount in the COVID-19 Emergency Fund to USD 18.8 million.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with SAARC leaders via video conferencing on March 15 to discuss Covid-19. Source: MEA

4. [Delegation from UN-CEIRPP visits India](#)

On March 2, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar received a delegation from the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The Delegation exchanged views with the

EAM on the latest developments and the current situation in West Asia. Since India has good relations with both Israel and Palestine, the delegation sought to engage New Delhi to play a more proactive role in the settling of the conflict between Palestine and Israel. The delegation also sought the support of India on synergies in capacity building for staff and institutions of the State of Palestine, including within the context of South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

5. [Foreign Secretary's Conference Call with counterparts from Indo-Pacific Countries](#)

On March 20, Foreign Secretary Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla participated in a telephonic conference call initiated by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun for discussions among some countries in the Indo-Pacific region on issues related to countering COVID-19. The teleconference included senior representatives from Australia, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand, and Japan. The participants shared their assessments of the current situation with respect to COVID-19, and discussed ways to synergise their efforts to counter its spread.

Foreign Secretary Shringla briefed the participants on the proactive steps taken by India both nationally and in the region under the Prime Minister's leadership. He conveyed India's desire to regularly share its perspectives with partners in the region and to work together with others to counter this challenge. The participants are expected to continue the conference call on a weekly basis, covering issues like cooperation on vaccine development, challenges of stranded citizens, assistance to countries in need and mitigating the impact on the global economy, etc.

VII. Developments in MEA

1. [Prime Minister's Video Conference with Heads of Indian Mission](#)

On March 30, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi held a video conference with the Heads of all of India's Embassies and High Commissions worldwide to discuss responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic. He complimented the Heads of Missions for their efforts to evacuate Indians stranded abroad in some of the epicentres of the crisis and exhorted them to take steps on five specific counts.

Firstly, to ensure their own health and safety, and that of their teams and families. Second, to attend to Indians who remain in various foreign countries, given the uncertainty of continuing international travel restrictions. He called on Heads of Indian Missions to help boost the morale of such compatriots abroad, and to help them address issues arising from their unplanned stay abroad, with their host Governments, and also to address other problems Indians might face abroad, including arranging shelter, where necessary and feasible. Third, to stay alert and identify in their countries of accreditation best practices, innovations, scientific breakthroughs and sources to procure medical equipment, for India's fight against COVID-19. He also advised Heads of Mission to suitably publicise the newly-established PM-CARES Fund to mobilise donations from abroad. Fourth, since this crisis also impacts upon the economy, they were advised to also focus on ensuring that commerce in essential supplies, logistics chains, remittances and so on are unaffected, through their coordination with foreign partners. Lastly, the PM advised Heads of Missions to continue to pay close attention to the evolving international political and economic situation, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response, ten Heads of Mission, in Beijing, Washington DC, Tehran, Rome, Berlin, Kathmandu, Abu Dhabi, Kabul, Male, and Seoul offered their perspectives to PM Modi. They shared feedback regarding appreciation in their countries of accreditation of the resolute measures taken by India to combat this pandemic.

The Heads of Missions outlined their efforts to help Indians stranded abroad, in particular, students and workers. They also reported efforts to identify medicine, medical devices, technologies, research and other measures which might help in India's own national effort to fight this pandemic. Heads of Mission also reported lessons learned in other countries, and their best practices, in the global fight against COVID-19. In

India's neighbourhood, measures were underlined to assist the national responses of those countries, using the special fund created at India's initiative for SAARC countries to combat COVID-19.



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