



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



Foreign Affairs Review

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ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored to these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

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, during his virtual conversation with Ms. Kang Kyung-wha, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea.

Source: Twitter/@DrSJaishankar

Video Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Source: SCO

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Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

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Contents

I. Asia	1
II. North America	6
III. Europe	7
IV. West Asia	9
V. Africa	10
VI. Latin America and the Caribbean	10
VII. Multilateral Fora	11
VIII. Repatriation of Indian Nationals	18



I. Asia

1. [Prime Minister Narendra Modi's telephone conversations with counterparts from Asia](#)

Over the course of the month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held telephone conversations with leaders from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Bangladesh.

On May 1, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with the Prime Minister of [Thailand](#), General Prayut Chan-o-cha. The two leaders shared information on the steps being taken in their respective countries to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Modi spoke about the importance of regional and global cooperation to fight the pandemic effectively. He assured the Thai Prime Minister of India's commitment to support the pharmaceutical requirements of Thailand. The leaders agreed on the desirability of greater collaboration between researchers, scientists and innovators of the two countries.

The Prime Minister spoke to Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, [President of Sri Lanka](#), on May 23 regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its likely health and economic impacts in the region. Prime Minister assured the Sri Lankan President that India would continue to provide all possible support to Sri Lanka for mitigating the effects of the pandemic. President Rajapaksa briefed PM on the steps being taken by his Government to restart economic activity. In this context, both leaders agreed on the need to accelerate Indian-assisted development projects in Sri Lanka.

PM Modi also had a telephone conversation with Mahinda Rajapaksa, [Prime Minister of Sri Lanka](#) on May 27, to congratulate him on having completed 50 years in the Parliament of Sri Lanka. The leaders discussed the health and economic impact of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic and the measures being taken in the two countries to counter them. Prime Minister assured Prime Minister Rajapaksa that India stands ready to extend all possible support to Sri Lanka during this challenging time.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with Mr. Pravind Jugnauth, Prime Minister of [Mauritius](#) on May 23. Prime Minister Jugnauth conveyed his condolences for the losses caused in India by Cyclone Amphan. He thanked PM for sending the Indian Naval Ship 'Kesari' to Mauritius as part of 'Operation Sagar', with a consignment of medicines and a 14-member medical team to help the Mauritian health authorities fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The two leaders discussed



enhancing cooperation in various areas, including measures aimed at supporting the financial sector of Mauritius, and enabling Mauritian youth to study Ayurvedic medicine.

On May 25, he spoke to Ms. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic to [Bangladesh](#). The two leaders shared their assessment of the damage caused by Cyclone Amphan in both countries. The leaders also discussed the COVID pandemic situation and the ongoing collaboration between India and Bangladesh. Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed India's support to Bangladesh in addressing these challenges.

2. [Boundary dispute between India and Nepal](#)

On May 8, via video conference, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh [inaugurated](#) a road link from Dharchula (Uttarakhand) to Lipulekh (China border). The road originates from Ghatiabagarh and terminates at Lipulekh Pass, the gateway to Kailash-Mansarovar.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal issued a [Press Release](#) on May 9 regarding the inauguration and claimed that the Link Road connecting to Lipulekh passes through Nepali territory. It cited the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, according to which, all the territories east of Kali (Mahakali) River, including Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipulekh, belong to Nepal.

In response, the Official Spokesperson of India's MEA [emphasized](#) that the road section in Pithoragarh district in the State of Uttarakhand lies completely within the territory of India and follows the pre-existing route used by the pilgrims of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. Under the present project, the same road has been made pliable for the ease and convenience of pilgrims, locals and traders.

Further, on May 20, the Nepal government released a new political map of the country which depicted Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura as part of Nepalese territory. The three territories were shown as part of Byas rural municipality in Dharchula district of Sudurpaschim province in Nepal.

The Official Spokesperson of MEA [responded](#) that Nepal's revised political map includes parts of Indian territory. He urged the Government of Nepal to refrain from unjustified cartographic assertion and respect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also called for a positive atmosphere for diplomatic dialogue to resolve the outstanding boundary issues between the two countries.



On May 31, Nepal law minister Shiva Maya Tumbahamphe tabled a constitutional amendment bill in the House of Representatives to update the map of Nepal. The next step entails a discussion on the bill in the Nepal Parliament.

3. [Incidents on the Line of Actual Control \(LAC\) between India and China](#)

On May 22, the MEA Official Spokesperson clarified that Indian troops had not undertaken any activity across the LAC either in the western sector or the Sikkim sector. Indian troops are fully familiar with the alignment of the LAC in the India-China border areas and abide by it scrupulously.

The spokesman also added that in accordance with the consensus reached in Chennai during the India-China informal Summit, the Indian side remains firmly committed to the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the border areas. This is an essential prerequisite to the further development of India-China bilateral relations.

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson [stated](#) on May 29 that based on the consensus reached between leaders of the two sides, China strictly abides by relevant bilateral agreements and is committed to upholding national territorial sovereignty and security as well as maintaining peace and stability in the China-India border areas.

India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated on May 30 that there is an ongoing dialogue with China both at the military and diplomatic levels to resolve the LAC stand-off.

4. [EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar's virtual conversations with counterparts from Asia](#)

During the month, the External Affairs Minister of India held virtual conversations with his counterparts from Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan from Asia.

On May 29, EAM had a telephone conversation with Foreign Minister Tsogtbaatar Damdin of [Mongolia](#). The two reviewed progress on an oil refinery, solar and ICT projects. Mr. Damdin also shared insights on rapid response and medical interoperability during a pandemic.

On May 19, his conversation with the Foreign Minister of the [Republic of Korea](#), Ms. Kang Kyung-wha focused on the global issues of the post-corona world. The EAM earmarked the contribution that Korean business can make to India's economic recovery and also looked forward to India-ROK Joint Commission Meeting once it is safe to do so.

On May 8, in his talk with Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov of [Uzbekistan](#), EAM discussed issues of medical supply and travel in the context of Covid-19. The two also shared perspectives on Afghanistan and reviewed preparations for the India-Central Asia dialogue and other bilateral engagements.

On May 7, EAM conversed with Mr. Toshimitsu Motegi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of [Japan](#). They discussed the return of Indian nationals and also dwelt on challenges of economic recovery, including supply chain resilience. Dr. Jaishankar remarked that the India-Japan partnership is key to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

On May 6, Dr. S. Jaishankar discussed medical cooperation in response to the coronavirus challenge and reviewed other aspects of bilateral ties with the Foreign Minister of [Tajikistan](#), Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin. The two also reaffirmed their shared perspectives on developments in Afghanistan.



EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar, during his virtual conversation with Ms. Kang Kyung-wha, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea. Source: Twitter/@DrSJaishankar

5. [Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's telephonic conversations with counterparts from Asia](#)

On May 8, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a telephone conversation with the Minister for Defence of [Japan](#), Mr. Taro Kono. The two Defence Ministers had discussions on their nations' respective responses against



the COVID-19 pandemic. Rajnath Singh informed Mr. Kono on India's contribution to international efforts against COVID-19 and discussed areas of cooperation in the global fight against the pandemic. They also agreed that India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership provides a good basis for both countries to work together along with other countries in this regard to deal with the post-COVID-19 related challenges. Both ministers also conveyed their commitment to take forward the initiatives of bilateral security cooperation under the framework of the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

On May 26, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a telephone conversation with [Australian](#) Minister of Defence Ms Linda Reynolds. The two held exchanged views on their nations' respective responses against the COVID-19 pandemic. Rajnath Singh informed Ms Linda Reynolds on India's contribution to international efforts against COVID-19 and discussed areas of cooperation in the global fight against the pandemic. They also agreed that the India-Australia Strategic Partnership provides a good basis for both countries to work together along with other countries to deal with the post-COVID-19 related challenges.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Scott Morrison will meet virtually for the India-Australia bilateral summit on June 4, 2020.



II. North America

1. [EAM's virtual conversation with the Foreign Minister of Mexico](#)

On May 1, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar had a positive exchange with Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard C. of Mexico on the respective responses to coronavirus. They also discussed the importance of economic recovery post-COVID-19.

2. [EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar and NSA Mr. Ajit Doval's met Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation](#)

US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad called on EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar and NSA Mr. Ajit Doval in New Delhi on May 7. Mr. Khalilzad was accompanied by Senior Director in the US National Security Council, Ms. Lisa Curtis, and the US Ambassador to India, Mr. Ken Juster.

Mr. Khalilzad updated on the US peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan. The US side has recognised India's constructive contribution to economic development, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. They laid importance to India's crucial and continuing role in sustainable peace, security and stability.

EAM and NSA reiterated India's continued support for strengthening peace, security, unity, democratic and inclusive polity and protection of rights of all sections of the Afghan society, including Afghan Hindus and Sikhs.

3. [Defence Minister Rajnath Singh speaks with US Defence Secretary over phone](#)

On May 29, Defence Minister of India Rajnath Singh had a telephonic conversation with US Secretary of Defence Dr. Mark T Esper. The two Ministers briefed each other on their nations' respective experience of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and agreed to continue bilateral cooperation in this regard. They reviewed progress on various bilateral defence cooperation arrangements and expressed their commitment to further promote the India-US defence partnership. The two Ministers also exchanged views on regional developments of shared security interest.



III. Europe

1. [Prime Minister Narendra Modi's telephone conversation with counterparts from Europe](#)

Over the month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held telephone conversations with leaders from Portugal, Denmark and the Republic of Austria.

On May 5, the Prime Minister held a phone call with Mr. Antonio Costa, Prime Minister of [Portugal](#). The two leaders discussed the state of COVID-19 pandemic and the steps being taken by both countries to control their health and economic impact. The Prime Minister commended PM Costa for his effective handling of the crisis. The leaders noted that proactive national measures have helped limit the spread of the virus. They offered all possible help to each other in dealing with the situation and agreed to collaborate on research and innovation aimed at fighting COVID-19.

On May 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephone conversation with Ms. Mette Frederiksen, Prime Minister of [Denmark](#). The two leaders compared notes on the steps taken in the two countries to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Modi appreciated Denmark's success in lifting the lockdown restrictions without causing an increase in infections. It was agreed that Indian and Danish experts would remain in touch to learn from each other's experience.

The Prime Minister had a telephone conversation with Dr. Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President of the [Republic of Austria](#) on May 26. The leaders exchanged views on measures taken in their countries to manage the adverse health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. They agreed on the importance of international collaboration to deal with the present challenges. Both the leaders reiterated their shared desire to strengthen further and diversify India-Austria relations in the post-COVID world. The Prime Minister highlighted the opportunities for enhanced cooperation in sectors like infrastructure, technology, research and innovation, SMEs, etc.



2. [Third India-Danish Joint Commission Meeting held virtually](#)

Dr. S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India and Mr. Jeppe Kofod, Foreign Minister of Denmark, co-chaired the Third India-Danish Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) on May 12 via video conference.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at the progress made in the 8 Joint Working Groups (JWG) - on Renewable Energy, Environment, Agriculture & Animal Husbandry, Food Processing, Labour Mobility, Sustainable and Smart Urban Development, Science & Technology and Shipping. It was discussed that the recently constituted Joint Working Group on Digitization would meet soon. Both sides also explored the possibility of establishing a Joint Working Group on Health to facilitate closer cooperation between the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors, including institutional collaboration and joint research.

The two Ministers noted that the Covid-19 pandemic is posing a significant threat to a globally connected world; forcing countries to restrict travel & interaction. Both sides agreed to jointly fight the Covid-19 pandemic by agreeing to share Best Practices and exchange information on medical research, testing kits and development of vaccines. The Ministers welcomed the dialogue between the Statens Serum Institute in Denmark and the office of Principal Scientific Adviser in India.

The Ministers agreed to hold Foreign Office Consultations during the second half of 2020 to discuss bilateral relations and issues of regional and global importance and a Policy Planning Dialogue to promote sharing on strategic and global trends of mutual interest at a mutually convenient date in the near future.

3. [Virtual conversations of the EAM with counterparts from Europe](#)

Over the course of the month, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar held virtual conversations with foreign ministers of Austria and the UK.

On May 11, with the Foreign Minister of [Austria](#), Mr. Alexander Schallenberg, the EAM exchanged experiences on combatting coronavirus. He thanked Mr. Schallenberg for the Austrian Government's support to the Indian community there and hoped to carry the dialogue forward.

On May 19, Dr. Jaishankar had a conversation with Mr. Dominic Raab, the Foreign Secretary of the [UK](#). They discussed the India-UK cooperation amidst the ongoing pandemic as well as global issues and world politics.



IV. West Asia

1. [Prime Minister Narendra Modi's telephone conversations with counterparts from West Asia](#)

Over the course of the month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held telephone conversations with leaders from Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Egypt.

On May 25, the Prime Minister had a telephone conversation with His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahya, Crown Prince of [Abu Dhabi](#). The leaders expressed satisfaction about the effective cooperation between the two countries during the COVID-19 pandemic situation and Prime Minister Modi thanked the Crown Prince for the support extended to Indian citizens in UAE.

On May 26, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation with His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the [State of Qatar](#). The Prime Minister highlighted the attention being paid by Indian authorities to avoid any disruption in the supply of essential goods from India to Qatar during the present situation.

In a telephone conversation on May 26, Prime Minister Modi conveyed greetings for Eid-ul-Fitr to H.E. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, President of [Egypt](#), as well as to the people of Egypt. Prime Minister also expressed his appreciation for the support extended by Egyptian authorities for the safety and welfare of Indian nationals in Egypt during the COVID-19 crisis. Referring to his earlier planned visit to Egypt this year, which had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister conveyed his desire to meet President Sisi as soon as circumstances permit.

2. [Virtual conversation between EAM and the Foreign Minister of Israel](#)

On May 19, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar had a conversation with Mr. Gabi Ashkenazi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel. The two discussed the special relationship between India and Israel. [Mr. Ashkenazi](#) looked forward to working with the EAM and further strengthening and expanding the strong relations between India and Israel in multiple sectors.



V. Africa

1. [Telephonic conversation between Prime Minister and Prime Minister of Ethiopia](#)

On May 6, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephone conversation with Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The two leaders discussed the domestic, regional and global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and expressed solidarity with each other during the health crisis. The Prime Minister assured Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali of Indian support to Ethiopia, for ensuring supplies of essential medicines and ameliorating the economic impact of the pandemic.

VI. Latin America and the Caribbean

1. [External Affairs Minister's virtual conversations with counterparts from Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

Over the course of the month, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar held virtual conversations with Foreign Ministers of Argentina and St. Lucia.

On May 5, with Foreign Minister Felipe Sola of [Argentina](#), EAM discussed the coronavirus situation, economic recovery, multilateral cooperation and the ongoing global issues.

On May 1, with Foreign Minister Sarah Flood-Beaubrun of [St. Lucia](#), Dr. Jaishankar discussed India's engagement with the CARICOM. He assured Minister Flood-Beaubrun that India would be a reliable partner on medicines. The two agreed on the need to focus on economic recovery in the post corona situation.



VII. Multilateral Fora

1. [Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated at the online Summit of NAM Contact Group](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the online Summit of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group held on May 4, 2020, to discuss the response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

The online NAM Contact Group Summit on the theme of "United against COVID-19" was hosted by the current Chairman of NAM, President of Republic of Azerbaijan HE Ilham Aliyev. The objective of the Summit was to promote international solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and to mobilise efforts of States and international organisations to address the pandemic. The event also commemorated the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace.

PM Modi's participation underlined India's longstanding commitment to the principles and values of NAM as one of its leading founding-member. In his intervention, Prime Minister emphasised the importance of a coordinated, inclusive and equitable response by the world to this crisis, outlining the steps India had taken domestically and internationally, while reaffirming India's readiness to offer assistance in solidarity with the Movement, to the extent possible. PM also emphasised the importance of a continued effort by the world against other viruses, in particular, terrorism and fake news. Overall, the NAM Leaders assessed the impact of COVID-19, identified needs and requirements for possible remedies and urged action-oriented follow-up measures.

2. [Telephonic conversation between Prime Minister and President of the European Council](#)

On May 7, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephone conversation with Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council.

The two leaders discussed the situation of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in India and the European Union. They appreciated the cooperation extended in the face of the pandemic, including for ensuring supplies of essential pharmaceutical products. The leaders recognised the importance of regional and global coordination to address the health and economic impact of COVID-19 effectively.

3. [Video conference of the SCO Ministers of Foreign Affairs](#)

The Video Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Member States was convened by the current Chair, Russia on May 13, 2020. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, chaired the meeting and EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar represented India.

This video conference was convened in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and discussions centred around the COVID-19 crisis and coordination of the efforts to deal with its trade, economic and social consequences. The SCO Foreign Ministers also discussed the preparations for the SCO Council of Heads of State Meeting (SCO Summit) in Saint Petersburg, the situation in Afghanistan and the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of World War II.

In his remarks, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar thanked the Russian Foreign Minister for convening this extraordinary meeting. He reaffirmed India's strong commitment to the joint fight against Covid-19 pandemic and its readiness to share information, expertise and best practices to the SCO Member States. He emphasised that India attaches great importance to its relations with SCO and has contributed positively to enhance the role of SCO in the global arena since its inclusion as a full member of SCO in 2017. He also assured that India would continue to maintain extensive engagement towards strengthening SCO's potential in ensuring mutually beneficial development. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the SCO Member States approved and adopted a [Statement](#) on the pandemic coronavirus (COVID-19) at the end of the meeting.



*Video Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.
Source: SCO*

4. [Joint Video Conference of the EAM with counterparts from Australia, Brazil, Israel, Japan, South Korea and the US](#)

On May 11, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar participated in a joint video conference with counterparts from Australia, Brazil, Israel, Japan, South Korea and the US. The call was initiated by United States secretary of state Mike Pompeo and covered topics such as response to the COVID-19 pandemic, global health management, medical cooperation, economic recovery and travel norms.

The foreign ministers [discussed](#) the importance of international cooperation, transparency and accountability in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and in addressing its causes. The ministers also discussed collaboration toward preventing future global health crises and reaffirmed the importance of rules-based international order.

5. [EAM's Video conference with the Vice President of EU Commission](#)

On May 28, EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar conducted a review meeting of the India-EU relations with the High Representative of the EU for Foreign and Security Affairs/ Vice President of the EU Commission, Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles. The two discussed initiatives to promote economic recovery post-COVID-19. They underlined shared perspectives on technology, connectivity and security and also discussed ongoing preparations for the India-EU Summit.



EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar conducting a review meeting with the Vice President of the EU Commission, Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles on May 28, 2020. Source: [Twitter/@DrSJaishankar](#)



6. [Dr. Harsh Vardhan elected as Chair of Executive Board of WHO](#)

On May 22, India's Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Harsh Vardhan was elected as Chair of the Executive Board of World Health Organization for the year 2020-21.

As the new Chair of the Executive Board of WHO, Dr Harsh Vardhan underlined the need for higher commitments in respect of diseases that have plagued humankind for centuries, collaborations for supplementing each other by pooling of global resources, an aggressive roadmap to curtail deaths from diseases that can be eliminated, a fresh roadmap to address global shortages of medicines and vaccines and the need for reforms.

He also shared his thoughts on the future health scenario of the world. "I believe that health is central to economic performance and enhancing human capabilities. However, public health policy must be based and guided on a proper understanding of nature. This is also the underlying principle of the traditional Indian systems of medicine based on holistic health and wellness, which I have lived and experienced", he said. He also outlined the policy of India towards 'Universal Health for All' through national flagships programmes such as Ayushman Bharat with its twin pillars of Health & Wellness centres (HWCs) and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), being led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Executive Board of the WHO is composed of 34 technically qualified members elected for a three-year term and its main functions are to implement the decisions and policies of the Health Assembly and advise and facilitate its work.

7. [Dr. Harsh Vardhan participates in NAM Health Ministers' meeting through Video Conference](#)

The Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Dr. Harsh Vardhan participated in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Health Ministers' meeting through video conference on May 20. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ogtay Shiraliyev, Minister of Health, Republic of Azerbaijan.

NAM expressed its concern at the global threat posed by COVID-19 and resolved to fight it with proper preparedness, prevention, resilience-building, and greater national, regional and international collaboration. In Dr. Harsh Vardhan's address at the meeting, he called for international collaboration to fight the coronavirus along with other challenges such as climate change. He stressed on the need for the global institutions of



governance to become more democratic, transparent and representative in order to be credible and effective.

Dr. Vardhan apprised NAM of India's fight against COVID-19. India's policy of micro identification, mass isolation and quick treatment reaped good dividends in preventing large scale spread and deaths due to COVID-19.

He also enlisted India's assistance to other countries, particularly in the neighbourhood. Living up to its reputation as the pharmacy of the world, especially for affordable medicines, India has provided medical supplies to over 123 partner countries, including 59 members of NAM. In conclusion, he hoped for constructive deliberations, cooperation and collaboration in the spirit of solidarity and fraternity that characterizes NAM.

8. [Dr Harsh Vardhan participates in the 73rd World Health Assembly through Video Conference](#)

On May 18, Dr. Harsh Vardhan Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare participated in the 73rd World Health Assembly (WHA) through Video Conference. He outlined India's efforts to combat the COVID-19 challenge. He remarked that India took all necessary steps well in time, including surveillance at points of entry, evacuation of nationals stranded overseas, massive community surveillance through robust disease surveillance network, strengthening of health infrastructure, capacity building of over two million frontline human resources, risk communication and community involvement. India has also supplied essential medicines to 123 nations as an expression of solidarity.

Recognising that therapeutics, diagnostics and vaccines are the only way out of this pandemic, the Health Minister highlighted the need for global collaboration. He also stressed on the need to pool resources to pay for the risk, research, manufacturing and distribution, with the condition that rewards should be available to everyone, irrespective of where it has been developed.

9. [Dr Harsh Vardhan participates in the 32nd Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting through Video Conferencing](#)

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, participated in the 32nd Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting through Video Conference on May 14. The theme of the meeting was- Delivering a coordinated Commonwealth COVID-19 response.



In his statement, the Union Health Minister remarked India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as pro-active, pre-emptive and graded. In implementing the world's largest lockdown, India aims to protect lives by mitigating the explosive growth of the disease and by ensuring that its healthcare system is able to cope with the growth of the disease. He further stated that at the same time, India is also mindful of saving lives as well as livelihoods and is, therefore, keeping all essential services out of the purview of the lockdown.

He also mentioned that the recovery package of more than 265 billion USD announced by PM Modi would support economic recovery as well as vulnerable segments of the Indian society. India has been the first country to urge consolidated global action to fight the challenge of COVID-19. It convened a meeting of SAARC leaders in mid-March in which the need for "coming together, not growing apart; collaboration not confusion; and preparation, not panic", was underlined. These are the elements that signify India's response to this crisis, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said.

In conclusion, he also highlighted the need to facilitate universal and affordable access to all relevant medical products and technologies, both existing and new. These should be made available fairly and equitably to tackle COVID-19.

10. [Indian Commerce and Industry Minister participates in the 2nd G20 Trade & Investment Ministers Virtual Meeting](#)

On May 14, the G20 nations convened for the 2nd G20 Virtual Trade and Investment Ministers Meeting, held through Video-conferencing. Piyush Goyal, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, represented India. During his interventions, the Minister asked the G20 members to focus on immediate and concrete actions that can ease the distress that has been caused due to the coronavirus pandemic. He strongly called for an agreement to enable the use of TRIPs flexibilities to ensure access to essential medicines, treatments and vaccines at affordable prices. He also called upon the G-20 nations to agree to provide diagnostic and protective equipment and healthcare professionals across borders where they are most needed. Instead of doing away with the policy instrument of export restrictions, the Minister urged the G20 members to deliberate on eliminating the historic asymmetries in the Agreement on Agriculture, and delivering on the longstanding Ministerial mandate to establish permanent, adequate and accessible disciplines on Public Stockholding.

The Minister also said that widely regarded as the 'Pharmacy of the World', India is proactively partnering in global efforts to develop vaccines and



effective treatment for this disease. India has unconditionally provided medical supplies to over 120 countries to combat this disease, of which 43 countries received it as a grant.

Underscoring the wide digital divide between developed and developing countries, the Minister stressed on the urgent need to build the digital skills and capacities of developing countries and LDCs, rather than rushing to make binding rules on digital trade and e-commerce, which will freeze the extremely non-level playing field against their interests, and deprive them of the opportunity to benefit from the immense potential in these areas.



VIII. Repatriation of Indian Nationals

1. [India's largest repatriation programme underway to bring back citizens stranded abroad](#)

On May 7, the Government of India launched the 'Vande Bharat' Mission, the largest exercise ever undertaken for the repatriation of Indian nationals stranded overseas. The first phase (May 7-16) resulted in the repatriation of 16,716 stranded Indians on 64 flights from 12 countries.

The second phase (May 17-June 13), which is ongoing is expected to bring back 100,000 Indians stranded in 60 countries across the globe due to the COVID-19 pandemic. MEA Official Spokesperson informed that as of 4 pm, May 27, "45,216 Indians have returned. These include 8,069 migrant workers, 7,656 students and 5,107 professionals. About 5,000 Indians have returned through land border immigration checkpoints from Nepal and Bangladesh." Unlike in the first phase that had flights only operated by Air India, private airlines have been included in the second phase of the Vande Bharat Mission. The spokesman also [informed](#) that 308,200 Indian nationals around the world have registered with missions abroad to be repatriated under the Vande Bharat Mission. The complete list of flights under the Mission is available [here](#).

From May 8, under Phase I of the Vande Bharat Mission, the Indian Navy launched Operation' [Samudra Setu](#)', as part of the national effort to repatriate Indian citizens from overseas. It repatriated 1,488 Indian nationals from Male to Kochi and is expected to commence the [next phase](#) from June 1. Under this phase, the Indian Navy's warships will make four sorties to bring back stranded Indians from Iran, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.



DPG

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

www.delhipolicygroup.org