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# a brand new normal

Following the global pandemic of novel Coronavirus, India has been at the forefront of digital conferences both within and outside the country. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is leading and adapting to the new way of reaching out to people, turning the adversity into an opportunity

By Akshat Jain

**A**s the world changes rapidly around us, the diplomacy at the highest end and the way it is conducted is evolving as well. Events are unfolding around the world every minute and the flow of

information is constant, regardless of time zones and lockdowns enforced by countries to fight the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Ensuring swift, effective and sustained channels of communication becomes even more critical in the



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (C), External Affairs Minister of India Dr S Jaishankar (far left) and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval (far right) at the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit in New Delhi on June 04



The ambassadors and high commissioners of Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Senegal, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, Australia, Cote d'Ivoire and Rwanda present their credentials to the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, through video conference

world of global diplomacy, especially during times like these.

As countries around the world continue being in lockdowns and social distancing becoming the new norm, diplomatic visits too have come to a halt. But diplomacy hasn't. Under the aegis of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is turning this adversity into an opportunity, by conducting routine diplomatic engagements online and reaching out to nations and leaders, particularly as the situation demands better coordination among world leaders to work out an effective global response to the unprecedented spread of the pandemic. With positive

diplomatic outreach becoming more important than ever at this point, virtual meetings and online summits have emerged as the new tool for communication.

### **Virtual diplomacy, Real Results**

The Indian government has led and been part of multiple virtual conferences and summits during these tough times. India took the lead in getting South Asian leaders to meet through a video conference to explore cooperation in combating the corona crisis and galvanise SAARC (South Asian

**INDIA, WITH THE RIGHT BLEND OF THE PHYSICAL AND THE VIRTUAL CAN EMERGE AS THE GLOBAL NERVE CENTRE OF COMPLEX MODERN MULTINATIONAL SUPPLY CHAINS IN THE POST COVID-19 WORLD. LET US RISE TO THAT OCCASION AND SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY.**

**narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India

## Safe & secure

As a secure and safe option to various video conferencing apps, the National Informatics Centre (NIC), Government of India, has launched an application named "Vidyo" where all recorded videos of conferences are saved on government servers and can be accessed by authorised personnel.

Association for Regional Cooperation) member nations into action. New Delhi also pressed for a G20 video meeting which was convened on March 26 last year. Since then the UNSC, EU and NATO have all adapted and connected through video conferencing.

On May 4, PM Modi took part in the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) online summit, along with 30 other heads of states and governments, the President of the United Nations and the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO). In his first address to the grouping since assuming office in 2014, PM Modi reiterated the importance of reforms aimed towards inclusive global engagements and the need

global pandemic of COVID-19.

On June 04, PM Modi held the first-ever bilateral 'virtual summit' when he met his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison through video conference, making it their fourth meeting in the last eighteen months.

India and Australia announced that they shall be raising their diplomatic relations further by elevating the bilateral Strategic Partnership concluded in 2009, to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) and promoting "2+2" engagements at the defence and foreign ministry level. Apart from this, there were a host of other declarations and MOUs being agreed upon for

PM Modi participating in the G20 Virtual Summit to discuss the global response to COVID-19 on March 26







supply chain management, cyberspace and agriculture. A new joint fund was also set up which would enable Indian and Australian researchers to develop an antiviral drug for COVID-19.

Another important aspect of the meeting was the arrangement for increased Maritime Security coordination between the two countries. PM Modi stressed on the importance of the Indo-Pacific region's security as a worldwide concern with PM Morrison acknowledging a growing role for India

to ensure harmony and prosperity in the region.

Not just the Prime Minister, India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S Jaishankar also participated in a virtual foreign ministers' meeting for BRICS and a virtual meeting of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) foreign ministers through a video conference.

Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi virtually addressing the 25th Foundation Day of the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences at Bengaluru

not only on the global platform, the use of video conferences has been a tool that has been used extensively by the Indian government on the domestic front as well

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abroad as well as with other foreign ministers across the globe. The EAM has held detailed virtual discussions with his counterparts from several countries.

Apart from high-level diplomatic engagements, communication with Indian missions across the world is also being conducted through digital means. The MEA has been regularly engaging with Indian ambassadors in various regions and sub-regions in recent days. On April 23, 2020, EAM Dr S Jaishankar tweeted “The changing world of corona era diplomacy. Strong friendships thrive even virtually”, referring to his regular virtual conversations with Indian ambassadors

### **The Digital Era**

Of course with virtual conferences a new set of challenges will come in place for the leaders around the world. For example, face-to-face meetings, gaining trust of the other side and reading between the lines are some of the key components of diplomacy which will be replaced with video conferencing.



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi with the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison at the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit, in New Delhi on June 04



**Left to right:** External Affairs Minister of India Dr S Jaishankar and Secretary (East) Vijay Thakur Singh (right) hold a virtual meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, Kang, Kyung-wha

The Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, Dr Harsh Vardhan attends a virtual meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Health Ministers



But despite this, the benefits of the virtual diplomacy far outweigh its costs. As economies shrink and the world battles with recession and austerity, virtual conferences and summits are going to be not only time efficient but also a cost efficient way of diplomacy.

In order to develop a comprehensive video conferencing solution for India and to push the Digital India reforms, the government launched an innovation challenge last month. According to the National Policy on Software Products, this innovation is aimed at developing an Indian tool for video conferencing to enhance local expertise.

As India takes to the virtual space to conduct business, the government is taking strong cyber security measures not only when it comes to official government and public sector dealings but also for private citizens.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has set out detailed instructions for citizens using various conferencing apps and about the challenges of data security as well as standard operating practices.

In the current volatile situation, international virtual summits and conferences have successfully bridged the communication gap between the countries.

For the foreseeable future, as nations around the globe struggle with the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and worldwide travel restrictions continue to be in place, it may be necessary for diplomacy to be conducted largely through virtual means, and this may become the new way of diplomacy going forward.



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