



The E- diplomacy Experiment

Context:

- The **first India-Australia virtual leaders' summit** on June 4 had a lot on the menu, ranging from military interoperability to jointly tackling COVID-19.
- The two countries upgraded their relations to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership'. The summit was noteworthy for its novel modus operandi.



E-diplomacy:

- The Indian PM has engaged in a few **multilateral 'e-diplomacy'** rounds since the COVID-19 outbreak like the SAARC leaders' video conference, G20 Leaders' Summit via video link and the Non-Aligned Movement virtual summit.

Recent development in India-Australia ties:

- India and Australia have upgraded their relations to a '**comprehensive strategic partnership**'.
- The dangers posed by COVID-19 have compelled the **traditional art of summit diplomacy** to adapt. Just as corporations and educational institutions have migrated to online mediums, nation states are left with no choice but to do the same.
- **E-summits are physically safer for leaders and also time-saving and economical.**

What are the challenges?

Effectiveness:

- There is a danger that 'e-diplomacy' will become less productive in terms of deliverables, especially with respect to crucial sticking points.
- With backroom negotiations by lower-level bureaucrats communicating remotely, online summits may not be able to satisfy the broader political goals and bigger objectives.

Threat of cyber security:

- A major threat to virtual summits comes from cyber insecurity.

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- In pre-COVID-19 times, summit venues used to be thoroughly sanitised and debugged to prevent sensitive foreign policy content from being spied upon or leaked. **E-diplomacy is riskier and could be subject to hacking of classified content.**

Conclusion:

- With Australia and India trying to forge **coalitions of middle powers in sustaining the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific**, gaps in diplomatic summits can convey weakening of collective resolve.
- Key partners like India and Australia have to get on with diplomatic relations and hold high-level meetings as part of their **strategic signaling**. Having online summit is better than no summit at all.