

**NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT(NAM) IN INDIA: IN RESPOND TO
COVID-19**

DR. PANKAJ KUMAR SHARMA

University Department of Commerce & Business Management

Ranchi University, Ranchi

SUKRITI BAGH

(Research Scholar)

University Department of Commerce & Business Management

Ranchi University, Ranchi

ABSTRACT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi address to a summit of the non-aligned nations last week has generated criticism as well as commendation. Both sides, however, miss the recent evolution of the Indian thinking on the NAM. External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has spoken frequently about India's stakes in the so-called "Global South". He was invoking a term that refers to the entire developing world and not just members of the NAM. The minister has talked about consolidating long-standing political equities that Delhi had created in the NAM and the Global South over the last many decades. The new interest is not a throwback to seeing the NAM as an anti-Western ideological crusade. Nor is it pretence of valuing the movement but treating it as a ritual to be performed every three years. It is based on the bet that the NAM remains a critical diplomatic forum for the pursuit of India's international interests. Express full support to the United Nations Secretary-General's plans and initiatives to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. My paper is going to discuss about the scenario of this movement in India.

Keyword: NAM, Online conference, Global, COVID-19, Nations

INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the online Summit of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group was held on 4 May 2020 to discuss the response to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The summit commemorated the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace

In a video statement, PM supports a more representative post-COVID-19 world order. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an indirect reference to Pakistan during an online meeting of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group, and said some countries were fomenting terrorism in the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic. The Indian leader supported a more representative post-COVID-19 world order and urged the World Health Organization (WHO) to focus on building health capacity in the developing countries.

But why has a routine speech by the PM on promoting global cooperation in combating the coronavirus gotten so much attention? One reason is its billing as Modi's first address ever to the NAM. After all, he had skipped the last two NAM summits, at Venezuela in 2016 and Azerbaijan in 2019. Critics of the NDA's foreign policy convinced themselves that Modi had no real attachment for the non-aligned legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru. For the traditionalists, Modi's engagement with the NAM was a welcome return to roots. For those who see the NAM as a political dinosaur, Delhi's renewed enthusiasm for it seems like a regression. But a closer look at the Modi government's foreign policy actions reveals a three-fold rationale for intensifying engagement with the NAM.

One, those who say the NAM is a relic of the Cold War must also acknowledge that a new Cold War is beginning to unfold, this time between the US and China. As the conflict between the world's two most important powers envelops all dimensions of international society, India has every reason to try and preserve some political space in between the two. Second, in the last few years, Delhi paid lip-service to the NAM but devoted a lot of diplomatic energy to forums like BRICS. Given the Russian and Chinese leadership of BRICS, Delhi inevitably began to tamely echo the international positions of Moscow and Beijing rather than represent voices of the Global South. Finally, as a nation seeking to become an independent pole in global affairs, India could do more with forums like the NAM in mobilising support on issues of interest to Delhi. An independent Indian line backed by strong support within the NAM can make a big difference to the outcomes of the impending

contentions at the World Health Assembly later this month on reviewing the WHO's performance during the COVID crisis.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MOVEMENT

- In his first address to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit since assuming office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday flagged the issues of “terrorism” and “fake news”, calling them “deadly viruses” at a time when the world fights the novel coronavirus.
- Modi said they should develop a platform for NAM countries to pool their “experiences, best practices, crisis-management protocols, research, and resources”.
- “NAM should call upon the international community and the WHO to focus on building health-capacity in developing countries. We should ensure equitable, affordable and timely access to health products and technologies for all,” he said.
- “Even as the world fights COVID-19, some people are busy spreading other deadly viruses. Such as terrorism. Such as fake news, and doctored videos to divide communities and countries,” he said.
- This was the first time Modi participated in a NAM summit — he had become the first Indian Prime Minister to skip the NAM summit in 2016 and in 2019 too.
- The NAM leaders announced creation of a task force to identify requirements of member countries through a common database reflecting their basic medical, social and humanitarian needs in the fight against COVID-19.
- Calling it the “most serious crisis” humanity has faced in decades, Modi underlined that at this time, NAM can help promote global solidarity. “NAM has often been the world’s moral voice. To retain this role, NAM must remain inclusive.”
- He added that COVID-19 has shown limitations of the existing international system. In the post-COVID world, a new template of globalisation, based on fairness, equality, and humanity is needed, he said. “We need international institutions that are more representative of today’s world.”
- The online NAM Contact Group Summit on “United against COVID-19” was hosted by current NAM Chairman and Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev.
- Over 30 Heads of State and other leaders joined the summit. The Summit was also addressed by UN General Assembly president Prof Tijjani Muhammed Bande, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, African Union chairperson Musa Faki Mahamat, EU High Representative Josep Borrell, as well as WHO chief Tedros Ghebreyesus.

- “Following the Summit, leaders adopted a Declaration underlining the importance of international solidarity in the fight against COVID-19. Leaders also announced the creation of a ‘Task Force’ to identify needs and requirements of member States....,” a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said.
- The theme of the online NAM Contact Group Summit was '**United against COVID-19.**'
- The summit was hosted by the current Chairman of NAM, **President of the Republic of Azerbaijan HE Ilham Aliyev.**
- The Summit aimed to promote international solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and to mobilize efforts of States and international organizations to address the pandemic.
- Over 30 other Heads of State and Government and other leaders, including from member States in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and Europe participated in the event.
- The Summit was addressed by the President of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) **Prof Tijjani Muhammed Bande**, UN Secretary-General **Mr. Antonio Guterres**, African Union (AU) Chairperson **Musa Faki Mahamat**, European Union (EU) High Representative, **Josep Borrell**, and Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) **Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus.**
- The leaders also discussed the creation of a 'Task Force' to identify the needs and requirements of Member States through the establishment of a common database that reflects the basic medical, social, and humanitarian needs in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT IS THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM)?

The NAM is a forum of 120 developing world states that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. The group was started in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961. After the UN, it is the largest grouping of states worldwide.

FORMATION

- NAM emerged in the context of the wave of decolonization that followed World War II.
- It was created by Yugoslavia's President, Josip Broz Tito, India's first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt's second President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah, and Indonesia's first President, Sukarno.

- All five leaders believed that developing countries should not help either the Western or Eastern blocs in the Cold War.
- As a condition for membership, the states of the NAM cannot be part of a multilateral military alliance (such as the NATO) or have signed a bilateral military agreement with one of the “big powers” involved in Great Power conflicts.
- However, its idea does not signify that a state ought to remain passive or even neutral in international politics.

TERMS OF SUMMITS

- Unlike the UN or the Organization of American States, the NAM has no formal constitution or permanent secretariat.
- All members of the NAM have equal weight within its organization.
- The movement’s positions are reached by consensus in the Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government, which usually convenes every three years.
- The administration of the organization is the responsibility of the country holding the chair, a position that rotates at every summit.
- The ministers of foreign affairs of the member states meet more regularly in order to discuss common challenges, notably at the opening of each regular session of the UN General Assembly.

IT’S RELEVANCE TODAY

- One of the challenges of the NAM in the 21st century has been to reassess its identity and purpose in the post-Cold War era.
- The movement has continued to advocate for international cooperation, multilateralism, and national self-determination, but it has also been increasingly vocal against the inequities of the world economic order.
- On the contrary, from the founding of the NAM, its stated aim has been to give a voice to developing countries and to encourage their concerted action in world affairs.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

- **Other deadly viruses**

“Even as we fight COVID virus, some people are busy spreading other deadly viruses such as terrorism, fake news and doctored videos to divide communities and countries,” said Mr. Modi in a video statement to the NAM grouping, which met on the theme of “United against COVID-19”. This may be seen as a reference by Prime Minister Modi to Pakistan’s role in supporting cross-border terrorism in recent days, with a spike in ceasefire violations across the Line of Control in Kashmir. On Sunday, India lost five security personnel in an anti-terror operation in north Kashmir’s Handwara.

The comment also takes a dig at Pakistan’s alleged role in the on-going social media spat between Indian and Gulf-based commentators. Indian authorities have maintained that some of the social media posts against Indian interests in the Gulf were promoted by Pakistan-based activists.

- **Virtual summit**

Mr. Modi was joined by more than 300 heads of state and governments from across the world in the virtual summit. That apart, the meeting included the President of the UN General Assembly Professor Tijjani Muhammed Bande, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, African Union Chairperson Musa Faki Mahamat, European Union High Representative Josep Borrel, and Director General of the WHO Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus. The leaders announced the creation of a Task Force for a “common database” showing medical, social and humanitarian details from the participating countries.

“NAM should call on WHO to focus on health capacity building in developing countries,” Mr. Modi said about the path ahead for the global health body.

- **New template**

Prime Minister Modi highlighted India’s constructive role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and said India has been carrying out “disaster management drills” while other countries had been organising military drills. He said the post-COVID-19 world order should be more representative. “The post-COVID world needs a new template for globalisation,” said Mr. Modi, urging reform in international organisations.

The summit leaders adopted a declaration underlining the importance of international solidarity in the fight against COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

For the first time since he took over six years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday took part in a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, albeit virtually, where he raised issues about terrorism, fake news and “doctored videos” with an eye towards India’s Western neighbour. On Monday, Modi joined over 30 heads of states and governments of NAM member states in an online summit convened by the current chair, Azerbaijan’s president Ilham Aliyev. A press note of the Ministry of External Affairs observed that “PM Modi’s participation underlined India’s longstanding commitment to the principles and values of NAM as one of its leading founding-member”. Modi didn’t attend the last two NAM leaders’ summits held in 2016 at Venezuela and 2019 in Baku. In his intervention, Modi highlighted India’s efforts to fight the novel coronavirus, as well as sending medical supplies to 123 countries, out of which 59 are NAM member states. But he also pointed a finger at Pakistan, without taking its name. “Even as the world fights COVID-19, some people are busy spreading other deadly viruses. Such as terrorism. Such as fake news, and doctored videos to divide communities and countries,” he said, adding, “But today, I want to focus only on the positives”.

In recent days, the Ministry of External Affairs had largely used the tag “fake” for Twitter handles in the Arab world. India has repeatedly referred to the fake Twitter handle of an Omani princess as an example of efforts by vested interests to create discord in relations between New Delhi and Gulf countries. The Indian foreign office’s finger was pointing straight at Pakistan. While the ministry had spoken about a surge in anti-India propaganda, there was no specific acknowledgment of the Islamophobic social media posts by Indians based in UAE, or tweets by the ruling party and other BJP supporters in the wake of the emergence of a COVID-19 cluster after a gathering of Tablighi Jamaat members. Indian missions in the Gulf had cautioned the Indian community to remain on the right side of the law and follow the strict anti-discriminatory laws. The Indian prime minister’s reference to terrorism and fake news could also be a counter of the Pakistani President Arif Alvi, who took part in the video conference. Alvi spoke much earlier than Modi, since as per diplomatic protocol; heads of states take precedence over heads of government. In his remarks, Alvi had claimed that there had been an “alarming increase in religious

intolerance, hate speech, Islamophobia, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination” due to the coronavirus pandemic. “Children, women and elderly have faced verbal abuse, death threats and physical attacks. Muslims have been denied access to vital health services. Nowhere are these trends more pronounced than in our immediate neighbourhood,” Alvi said, as reported by *Dawn*. The Pakistani president also raised Kashmir, referring to the restrictions as having impaired the fight against coronavirus. The last time that Pakistan raised Kashmir during a multilateral video conference on COVID-19, India had issued a strong protest.

At the end of the virtual summit, a declaration was issued which specifically said that NAM “fully supported” the World Health Organisation and its “leadership”. The United States had withdrawn funding to WHO, with the Donald Trump administration claiming that the director general Tedros Ghebreyesus was aligned towards Beijing and not holding China accountable for the start of the pandemic. India has, so far, asserted that assailing the WHO leadership in the midst of a full-blown pandemic was not good timing. However, New Delhi was open to revisiting this question once the crisis had blown over. The NAM declaration also called for the removal of “unilateral coercive measures”, that is sanctions against NAM members states. The United States has imposed sanctions on Venezuela, Cuba and Iran.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32669/Intervention+by+the+Prime+Minister+at+Online+Summit+of+NAM+Contact+Group>
- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-modi-at-nam-summit-terrorism-fake-news-deadly-viruses-6394202/>
- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/narendra-modi-video-address-nam-summit-6403546/>
- <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/at-his-first-nam-meeting-modi-raises-terrorism-fake-news-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32670/Prime+Minister+participates+at+the+online+Summit+of+NAM+Contact+Group#:~:text=The%20online%20NAM%20Contact%20Group,United%20against%20COVID%2D19%E2%80%9D.&text=The%20objective%20of%20the%20Summit,organisations%20to%20address%20the%20pandemic.>
- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/some-countries-are-fomenting-terrorism-in-the-midst-of-the-pandemic-pm-modi-tells-nam/article31505332.ece>

- https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-participates-at-the-online-summit-of-nam-contact-group/