



e-Diplomacy

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Why in News

Recently, the **first India-Australia Virtual Leaders' Summit** was held where important strategic decisions, ranging from military interoperability to jointly tackling the **pandemic**, were made.

The summit was noteworthy for its **novel modus operandi** after the dangers posed by **Covid-19** have compelled the traditional summit diplomacy to adapt to new digital ways.

Key Points

- **e-Diplomacy (electronic diplomacy)** is the use of technology by nations to define and establish diplomatic goals and objectives and to efficiently carry out the functions of diplomats.
 - These functions include representation and promotion of the home nation, establishing both bilateral and multilateral relations, consular services and social engagement.
- The pandemic has forced mankind to **maintain physical and social distancing**, leading to a **shift towards work from home mode and using online platforms** for education (**online classes**), business (**e-Commerce**) and other daily things.
 - Just as corporations and educational institutions have migrated to online mediums, nation-states are left with no choice but to do the same by conducting virtual or e-summits.
- **Advantages:**
 - These are **physically safer** for leaders because there is no need for any physical contact with anyone.
 - The process is **time-saving** as the leaders can attend the summits and conferences from their offices without having the need to physically reach the venue or other country.
 - These **economise events** by avoiding costly physical journeys and event management.

- **Challenges:**

- It is **doubtful** that major breakthroughs or deals requiring the direct intervention of leaders can happen **without all the protocols and structured dialogues** in person.
- There is a possibility of **e-diplomacy becoming less productive** as online summits will simply **not satisfy the broader political goals and bigger objectives** that heads of state carry with them.
- Threats related to **cybersecurity** also come in the picture:
 - E-diplomacy is riskier and could be subject to **hacking** of classified content.
 - This could reduce the spontaneity and openness of the conversations.
 - In pre-Covid-19 times, summit venues were debugged to prevent sensitive foreign policy content from being spied upon or leaked.
- Apart from the virtual summit with Australia, India has had a **few multilateral e-diplomacy rounds** since the Covid-19 outbreak. **For example,**
 - **SAARC Leaders' video conference.**
 - **Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit.**
 - **Non-Aligned Movement Virtual Summit.**

Way Forward

- The **British scholar Ernest Satow** dubbed “**summits a permanent feature of diplomatic topography**”. It has been a maxim in diplomacy that face-to-face interactions at the highest level mark the zenith of foreign relations.
- In-person summits will restart one-day but the **online interlude has to go on because diplomacy has to go on.**
- However artificial and unsatisfying the video conferencing medium is, **having some summit is better than no summit at all.** Key partners have to get on with it and hold high-level meetings as part of their strategic signalling.

Source: TH