



drishti

Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on COVID-19

 drishtiias.com/printpdf/video-conference-of-saarc-leaders-on-covid-19

Why in News

The **Video Conference of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Leaders on COVID-19** was held recently.

- All the **members of SAARC** (India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan) attended the conference.
- The conference is considered as a **step towards the revival of SAARC** as the SAARC Summit has not taken place since 2014 because of India-Pakistan tensions.



Key Points

- **COVID-19 Emergency Fund:**
 - India has proposed to create a **COVID-19 Emergency Fund** which could be based on a **voluntary contribution** from all SAARC members.
 - Further, **\$10 million** has been extended by **India** as a contribution to the fund.
 - The fund can be used to meet the **cost of immediate actions** by any member and will be coordinated through foreign secretaries and embassies of the member countries.
 - The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** has also constituted the **COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund** with the help of corporate bodies, foundations and the UN Foundation.

- **Other Proposals by India:**
 - India has also proposed a **rapid response team of doctors and specialists**, along with testing kits and other equipment for all the member countries.
 - India has set up an **Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal** to better trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted. India has offered to share it with member countries.
- **Economic Issues and Measure:**
 - The conference also discussed **longer-term economic consequences** of COVID-19.
 - The member countries have also proposed **to insulate internal trade of South Asia and local value chains** from its impact.
- **Measures by SAARC to Manage Health Pandemics:**
 - It has been decided to frame and enforce the **common SAARC pandemic protocols**.
 - The members have also decided to establish a **working group of national authorities for health information, data exchange and coordination** in real-time.
 - It has also proposed a **SAARC health ministers' conference** and the **development of regional mechanisms** to share disease surveillance data in real-time.
- **Country-Specific Issues:**
 - **Afghanistan** has highlighted the **vulnerability** as it shares a **long and open border with Iran**, one of the worst affected countries in the world.
 - The **Maldives** has cited the **economic downturn** owing to the **drop in tourists inflow from Italy, China and Europe - the main source of tourists for the country** and sought a South Asian response to the crisis.
 - The **tourism-dependent countries like Bhutan, Sri Lanka** has also sighted issues related to the **economic slowdown**.

Source: TH