

# CHINA 'READY TO SUPPORT' INDIA, OFFERS VACCINES TO SOUTH ASIA

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New equations:China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi at an event in Beijing, in this file photo.AFPWANG ZHAO

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday offered Chinese vaccines to countries in South Asia to ensure "a more diversified and stable" regional supply and said Beijing was also "ready to provide support and assistance" to India.

Mr. Wang was speaking at the fourth multilateral dialogue involving countries in South Asia on coordinating their COVID-19 responses and economic recoveries. The virtual dialogue involving the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka marked China's stepped up engagement in the region following the pandemic, and was the latest in a series of meetings involving all countries in South Asia barring India, Bhutan and the Maldives. China previously held a meeting of Foreign Ministers with Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan, a dialogue with Vice-Foreign Ministers involving Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, as well as a meeting at the Director General level of the six countries that again met on Tuesday.

## Assistance to India

Mr. Wang said at the meet that China had "extended an invitation to India" and also expressed its sympathy and condolences amid the current COVID-19 surge. He said China is "ready to provide support and assistance to the Indian people at any time according to the needs of India".

The Chinese Foreign Minister called on the six countries to work together in fighting against COVID-19 and said China was prepared to offer its vaccines through flexible arrangements to ensure "more diversified and stable" vaccine supplies for countries in South Asia. China has also raised a proposal of establishing an emergency reserve for supplies for South Asian countries.

Mr. Wang called on the countries, all of which are involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative, to explore "fast channels" to enable exchanges of people and commodities and said China would establish a poverty reduction development cooperation centre for South Asia to share its experiences.

Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali in a statement said the country supported the need for "an enhanced level of regional and international cooperation for COVID-19 response and economic recovery".

Nepal's Foreign Ministry said China had agreed to provide Nepal "with an additional grant of medical equipment and materials equivalent to 5 million RMB [around Rs 5.7 crore] to complement national efforts in fighting against COVID-19."

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