

# CHINA HOLDS THIRD EDITION OF SOUTH ASIA MULTILATERAL MEET

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

Hua Chunying

China has held its third multilateral dialogue with countries from South Asia to take forward closer cooperation on fighting COVID-19 and coordinating their economic agendas, reflecting a new approach in Beijing's outreach to the region.

The third dialogue, held virtually on January 6, brought together every country in the region barring India, Bhutan and the Maldives, and was aimed at "anti-epidemic cooperation and poverty reduction cooperation", China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

All three dialogues have been attended by Pakistan and Nepal, which are emerging as two lynchpins in China's regional strategy. The first such meeting was convened by China in July, and was attended by Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan. This was followed by a grouping in November attended by China, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The January 6 meeting was attended by all five countries that have taken part in these dialogues — Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh — and was a follow-up to the two earlier meetings, Ms. Hua said.

"In this meeting, the representatives shared their experience on anti-epidemic and poverty relief," she said. "They talked about dealing with the impact of the pandemic, resuming economic and trade cooperation, dealing with non-traditional security challenges and advancing sustainable development, and reached an initial consensus. It shows our strong will and confidence in dealing with challenges together and achieving cooperation. China would like to work with all sides in implementing our consensus and to make greater contribution to building a regional community with shared future for health."

In the previous two rounds, the countries also discussed how to work more closely together under China's Belt and Road Initiative to boost their post-COVID-19 economic recovery and agreed that countries linked by land ports should establish joint response mechanisms in border areas, apart from committing to greater information sharing and international cooperation.

## CPEC extension

At the July quadrilateral dialogue with Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, as well as taking forward an economic corridor plan with Nepal, called the Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network.

Mr. Wang told the conference the four countries were "connected by mountains and rivers", and also offered to share China's expertise and capacities on COVID-19 vaccines. The Foreign Minister also hit out at countries that had "politicised" the pandemic and "undermined cooperation for their own political needs", saying they would be "nailed to history's pillar of shame forever".

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