

# At G20 meetings, Modi bats for multilateralism

## HTC and Agencies

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**BUENOSAIRES/WASHINGTON:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday met Chinese President Xi Jinping for a fourth time in 2018, which he described as a milestone in bilateral relations, as the Asian giants see out the year on a note of warmth after beginning it against the frosty backdrop of a 73-day military standoff in the Doklam plateau last year.

Modi also met US president Donald Trump and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as the leaders of the three countries held their first ever trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Buenos Aires.

Before the meeting, Modi shared with the media a new acronym—JAI. "When you look at the acronym of the three countries Japan, America and India—it's JAI," Modi said, adding the word means success in Hindi.

The countries will be "playing a big role together for world peace, prosperity and stability" while both the US and Japan are "our strategic partners" and "very good friends", Modi said.

Trump said his country's ties with India and Japan have never been better. Abe said the three countries shared "fundamental values and strategic interests."



French President Emmanuel Macron, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, US President Donald Trump, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Argentina's President Mauricio Macri with other leaders at the G20 Summit AFP

Also on Friday, Modi met UN chief Antonio Guterres, promising him that India will play its "due and responsible" role at the vital climate change negotiations next week. He also met Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The G20 summit is taking place amid the confluence of an array of fractious world issues including differences over climate change, a trade war between the US and China, US-Russia tensions and the conflict in Ukraine. "This year has been very good and important for our bilateral relations," Modi told Xi, officials said. "I am confident that the coming

year would be even better. The informal summit between the two leaders in Wuhan [in April] proved to be a milestone for the two countries. This gave a new momentum to our engagement." Modi said India was eager to host Xi at an informal summit.

The informal talks in Wuhan, where the two leaders met for a candid exchange of views without their diplomatic aides being present, helped melt the frost that developed in Sino-Indian relations following the standoff in Doklam, at the tri-junction with Bhutan.

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The standoff was caused by Chinese army attempts to build a road in the area, which is claimed by Bhutan, a close neighbour of India, as well as China.

External affairs ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar wrote in a Twitter post: "Working together to strengthen the Wuhan spirit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a warm and productive meeting with President Xi of China, their 4th this year, on sidelines of G20 summit. Discussed joint efforts to further enhance mutual trust and friendship across all aspects of our ties."

China is looking to boost agricultural exports to India while increasing imports of rapeseed and soymeal from the country, President Xi told Modi. Xi also indicated greater trade in the pharmaceuticals sector between the two nations, foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale, who is travelling with Modi, said.

"On the economic side, President Xi Jinping referred to enhanced imports of rice and sugar from India and spoke of possibility of greater imports of soymeal and rapeseed," he said.

The Indian PM met Guterres as G20 officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said climate change was emerging as the biggest stumbling block to agreement on a joint communique when the summit concludes on Saturday. President Trump has yanked the US out of the landmark Paris climate accord. His opposition to collective action stands in defiance of scientists' increasingly urgent warnings that policy action is desperately needed to counter the climate threat.

The climate change meeting in Katowice, Poland, starting on December 3, dominated the talks between Guterres and Modi, who played a leading role in initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), a coalition of more than 100 countries aimed at harnessing solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. Guterres said elsewhere in Buenos Aires that the Katowice meeting

"is a make-it-or-break-it moment" for climate change.

"It was a good meeting. The prime minister assured the secretary general that India plays an important role in climate change negotiations and that it is part of the Indian culture and civilisation to preserve the environment and that he could rest assured that India would play its due and responsible role..." foreign secretary Gokhale said.

At their meeting, Modi and the Saudi crown prince discussed Riyadh's readiness to supply India with oil and petroleum products. The prince, known in the west as MBS, also discussed with Modi Saudi oil giant Aramco's investment in refineries in India, including the company's project to build a large refinery on the western coast of India, cooperation in arms manufacturing and Saudi efforts to develop a domestic arms industry, Spa said.

In other engagements in Buenos Aires, Modi addressed a 'Yoga for Peace' event, describing yoga as India's gift to the world for health, wellness, and peace, adding that the discipline improves the health of both the mind and body of an individual.

"The cooperation between the two countries has an ability to create a golden future in sectors of water, land and space," Modi said at the event, addressing Indians living in Argentina. "You are all India's messengers. Your contribution is a bridge which connects both the countries."