

Post COVID 19 world politics: Implications for Bangladesh-India relations

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A new world order?

The world is certain to be a different place post COVID19. It will take some time for the world political economy to overcome the shock of the devastating impact that COVID19 will have on the world system. People across the world will face challenges with a sharp break from the recent past of day to day life. Thus, it is no surprise to conclude the politics of international affairs will be different or more so conducted and balanced in a different paradigm.

One of the key questions will be, would a post Covid19 world move backwards or forwards in visioning a global future? Another will be, whether the future will be a globally connected one or a draw back to the old *Realpolitik narrative of States*? Unquestionably, the US as the leading superpower will see its designation challenged in the balance of international politics or amongst equals with a powerful and influential China as a leading political and economic counter balance.

I believe, Post COVID19 will provide further opportunity for countries to integrate and engage rather than disintegrate and disengage from global connectivity. The US and the Western democracies albeit incapacitated by economic pressures must not move away from the sponsorship of the democratic project. The more the US integrates and embraces itself with democracies around the globe, the more likely it is to remain an influential and impactful force in *great power politics*. It will need to adjust its foreign policy to collectively leading on the universal values of democracy and human rights rather than attempting to do anything in isolation. Simply speculating that China's post COVID19 dominance is as an ill intended project will not get the global traction it may desire. Rather the US should reach out on the values of freedom, democracy and rights with more priority globally.

China with its economic resources on the other hand, has already started on a goodwill programme following the outbreak of the pandemic by offering support to countries across the region and beyond by placing the importance of people before regime, as part of its outreach to connect globally. The recent example of Beijing distributing masks across political parties in Bangladesh regardless of ideological considerations further qualifies this approach to building diplomatic goodwill and empathy. Post-COVID provides for different kinds of opportunities to integrate, connect and maintain

relevance for powerful state actors rather than choosing the path of disconnection.

Therefore, I foresee big powers in world politics moving more toward projecting a collective approach to leadership rather than a simplified *state centric approach* to foreign and economic policy in balancing their influence across the globe.

Where do Bangladesh-India relations sit post-COVID19?

Neither Bangladesh nor India or any other country in the world had any idea that such a devastating pandemic was on the way. Therefore, to plan to deal with such a crisis in advance of that magnitude was not possible. This pandemic has shown how important it is for countries to establish trust and legitimacy with its citizens in re-assuring the security and future of its people and territory. India in this regard to an extent has been able to establish some of the governance infrastructure to deal with such problems by turning to its own scientific community of experts, on the other hand we have seen a contradictory approach in Bangladesh, where the government has lacked co-ordination and failed to work in a joined up way with scientific experts to establish transparency and trust with its people and instead opting for *malign influence* which may arouse internal and external security concerns. Without dwelling further on internal politics, I would like to stress on the opportunities and challenges post-COVID presents to strengthen relations between our respective countries.

Bangladesh in some way is fortunate to share geographical proximity with two big powers like India and China providing its sovereign space does not become the *battleground* of power struggles between these regional powers. The people of Bangladesh in my view would welcome connectivity and integration providing it does not infringe on their right to development and advancement. India like the US was founded on the principles of liberty and freedom and right to self-determination. Post COVID19 provides an opportunity for South Asian countries to give leadership on formulating and promoting an '*ethical foreign policy*'. Should India integrate its founding principles within its foreign policy and push for an outward looking *ethical foreign policy* to reach out to nations across the neighbourhood and its people, then it can become an influential leader in the region and beyond, given its size, capacity and resources to connect and lead widely across the globe as well.

Political parties in Bangladesh and India will come and go from office, the people and the State will always remain. Therefore, it is important that both India and Bangladesh exercise an ethical dimension within their foreign policy that is based on national security interests and international values of human rights at the heart of it. Such a policy position will ensure that people to people relations remain intact regardless of internal political scenarios. Therefore, Post-COVID19 provides India with an opportunity to become a regional leader in striking an embracing foreign policy entrenched by the values in her formation putting emphasis on people to people outreach to strengthen and sustain relations with Bangladesh and the world.

Bangladesh on the other hand, cannot hedge between regional powers. It must look to its own interests for the development of its people by encouraging trade, development and cooperation with important development partners to ensure its national interest and regional security. Therefore, the exercise of '*soft power influence*' at all levels of the Bangladesh-India relationship might be a more sustainable option for strengthening sustainable relations between both countries in a Post-COVID world.