

Geopolitics of the Pandemic Bangladesh Perspective



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious global health risk. Bangladesh is no exception. Since SARSCOV-2 began spreading across the world, many analysts have contemplated its impact - would it simply accelerate existing trends, or would it prove to be a geopolitical 'game-changer' creating a world completely different than before? The answer is much more complicated than 'either-or' – the world during and after COVID-19 will have components of both, the old and the new, the known and the unknown.

As the fourth largest Muslim country in the world, and third in the region, Bangladesh has significant geopolitical importance, particularly given its proximity to China and its location within India's 'geostrategic frontier.' Bangladesh already faces major challenges in national security, economic development, energy security, and military expansion.

Since Bangladesh possesses significant geopolitical importance among South Asian countries, it should take the initiative to create new regional platforms free from the influence of regional powers. Europe and America should recognize the geo-strategic importance of Bangladesh.

THE CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the prevailing global trend toward a more polarized and fragmented world. It may signify a 'new normal' and herald the beginning of a new world order, or perhaps the status quo will ultimately remain the same. However, only nine pharmaceutical companies have full control over COVID-19 vaccine production, giving just a few countries a monopoly. Some studies have predicted that two centuries of Western domination will end soon. But will Western values retreat with it? Will Eastern values fill the void? Which values are better?

Like many other sectors of public and private life, diplomacy has been disrupted by the pandemic. As the coronavirus has spread all over the globe, the sense of strategic helplessness has been devastating. Conflicts continue unabated. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, there have been expectations that a major diplomatic breakthrough will take place. But if one development sticks out from this whole period, it has been the

exacerbation of the US-China conflict. There has been a global strategic realignment that appears to stretch in the near future. On one side are the US, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, India, Japan, probably Australia, and the countries of Southeast Asia, on the other, China, Pakistan, North Korea, and perhaps Turkey, Iran, and Russia. These countries are actively shaping counter-alliances and narratives via China's highly ambitious Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) vs. the US-Japan led Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the BIG-B initiative, Quad alliance, and Asia-Pacific Strategy and have started decoupling their economies. It seems that a new 'Cold War' is emerging.

The tensions on the Korean Peninsula, in South Asia, along the Sino-Indian border, and in the East and South China Seas show that regional powers are equally crucial in shaping the new geopolitics of Asia and the new world order. Unlike Asia, Europe is likely to be caught for decades in a competition for political dominance and military power while multipolar order, connectivity, supply chains, resources, artificial intelligence, and technological supremacy would dominate the age of digital capitalism. Europe, which dominated the global order less than a century ago, is now in danger of cutting itself off from the contemporary quest for international order by identifying its domestic plan with its ultimate geopolitical direction. Though the whole EU is not responsible for it, Brexit is one of the worst examples of this. In fact, we are seeing not just a shift to a more multipolar world, but also the emergence of 'multiple modernities' which challenge the universality of western values. As South Asia is trying to cope with the dynamics of globalization, China has emerged as a crucial player in world economy.

India has always been at the center of Bangladeshi geopolitics, although the USA has always had a bargaining chip. Other territorial powers such as China used to be on the periphery of Bangladeshi strategic thinking. Historically, Bangladesh has had more developmental and societal ties to India. Bangladesh, Pakistan and India together constitute a subcontinent. Nonetheless, India's hegemonic attitude and bullying approach has generated widespread bitterness among ordinary Bangladeshis, especially in comparison to China, which has historically abstained from interfering in Bangladeshi politics while investing extensively in its economy. China hawks, particularly in South Asia, routinely malign Bangladesh for receiving trade and investment from China. These critics overlook the relationship's limits. These paternalistic stories are steeped in an obsolete perspective on Bangladesh, which takes steps to estrange a country that has become a model for human development and monetary policy. It should be noted that there is a perception among a significant section of Bangladeshis China has also taken an interest in Bangladesh's domestic politics since the 2018 Bangladeshi election. China has skillfully created a notion in Bangladesh that it is politically disinterested and non-interfering by refraining from

remarking about Bangladesh's internal issues in public. But this Chinese support nonetheless is helping an unelected, undemocratic regime to remain in power.

Drawing lessons from pre-COVID geopolitics, this article will suggest strategies that countries like Bangladesh should, and should not, follow to defend sovereignty, democracy, human rights and rule of law. History never repeats, but it rhymes. This article will seek to find those rhymes before it is too late.

ACTORS MAPPING AND SITUATION ANALYSIS

As is the case with most of the world, Bangladesh has been hit hard by the Coronavirus pandemic. While official statistics report over 826,622 cases and 13,118 deaths (as of June 13 2021), the veracity of those figures has been called into question. Recent research has indicated that a significant part of the population of Dhaka, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, could be asymptomatic carriers of Covid-19.

Amidst Bangladesh's COVID-19 troubles, there is a possibility that the country could be increasingly involved as a surrogate in the Sino-Indian rivalry over influence in South Asia. Bangladesh has received many notable privileges from China, such as a loan of nearly USD \$1 billion to upgrade its power grid, a tariff waiver on close to eight thousand Bangladeshi exports as well as an accord to build an airport terminal in Sylhet, close to the Indo-Bangladeshi border. All of these developments are intertwined with Bangladesh's increased cooperation with China on defense matters, which has caused a furor in New Delhi. Prior to the pandemic, Indo-Bangladeshi ties were already tense over the Assam National Register of Citizens (NRC). The NRC in Assam is basically a list of Indian citizens living in the state. The citizens' register sets out to identify foreign nationals in the state that borders Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government has stated that laws such as the NRC are an internal matter, but Bangladesh has also asked for written promises that those rendered stateless by the NRC will not be sent to Bangladesh. Statements such as those from Amit Shah, a top ranking leader of India's governing party, referring to people who illegally entered Assam from Bangladesh as "termites," have worsened bilateral relations. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen recently said that Indo-Bangladeshi relations are tied by blood, but it is reasonable to ask whether fraying ties between Dhaka and New Delhi will make room for Beijing to gain preeminent status in Bangladesh.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added a new layer of complications to Bangladesh's relations with its neighbors. Both India and China have contributed COVID-related medical assistance to Bangladesh, and India has promised Bangladesh early entry to a vaccine program. Although Dhaka initially responded positively to the Chinese biotech

company Sinovac's request to carry out a COVID-19 vaccine trial in the country, it only endorsed the trial after consulting the Bangladeshi PM on the decision. India's warnings about the Sinovac vaccine trial seems to have fallen to deaf ears. But the future of the much-discussed trial has become doubtful after Sinovac asked the Bangladeshi government to cofinance the drive. In the meantime, Bangladesh signed a deal with the Serum Institute of India on November 5 to buy thirty million doses of a potential coronavirus vaccine being produced by British drug maker AstraZeneca.¹ On January 27, 2021, Bangladesh became the 54th country in the world to commence vaccinating its people. On January 3, 2021, the Serum Institute was obliged to stop exporting vaccines due to India's own state emergency. Since then Bangladesh has vaccinated 5,819,912 people. Bangladesh has also started to search for other sources of vaccines. China already gifted half a million doses, and Bangladesh is poised to receive critical benefits from both New Delhi and Beijing if it plays its cards right. Switching Bangladesh's foreign policy to favor of China over India will be no easy or quick task, but it seems that China is determined to dislodge New Delhi's formidable influence in Dhaka.

Located between mainland India and the seven provinces of its Northeastern Region (known as the 'seven sisters'), with a major sea port on the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh has always had critical strategic significance to India. The geographic location of Bengal gives it great significance in great power planning. Bangladesh stands at a geopolitical crossroads, and the country needs to make an exit plan to extricate itself from the regional crossfire.

The regional geostrategic climate is growing serious. It is no longer just India which has an interest in Bangladesh. Bhutan, China, Nepal, the USA, and even Australia and Japan are showing increasing concern over the country. Bhutan and Nepal, being landlocked, are keen to utilize Bangladesh's seaports. China is seeking to contain India geopolitically. The USA has recently begun making use India's base on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and already has an Indian Ocean base of its own on Diego Garcia, but it nonetheless wants to utilize Bangladesh's Chattogram Seaport to reinforce its position in South Asia. Due to its strategic location on the Bay of Bengal, Chattogram is attractive to all the great powers, especially the United States. Japan and Australia likewise keep up great relations with Bangladesh for their public interest. Australia has an interest in helping to resolve the persistent unrest in the Chattogram Hill Tracks (CHT), where it has a variety of ongoing programs and considerable influence. Bangladesh may once in a while waver between India and China to strengthen its

¹ "Bangladesh Signs Deal With India For 30 Million Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine" NDTV, November 5, 2020 <https://www.ndtv.com/worldnews/bangladesh-signs-deal-with-india-for-30-million-doses-of-covid-19-vaccine-2321161>

position, but it should not change its strategy towards the western powers.

Bangladesh is different from India and Pakistan. It is not a regional power. It does not have the strategic or security importance of Pakistan. Bangladesh has had democratically chosen governments in the past, but like Pakistan, Bangladesh has also experienced military coups. Additionally, some recent events point to the rise of 'extremist' activity. The government's treatment of the country's main opposition party and civil society raises questions about the condition of human rights and civil rights within the country. For that reason, the EU's role should also be considered. Based on the economic, political and security environments, there are many grounds on which the EU could get involved in Bangladesh.

The European Union is one of Bangladesh's major business partners. The EU is Bangladesh's most important source of exports, with Germany alone ranking just behind the United States at 14.2% of Bangladeshi exports.² Bangladesh is the EU's 34th-largest trade partner.³

The 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy was a critical event in Euro-Bangladeshi trade relations. The accident prompted the European Union to push for workplace security, safety, and labor rights reform in Bangladesh. An example of the European Union's diplomatic pressure was seen during the January 2014 general election in Bangladesh. The political environment surrounding the election was extremely strained, and the major opposition parties boycotted the election due to concerns over the election's free and fair nature. The EU, along with the United States, declined to send election observers in order to force the parties to come to an agreement.

NATIONAL DISCOURSE, POLITICAL NARRATIVES AND POLICY DEBATES

Bangladesh's relationship with the West transcends the intergovernmental level. It takes place through the Bangladeshi diaspora and through Bangladesh's status as a 'developing' nation. The trend of strong economic growth and improved social development indicators, in an environment characterized by poor governance, is known as the 'Bangladesh paradox' or the 'Bangladesh conundrum.' On an essential level the mystery is: how does a country like Bangladesh, with such poor governance, achieve such development? How has a country like Bangladesh, consistently ranked in the lower part of Transparency International's corruption perception index,

² "Bangladesh: Product Trade," Observatory of Economic Complexity, retrieved June 15, 2021 <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/bgd>

³ "European Union, Trade in goods with Bangladesh," European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, February 6, 2021 https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_bangladesh_en.pdf

experienced such economic, social and human development?

Since 1990, international organizations and economists have upheld Bangladesh as an example of overcoming adversity. Bangladesh was numbered by Goldman Sachs in the club of 'next eleven' nations that would follow Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the 'BRICs') onto the global stage as key drivers of the world economy.⁴ Bangladesh's extraordinary fiscal improvement has been accompanied by improvements in major civil development indicators such elementary school enrollment rates and life expectancy and decreases in infant mortality. The improvement in these indicators is among the best in the world. The Economist calls attention to four explanations behind this achievement.⁵ These are: (a) viable birth control resulting in more enabled women and a 'demographic dividend'; (b) stable rural family unit earnings, which have fallen in numerous equivalent nations, propped up by expanding horticultural profitability and non-agrarian revenue streams such as expatriates' remittances; (c) a political agreement among the elites favorable to social projects, (for example, restrictive money moves); (d) lastly the efforts of Bangladesh's acclaimed NGOs.

Meanwhile, analyses of Bangladeshi politics over the same period paint an unequivocally miserable, violent, and critical picture. Bangladesh's government is characterized by fundamental political cronyism and regulatory defilement, a wasteful state, feeble administrative limit, angry legislative issues, political precariousness, and politicized and degenerate legal establishments.

Basic liberty is an area where worries about governance in Bangladesh push the nation solidly back into Henry Kissinger's territory. The US Secretary of State dubbed Bangladesh a "bottomless basket" at its introduction to the world in 1971, and Bangladesh seemed to endeavor to live up to the moniker. To the rest of the world, a significant part of the Bangladeshi experience can be summarized as a haze of political fights and disasters interspersed by upheavals of jihadist savagery and intermittent military intervention. Extrajudicial killings and torture of individuals by the security forces have for been issues in Bangladesh under both progressive regimes and military governments. These issues become politicized when the security powers and legal executive are used to smother resistance from rival parties and the press. Obviously, it is a controversial issue whether the security forces and are acting in the interest of the nation or for personal gain.

⁴ A.R. Chowdhury, "Bangladesh – a part of the 'Next 11,'" The Daily Star, May 15, 2012
<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-234135>

⁵ "The path through the fields," The Economist, November 3, 2012
<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2012/11/03/the-path-throughthe-fields>

ARGUMENTS FOR A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ORDER

Europe & Asia

COVID-19 has claimed more than 3.81 million lives and infected over 176 million people. It has decimated rich and poor economies alike. Different countries, however, have adopted widely different policies in response to the crisis. The divergence between Asia and Europe is a case in point.

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, it will remain a key player in the global community. Post-Brexit Britain will likely have particular relevance to the subcontinent through post-colonial ties such as the Commonwealth of Nations.

The UK holds a respected position in the educational and cultural sectors. It has extensive networks with policymakers and other decision-makers worldwide, including in Bangladesh, where many elites were educated in the UK. As a result, Britain commands considerable influence in Bangladesh. Due to colonial connections, many Bangladeshi expatriates also live in the UK. They send huge remittances and contribute significantly to the Bangladeshi economy. This affords the UK a significant bargaining chip, but also allows the Bangladeshi diaspora to influence the Anglo-Bangladeshi relationship. Trade between both countries is also a vital factor. Bangladesh is a major export partner of the UK. Continued good relations are therefore important for both countries.

Russia occupies an unusual position on the global stage. Under President Vladimir Putin, Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated that it has the capacity to affect the international order. Russia has historically had good relations with Bangladesh, going back to the 1971 Liberation War. Bangladesh and Russia maintain fruitful relations at the highest levels. Talks between the foreign ministers of the two nations at United Nations General Assembly meetings and at other global fora are routine. The two countries share close political, military, economic, and cultural relations.

Both regions are undoubtedly facing serious economic hardship. Policymakers must consider how to define emergency measures into more viable programs. Their paths may not be the same, but their objectives – protecting lives and livelihoods, especially those of the most unsafe – should be.

South Asia & Bangladesh

As a fast-progressing economy, Bangladesh is in desperate demand of financing, while India and China see investment in Bangladesh as a way to expand their influence.

Bangladesh has seized this opportunity to use both China and India to fill its FDI deficit. However, far-sighted observers worry about the 'Chinese Debt Trap' and India's 'Big Brother' attitude.

There is also the security dimension of these relationships to consider. Bangladesh is ringed by India on three sides, and their 4096-kilometer border is the fifth-longest on the planet. The Bay of Bengal to the south is watched over by the comparatively powerful Indian Navy. Truth be told, the official claim that India and Bangladesh share a 'special relationship,' with India as Bangladesh's natural ally, is now becoming a matter of mockery.

Conventional wisdom says that great power rivalry makes smaller neighbors vulnerable. As Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said recently, quoting a Swahili proverb, "When elephants fight, the grass suffers, but when they make love, the grass suffers also." Nonetheless, this saying seems inappropriate in the case of the Sino-Indian tug-of-war for regional preeminence over Bangladesh. Rather than losing, the small-scale South Asian country is gaining favors.

Indo-US, Indo-Saudi or Indo-Israel projects, or even the love affair between India and the Burmese military junta are not going overlooked by Bangladesh. Out of Burma's neighbors, Bangladesh suffers the most from the ongoing Rohingya crisis. Like the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) and NRC, most Bangladeshis still view Indo-Kashmir, Indo-Ladakh, or even Indo-Doklam tussles as purely Indian internal affairs.

The underlying vulnerabilities of marginalized communities have been exacerbated by the pandemic. This especially applies to the Rohingya, who are in the grip of one of their worst collective crises as a people. The first COVID-19 cases in Cox's Bazaar last June generated concern that the disease would spread like wildfire in the squalor of the camps where social distancing measures seemed practically unenforceable. Fortunately, the disease has so far been contained at manageable levels thanks to proactive testing.

The 2017 crackdown on Rakhine Rohingyas by the Burmese military (Tatmadaw) drove over 600,000 refugees into Bangladesh. Both Western and Muslim nations censured Aung San Suu Kyi's administration, however, India and China supported Burma. Both have high geostrategic stakes in Burma as they seek to establish themselves as global powers. However, China and India's methodologies are fundamentally different. In an interview, Indian Ambassador Vikram Misri said India's program for the advancement of Burma is quite the same as "others," meaning China. "India wants to create public assets in Myanmar and handover to local authorities. We finance a project like Kaladan mostly by grants and some concessional financing, but we ensure that these never

become a burden.”⁶ The Rohingya have been subjected to persecution, discrimination, and torture for decades. In 2017, almost a million of them had to leave their homeland because of gross human-rights abuses, and Bangladesh welcomed them. Nevertheless, three years later, the Rohingya are still suffering, still unable to speak up for their rights, and still marginalized.

Middle Eastern Countries

It seems that Middle Eastern countries are often forgotten in this kind of geopolitical debate. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Arab States facilitated 23 million migrant laborers, with 9 million (39 percent) women migrant laborers in 2017. The main part of those workers is from Asia, with a sizeable number additionally coming from Africa, particularly Egypt, and progressively from East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda). The ILO estimated that migrants in the six GCC States account for over 10 percent of all migrants globally, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE respectively host the third and fifth largest migrant populace in the world. Indeed this has a huge impact on geopolitics.⁷ Five million Bangladeshis live in the Middle East, and Bangladesh depends heavily on the Middle Eastern countries for inward remittances, receiving approximately 59 percent of the entire remittance flow from the region. The Middle East employs around 81 percent of the 10 million Bangladeshi migrant workers. At present, Bangladesh keeps up relations with the Middle Eastern countries through different methods like trade, security and in particular religion that empower the two to co-operate more effectively than their Western or Far Eastern aide. Furthermore, these countries are enormous contributors to Bangladesh regardless of their policy towards China. This is one of the factors which influenced Bangladesh to join the Riyadh-based Islamic Military Alliance Centre, formed with a mission to fight terrorism and extremism in general.

According to BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, around 200,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers returned home between mid-February to mid-March, including 41,000 from Saudi Arabia, 38,000 from the United Arab Emirates, and 20,000 from other Gulf countries last year. (Arab News, December 20, 2020). Normally, every month, around 50,000 job seekers would move into the global labor market, but this has come to a halt due to the pandemic over the past three to four months. Some 200,000 workers could not go overseas to work despite having legal work permits and papers. Most

⁶ Subir Bhaumik, “Why do China, India back Myanmar over the Rohingya crisis?” South China Morning Post, October 18, 2017 <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2115839/why-do-china-india-back-myanmar-over-rohingya-crisis>

⁷ “Labour Migration,” International Labour Organization, retrieved June 15, 2021 <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labourmigration/lang--en/index.htm>

Bangladeshi remittance sources are being badly affected by the pandemic, given the skill set of Bangladeshi migrant workers. Bangladesh is thus entering into the global 'new normal.' Per the World Economic Forum, "The economic importance of the more than 10 million migrants from Bangladesh who sent close to \$18 billion in 2019 cannot be overstated. International remittances normally represent around 7% of Bangladesh's GDP. But the COVID-19 pandemic is having an acute effect on Bangladeshi migrants abroad, who are largely concentrated in countries with strict lockdown measures. Considering the large volume of Bangladeshi migrants in the Middle East, secondary economic impacts through depressed demand and falling oil prices will also likely add strain to the flow of remittances."⁸

Israel is one of the most important countries in the Middle East. Both Israel and Bangladesh were established in the wake of bloodshed: for Israel, the Holocaust; for Bangladesh, the barbarities during the 1971 Liberation War in which the pro-independence Bengali populace was methodically attacked. Israel extended diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh upon its founding in 1972, however, Bangladesh refused to reciprocate out of solidarity with other Muslim nations. As of 2021, Bangladesh still has no diplomatic or economic relationship with Israel. This is an ideal opportunity for change. Since 1972, many Arab states have reached a rapprochement with Israel. Israel is also a growing partner of India. Israel has a great deal to offer in South Asia, particular.

USA

Finally a change of guard in the White House brings USA back in the track. The whole world has watched democracy in action since November 3, 2020. We have seen how dirty it can get. At the top of it all, the most important winners aren't Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the most important winner is democracy. The biggest lesson is that the institutions matter more than the individuals, if the former are robust. If President Donald Trump had his way that the system of checks and balances built over centuries would have collapsed. Salute to the framers of the US Constitution who did not let that happen.

A second big lesson is not to make science the enemy of politics. A Trump victory would have sent a dangerous message to the remainder of the planet that science can be ignored even where it matters the most – that a pandemic can just be wished away regardless of how costly it's in terms of human health and misery. We will only hope

⁸ Amil Aneja and Sheikh Tanjeb Islam, "Bangladesh faces a crisis in remittances amid COVID-19," World Economic Forum, June 16, 2020
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/bangladesh-faces-a-remittances-crisis-amid-covid-19/>

that science will return to the White House in pandemic management, a critical precondition for a sustainable economic recovery in the US.

It would be a blunder to anticipate any major changes in the US strategy. The new grown-up in the Oval Office is a practical person, confronting numerous genuine homegrown difficulties, as a matter of first importance being to reestablish diplomacy in the lead of the Presidency. What could likewise be a modest assumption is that the finish of a conditional and go-it-single-handedly strategy model rehearsed in the Trump period.

Collaboration and arrangement rather than pride and harassing will ideally return in light of the fact that the essential elements for settling issues in the arrangement and financing of overall public merchandise like pandemic control, worldwide trade, and in this way the climate change issue of the earth. Biden is anticipated to shape US strategy that in a general sense trusts it can accomplish more when it works close by the comity of nations and reconnect in multilateral participation, worldwide standards, and the worldwide request.

The US retreat from worldwide initiative left its partners and companions fairly rudderless. It will take more than a single political decision to reconstruct the resultant loss of trust. America should genuinely coordinate in remaking a stronger principles-based arrangement of overall administration that will address the difficulties and exploit the chances of this century without abandoning countries. In any case, Trump's more grounded than-anticipated showing ought to stir individuals who anticipated that that one should totally forsake the ethos of his strategy. The post-Trump Republican Party, which can stay a power to deal with, is presumably going to remain indifferent to the value of worldwide establishments and consequently the utility of multilateral arrangements.

US considers Bangladesh to be an important partner in US initiatives to strengthen relations in the Indo-Pacific region. Bangladesh is in no way an exception to the geopolitical polarization that has emerged in the region. Especially for the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), taken up to counter China's BRI. Bangladesh hopes to see a more grounded US policy on the Rohingya issue under the Biden Administration with more extensive respective relations with Bangladesh and the new Administration will fortify Bangladesh-US relations on center issues thinking about Bangladesh as a geopolitically vital country.

There can be no overstating the importance of the works facing Biden. If he survives whatever threats, legal and rhetorical, that Trump throws his way in the coming days and weeks, he will begin his term facing a profoundly divided country, one even more

polarized and tribal than the polls have suggested. It's a country during which one-half can't exactly understand the contrary half. He likewise goes up against a natural that is influenced by an always demolishing pandemic, a weak economy, racial bad form, and an environment emergency that millions will not recognize. So, there is no big hope for Bangladesh that the relationship with US might alter drastically, but then new US administration takes Bangladesh as a prospective ally due to its geo strategic location and US also need to consider that the dynamics of regional politics in South Asia has been changed a lot recently.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The agony brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has attracted less attention than that of China, Europe, and the US, yet the locale has experienced some of the most severe flare-ups of the pandemic on the planet. The pandemic's effect is not homogenous, and all of the 33 nations of South America should be analyzed independently to completely see how the region is being affected by the pandemic. The international scene is moving from numerous points of view.

Latin American countries, like Bangladesh, are among the emerging economies of this century. Bangladesh already has strong cultural and economic ties with the LAC countries, but as emerging nations, both must explore business and trade opportunities. Bangladesh can take this chance to export Ready Made Garments (RMG), pharmaceuticals, melamine goods, services, jute products and handicrafts. As a result, Bangladesh should seek free trade agreements with LAC countries. They can also work on global climate change option as all of them are facing the same crisis.

We saw some intriguing geopolitical moves toward the beginning of June 2020, when Iran sent an oil tanker to Venezuela to alleviate huge fuel shortages there, in spite of Washington's warning against doing so. Cuba has also made an impact during the pandemic. Following its long-standing practice of "doctor diplomacy," Havana rushed clinical detachments to South Africa and Italy.

Washington's influence in LAC has been in retreat for some time, predating both COVID and the Donald Trump administration. This advancement coincides with China's rising impact in the region.

Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic has incited widespread geostrategic disquiet in Africa. It is important to ask: what are the "uncertainties" facing Africa when analyzed through

geostrategic focal points? For quite a while, African analysts and strategists have regretted the mainland's economic reliance on the rich economies of the Global North and rising forces like China. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief the weakness of the major powers that make up groups like NATO, the G7, and G20. If ever there was a time for African solidarity, it is now. With more well-off countries focused on taking care of their own issues, it is time for African countries to seek international fortitude that mirrors the mantra of "African answers for African issues."

Bangladesh has received enormous support from African nations during the Rohingya crisis. Seven countries of Africa recently changed their vote from 'abstention' to 'yes' on a proposal at the plenary session of UN General Assembly on the issue of human rights of Rohingya and other minorities in the South Asian nation. Gambia has filed its case against Burma at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the genocide of the Rohingya in a move widely welcomed by the Muslim minority society, as well as by Bangladesh.

On the politico-monetary front, Pan-Africanism is starting to come to fruition in the form of the unique African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Broken worldwide supply chains afford African nations the chance to devise intracontinental supply systems like the global cross-line trade imagined in the AfCFTA arrangement. It may signify the inclination of African leaders towards China rather than the West for financial help, while inclining more toward the West for standards of governance. Bangladesh, however, is a unique case as South Asia is exceptionally partitioned. Bangladesh cannot rely on only India or China alone.

UN & WHO

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced that the organization will continue researching on the COVID-19.

Neither the countries first hit by the pandemic nor those to which it later spread were able to fully fulfill WHO guidelines. There is no mechanism for sanctioning violations of these guidelines. The UN should discuss measures, including indemnity supports to victims in countries that have not taken necessary measures or report in the event of a health-threatening epidemic at the world or regional level.

In the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the need to watch for weak networks in the public arena. Bangladesh needs a demographic mapping survey to meet this requirement. It will likewise enhance Rohingya refugee COVID-19 reaction plans.

As of Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh (vol 2), A United Nations report found that the social safety aid activities embraced by the Bangladeshi government have been limited in scope. To make an already difficult situation even worse, numerous media reports uncovered the involvement of pro-government individuals and their partners in the misappropriation of relief supplies. This is profoundly risky as long as down and out individuals are wandering the streets Dhaka asking for food.

It should be noted that Bangladesh did not enforce any strict mandates at first, and a great many individuals were out in the city, particularly in Dhaka, which is a megacity with 46 thousand people per square kilometer. Social contact is intense on public transportation and in the ghettos. In densely populated and lower wage nations like Bangladesh, the implementation of social distancing as prescribed by the WHO is a fantasy.

OUTLOOK

Bangladesh cannot remain aloof from the changing international environment. The shifting geopolitics of the region have increased Bangladesh's geopolitical value threefold. To start with, Bangladesh is now the as the fourth-largest Muslim country on the planet and the third in the region. The second factor is Bangladesh's location inside the geostrategic frontier of India, South Asia's most powerful nation. The third is Bangladesh's proximity to China, Asia's greatest power and an adversary of both the US and India. The current climate therefore represents a test of Bangladesh's national security policy, especially regarding economic advancement, energy security, and military development.

The strategic importance of a country depends on both volatile and non-volatile factors. One must recognize and understand how these factors tend to influence a country's geo-strategic clout or its vulnerability. India would find itself cut off from its northeastern provinces in a border conflict with Bangladesh. The only way to offset the pressure is to have a strategic corridor through Bangladesh. The importance of such a route first became clear to Indian strategists in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. China threatened to cut India's Lines of Communication to the Seven Sisters, particularly in the NEFA (the Northeast Frontier Agency, since renamed Arunachal Pradesh). Thus, Indian strategists are cognizant of the fact that China is capable of isolating the northeastern provinces from the rest of India.

The changed geo-strategic dynamics following the rise of the USA as the lone superpower and the subsequent events in Europe and the Middle East, and the fast

changes in global geo-politics have generated a state of fear-psychosis among the existing and emerging middle powers. These powers, apprehensive of the perceived threats to their national interests from state and non-state actors, are either aligning with or moving away from the predominant global powers. The emerging strategic partnerships between Russia and China and between the United States and India seem to be going in opposite directions. However, the ever-increasing pressure of the middle powers necessitated extension of their strategic frontiers. In Asia we are witnessing the strategic rivalry between India and China. India, having defied American influence for five long decades since its independence, moved much closer to the US and established nuclear and military cooperation with Washington, shunning the spirit of the principle of non-alignment. On the other hand, Russia and China, putting aside their differences from the 1960s Sino-Soviet Split, have moved closer to each other, and are trying to counter US influence in their respective backyards.

Against the backdrop of a redefined strategic frontier and the rising military giant of India, Bangladesh needs to reassess its own geo-strategic priorities, with a focus on its opportunities and challenges. Most of all, Bangladesh needs to bear its vital location on India's strategic frontier. There is a perception that Bangladesh's foreign policy has been largely driven by its leaders and their partisan policies, instead of being based on the principles of equality, social justice and human dignity promised in the proclamation of independence.

FINDINGS

1. Before the pandemic, inequality was already increasing in most of the developing world. The pandemic will greatly exacerbate existing economic and social divisions. Whether or not the pandemic's effect on inequality will be felt for many years to come will depend on whether or not the governments of developing countries take concerted action – both in the near future, by providing large scale income backing plans for the working poor, and in the distant future, by educating their workers to prepare for a more digitally leading world and building the framework for it. It will also depend on whether the global community can act in a unified way to provide much needed credit assistance and investment for low income countries.
2. Many countries, especially EU member countries which suffered great damage from the pandemic, are now voicing demands for the reform of global institutions such as the WHO and the UN to combat future pandemics. The inadequacy of the WHO may lead countries to pursue policies independent of the international consensus. Enhancing the efficacy of international institutions will require the devolution of

greater responsibility and capability to regional players. Deliberations at the global level are nonetheless necessary to set broad policy as well as to coordinate crisis response.

3. The EU should be strengthened under the leadership of Germany, along with promoting liberal and participatory democracy globally, as Germany seems to be the most liberal and accommodative country in Europe. A recalibration of German foreign affairs might become inevitable, and this, once again, might lead to modifications of current policies. German reunification transformed the European dynamic by reestablishing Germany as the most powerful European state. European foreign policy is approaching an inflection point in which the European Parliament should play an important role. This means outlining the essential features of strategic autonomy, but also shaping them with each other. As such, traditional foreign policy needs to join forces with other policy areas such as technological and environmental issues, trade, and strategic communication – and of course, public health. In that sense alone, the pandemic is already a game changer.
4. As Bangladesh is a member of the Commonwealth, the UK will remain an important political and development partner. The United Kingdom is the second largest source of remittance for Bangladesh, so the UK figures prominently in the future plan for furthering the Bangladesh development.
5. A strong but democratic and altruistic US government is important for all concerned. Washington should strengthen its engagement with Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been neglected by American policymakers for the last couple of years but correcting that error should not mean neglecting India. The US has a long-standing and supportive relationship with Bangladesh, and it views Bangladesh as a reasonable voice in the Islamic world. In its relations with Dhaka, the U.S. government, along with Members of Congress, has focused on a range of issues, especially those relating to politicoeconomic development, humanitarian concerns, labor rights, human rights, good governance, rule of law and counterterrorism.
6. India's big brother stance, defaming and deriding the nations at its borders will not change as it faces off against another great power. India is the largest and most influential power in South Asia, and it is natural that Indian neighbors feel insecure about their "independence and identity." Setting aside the obsession with the huge amounts that China is investing in the region, India must begin by simply respecting the dignity of its neighbors.

7. More regional and international platforms need to be created to balance Indian and Chinese hegemonic influences. For that to happen some countries in South Asia — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka — should remain outside the conflict between New Delhi and Beijing.
8. The constitution of Bangladesh declares "Friendship to all, malice to none" but it also clearly states in the passport that Bangladesh has no diplomatic relations with Israel. This conflicts with the constitution. Moreover, a good number of Arab states have developed all kinds of relations with Israel. It is important that Bangladesh, while maintaining its moral and political support for Palestine, should start seeking to develop diplomatic relations with Israel to strengthen Bangladesh's position.
9. Bangladesh needs to focus on the successful sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. Bangladesh has to be strict, has to be more specific, and has to try to take the issue before international fora so that the UN and EU can apply multilateral sanctions on Burma, and the Arab and Western countries can freeze oil, weapons, and money flow to Burma. Bangladesh and Myanmar reached a China-mediated bilateral agreement three years ago, but Myanmar has yet to follow through by taking a single Rohingya back. Strict multilateral processes need to be applied as soon as possible for saving the Rohingyas, especially the next generation who have raised in the camps since birth without basic rights, education, or identity. It is amply clear by now that Myanmar authorities will not participate in the repatriation process in a conventional bilateral system. Bangladesh has to push Myanmar with its diplomatic plan of action to take the issue to the global community. Bangladeshi policymakers should keep in mind that China, India, and Myanmar want to keep the crisis regional. Bangladesh has to bring the international key players in the field to sanction, to pressure, to repatriate hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas in a globally recognized, sustainable process that would guarantee that Rohingya people will not face the same fate again.
10. The geographic position of Bangladesh renders it geopolitically and geo-strategically important in the South Asia. Bangladesh is a claimant of enough attention while discussing about rising importance of the South Asia in world politics as it occupies a small but crucial part of the region. The country has attracted Europe and America's attention. The US and Europe must view Bangladesh objectively, rather accepting India's perspective.

11. An alarming decline in global liberty hints at some hard thinking about what is needed for democracy to prevail. There has been a great hue and cry in many countries like Bangladesh for human rights, rule of law and press freedom as well. It is not right to admire foreign dictatorial regimes. The developed democratic nations must keep distance with the countries ruled by autocrats or authoritarian regimes. Moreover, they must put serious pressure on those dictatorial regimes to reform.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh will need support from both India and China, as it has always received support from its Western friends and development partners, to ensure sustainable development, capacity building, and growth of a skilled society. It will need significant cost-effective support to revive its health sector, which is plagued by inefficiency, assistance for metropolitan governance and planning, and infrastructure development.

Bangladesh should be aware that both China and India will be seeking to exploit their investments. To avoid becoming trapped in an international rivalry over the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh should exploit its strategic position carefully. One way of getting the most out of the Sino-Indian rivalry is to make sure that it does not display a preference for either party. Maintaining good working relations with both India and China is crucial for an economically weak Bangladesh. Bangladesh also should maintain very good relations with Europe and America.

Bangladesh therefore needs a 'balanced' foreign policy – not leaning too far into the sway of India (politically) or China (economically). Bangladesh, again, should not be a mere spectator in this region. Because of its strategic location Bangladesh can be a regional player, albeit a small one. The country should keep in its mind that the projection that Bangladesh will become one of the top 30 economies by 2030 has attracted significant international attention. The future world, after all, will be a truly multipolar one where even the smaller powers will have important agency.

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