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## Post Covid Scenario: Bangladesh At Cross Roads:

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Covid-19 has put many countries, rich and poor, in an unpreferred position to fathom the future politico-economic course for their respective countries

Are they to abandon the system and institutions they had embraced for decades that had become in course of time their own? Some had digressed from the ones they had liberated themselves from, often due to feel they are different from their colonial masters whose main aim was extraction from the colonies to enrich their metropolis. The scale of extraction was immense and to the detriment of the disposed, not due to lack of resources but because they did not have the guns to fight the colonialists.

Though the colonialists viewed themselves superior to the natives Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* asserts that there is little difference between "civilized people" and those described as "savages." *Heart of Darkness* implicitly comments on imperialism and racism. Perhaps Joseph Conrad would put the circumstances as the dictator who decides whether London (in *Heart of Darkness*) was any better than Africa the dark continent inhabited by "uncivilized" people.

As the newly developing countries were trying to find their identity so did Marxism and Maoism were finding their own battle not so much on ideology but whether industrialized capitalists were sucking the blood of the common men or as Mao, revolutionizing rural China, felt that not the industrialists but the feudal lords were sucking the blood of the farmers. Both Karl Marx and Mao Zedung were fighting the same battle from different contexts. Mao's China has now been transformed into the second richest country in the world with vast geo-political armor in its grasp.

So political scientist have started a debate on the fate of the world in post-coronavirus world. Would we see Harvard's Graham Allison's

description of Thucydides Trap which Allison described as a situation “when a rising power like Athens, or China, threatens to displace a ruling power like Sparta, which had been the dominant power in Greece for a hundred years, or the US, basically alarm bells should sound?” Nowadays many hear the loud sounding of the alarm bells warning the world of an impending “Thucydides Trap”. Chinese President Xi Jinping has chosen Belt and Road Initiative as the vehicle for spreading China’s influence in Asia and Africa and to convert the world into a multipolar system in which China as the second richest nation in the world will play a significant role in global affairs. The problem arises with Xi Jinping’s insistence on the primacy of the Chinese Communist Party in all affairs which with the advancement of technology would be able to peep into the bed rooms of the Chinese people.

China’s intrusion into the recent agitation in Hong Kong contrary to the agreement of “one country Two system” signed at the time of the British handing over of the colony to China is a blatant example of Chinese interference in Hong Kong. Xi Jinping’s authoritarian bent can be gauged from his analysis of Nikita Khrushchev’s 1965 speech on destalinization which in the Chinese leader’s opinion had opened the door to multiparty political system in then USSR. The point to ponder is when people have more disposable income the urge for more freedom of choice becomes inevitable. Chinese of this generation would not like to see a Tiananmen Square massacre not by foreign troops or by their own.

Outwardly China is a showpiece for the world to see. Yet the rural areas have been denied the gains of development. Inequality among different segments are increasing. According to WIKIPEDIA China’s current mainly market economy features a high degree of income inequality. According to the Asian Development Institute, “before China implemented reform and open door policies in 1978, its income distribution pattern was characterized as egalitarianism in all aspects.”

Wikipedia continues to add that in December 2009 34 out of 50 leading economists thought that inequality would impede sustainable development. Harvard Economist Kenneth Rogoff also cautioned on the problem of income inequality, commenting that “There is no doubt that income inequality is the single biggest threat to social stability around the world, whether it is in the United States, the European periphery, or China.”[ Income inequality is argued to be a menace to social stability, and potentially causes a disappearance of middle class capital that would impede China’s economic growth. In a bold statement ] Hu Angang, an influential researcher in China, warned that further increases in regional disparities may lead to China’s dissolution, like in the former Yugoslavia.

Given the above situation one has to be cautious about BRI Initiative. Western governments and journalists want definitive information on BRI. The consider statements like "The Belt and Road is a \$900 million/\$1 trillion/\$5 trillion dollar initiative spanning 65 countries, 60% of the world’s population, 75% of energy resources, and 30% of GDP” as more propaganda than plan of action. Some find it intriguing that Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Kyrgyzstan, among other countries have canceled, downsized, or postponed key BRI projects, and the initiative seems to be going through a period of retreat to an extent that some researchers are suggesting that BRI may have seen its peak.

Even if BRI partially succeeds we are far from answering the question of global construct in post-covid-19 situation. Some middle of the roaders reluctant to commit themselves either way have surmised: Humans can rein in their instincts and build societies that divert group competition to arenas less destructive than warfare, yet the psychological bases for tribalism persist, even when people understand that their loyalty to their nation, skin color, god, or sports team is as random as the toss of a coin. At the level of the human mind, little prevents new teammates from once again becoming tomorrow's enemies. (This Is Your Brain on Nationalism Foreign Affairs).

If many nations face identity crises relating which path to choose in post-pandemic world a guideline could be the state of the economy. Most of the developed economies are expected to contract. In the case of the US 26 million Americans have applied for unemployment benefits while the legal immigrants have paid more taxes and are considered dependable workers. This puts them in the eye of the storm as the object of "stealers" of jobs that average Americans consider to be their birthright. This is no different in Europe. In war devastated Europe many immigrants were invited as "guest workers" to clean the toilets and sweep the streets that full blooded Europeans refused to do. When the European economies could stand on its own feet no doubt due to the efforts of the locals the "guest workers" were encouraged to go back to their "home" that they had left decades back. Their descendants who were no less French or Germans refused to go to a country they had only heard of and had never even seen. When the crunch comes in spades justice flies out of the window.

In Post-Brexit the rights of the non-British Europeans is going to be one of the thorniest points to be settled between Boris Johnson and his EU negotiator. But then Britain and EU are on the same page of liberal democracy. In the case of the US and China it is the opposite. How can the world in particular the developing countries be coaxed into the illiberal camp just because of yet insoluble pandemic disease? One may refer to the US hubris of "American Exception" which was noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in his book "Democracy in America". Later on successive writers, notably Seymour Martin Lipset and in varying degrees Joseph Nye, Robert Kagan, Neil Campbell Ferguson have voiced American Exceptionalism. Lipset in his article (American Exception-A Double Edged Sword) quoted G.K.Chestersen: "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence. . . ." As noted in the Introduction, the nation's ideology can be described in five words: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire". Lipset himself said: Being an American is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American.

From Monroe doctrine to the First World War to the Second Great War and henceforth the American leadership has remained constant. Vladimir Putin however cautioned about the danger of teaching a people that they are exceptional.

The real undeniable truth is that the world has become multipolar as G7, G20 and other regional organizations testify. In neck of the woods South Asia would feel comfortable to cooperate with India though not at the exclusion of China a behemoth in the region. Despite bumps Bangladesh shares common history, India's assistance in 1971 War of Independence argument notwithstanding that Indian refuge to one million Bengalis was not only due to humanitarian consideration. Her aim was the dismemberment of Pakistan. Geopolitical consideration must have played a role. But should we then forget incessant efforts by then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on our behalf and the

number of vetoes given in the UNSC by then USSR to thwart the Western plan to force a political settlement with the murderous Yahya regime whose marauding army carried out the most barbarous genocide that can be matched only with Hitler's annihilation of millions of Jews in the Second World War?

We have differences with India and we shall have in future more so with the present set up in Delhi which is following a Hindutva policy while housing 200 million Muslims in the country. But then it is for the Indians to decide whether article 370 and declaration of Ladakh as union territory, Constitution Amendment Act, and policy on National Register of citizens after more than seventy years of India's independence are acceptable. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will have to face an electorate with an economy projected to grow around 2% in 2020 and 2021, huge unemployment and hunger in certain places.

**So far as we in Bangladesh are concerned this writer is convinced of closest possible relations with India will be beneficial for Bangladesh.**

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