



SOUTH ASIA PEACE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Edited by
Prof. (Dr.) C. B. Bhangre
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 **Bharti**

South Asia Peace *and* Security Challenges

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Introduction

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has created a global health crisis that has a profound impact on our world and day-to-day lives. Due to this pandemic, millions of people have lost their lives all over the world and people are still dying by the coronavirus. The whole world is suffering from this virus. So far, no country has been able to stop its infection completely. The virus has also badly affected the South Asian region. Though, the pandemic has not been a new phenomenon in the history of South Asia. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has affected more than 1.9 billion people in the South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives (Zee News, 2020). However, the coronavirus was first reported in the city of Wuhan of China on 31st December, 2019 (WHO, 2020). After that, the virus spread rapidly in the whole world. The Covid-19 pandemic put the whole world in danger. In a very short period of time, the virus engulfed the whole world. For this reason, on 11th March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the coronavirus as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). To prevent the virus from spreading, the government of all countries put a lockdown measure in their own countries, so that people do not get out of their homes, because this virus spreads very fast by coming into contact with each other. The government of all countries stopped all services except emergency services during the period of lockdown. All these have a devastating effect on the economic activity of the country.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also a very profound effect on South Asian countries. Like the rest of the world, the government of South Asian countries also resorted to lockdown measure to control community transmission of the coronavirus. South Asia is one of

the most densely populated regions in the world, where the risk of infection of the virus is highest. As a result, the lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of the virus caused a major setback to the country's economy. Although, the region's economy was already in terrible condition before the pandemic, the Covid-19 made it more severe (The Kootneeti, 2020). Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be a major health threat as well as the economy of the country. Kristalina Georgieva, Chief of International Monetary Fund (IMF), has said that "the world has to face the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of 1930" (The Indian Express, 2020).

Current Pandemic in South Asia and Challenges

South Asia is a region that includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Maldives. Currently, the population of this region is one fifth of the world population and contribute more than 15% to global economic growth (France 24, 2017). According to a report, the first covid-19 case in South Asian countries was reported in Nepal on 23rd January, 2020 in a 32-year-old student, who returned from the city of Wuhan in China (Reuters, 2020). After that the case of Covid-19 in South Asian countries gradually increased. The second case of Covid-19 was registered in the state of Kerala in India on 30th January, 2020 (NDTV, 2020). This was followed by the confirmation of Covid-19 cases in Herat province of Afghanistan on 24th February (CNA, 2020) and in Pakistan on 26th February (The News, 2020). In this way, South Asian region went under the grip of the coronavirus. On 6th March, Bhutan confirmed the first Covid-19 case in a 76-year-old man (BBS, 2020). Due to its transmission, this pandemic has been declared a global health disaster of the century as it is becoming a challenge for the entire human race (UNDP, 2020). Bangladesh and Maldives also officially confirmed the covid-19 cases on 8th March, 2020 (Straitstimes, 2020) (AA, 2020). Hence, we can say that no country remains in South Asia countries which is untouched by this virus. The virus spread rapidly in South Asian region as it is a densely populated region. The number of people getting infected started increasing day by day. In the mid of May, 2020 India became the first South Asian country to overtake China in terms of number of Covid-19 cases. At present, India is becoming the world's hot spot for this pandemic. Most countries of the world adopted lockdown measures to prevent the infection of the coronavirus. All services except emergency services were stopped during the period of lockdown. The South Asian countries also followed the policy of lockdown to save the people

from getting infected. But unlike other countries such as Germany, Italy and Thailand, the lockdown measure in densely populated areas such as India, did not help to prevent the outbreak of the coronavirus. Rather, the subsequent lockdown halted the wheel of economic activity and hit the economy of the country badly. Today, South Asian countries like India have the highest number of people infected with virus worldwide and still the risk of infection of the virus continues to increase. The total number of Covid-19 cases and number of deaths in South Asian countries are as follows:-

Country	Date	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
India	17 November	8874290	130519
Pakistan	17 November	361082	7113
Bangladesh	15 November	432333	6194
Afghanistan	17 November	43628	1638
Nepal	17 November	211475	1247
Bhutan	1 November	349	00
Sri Lanka	17 November	17674	61
Maldives	17 November	12314	44

(Sources: (WHO, 2020), (Big News Network, 2020), (Worldometer, 2020))

The data given in the chart shows that Covid-19 has caused havoc in some countries of South Asia and is still under threat of coronavirus. No one can deny the fact that India currently has the highest number of Covid-19 cases among South Asian countries. The massive population of South Asia, extreme poverty, weak human resources and poor health care system made the situation worse in this region. The lockdown measure imposed to prevent the spread of the virus, severely affected the economic activity of these countries. We can see its direct impact in the economy of these countries. By the end of 2019, economic growth of India has fallen below 5% and unemployment rate grows rapidly (The Economic Times, 2019). Not only India and Pakistan, which are the second largest economy of this region, but also Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were under the economic downturn even before the pandemic. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measure had devastated it. The world Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have revised the economic growth rate of the countries in the region. According to a report of World Bank, 38 million people in this region may fall below the poverty line (Nikkie Asia, 2020). It is estimated that the regional economy will contract at 7.7%, India at 9.9%, Maldives and

Sri Lanka at 19.5% and 6.8% in this year (World Socialist Web Site, 2020). According to a survey, millions of people in India have lost their jobs and urban poverty has increased rapidly. Employment opportunities are starting to decrease gradually. Companies started retrenchment of their employees. The number of unemployed youths is constantly increasing. It is said that South Asia is experiencing its worst recession. Though, South Asian regions are already lagging behind developed countries. In this way, the Covid-19 pandemic actually led to the global crisis. It is also true that as a result of the necessary measures taken to control the outbreak of the coronavirus, a major economic and humanitarian crisis has arisen. Its economic far-reaching consequences will be very frightening in the coming days.

Conclusion

We can say that the Covid-19 pandemic is becoming a threat to the entire human race. It has not only affected the countries of South Asia but also affected all the countries of the world in a big way. The South Asian countries is currently facing double crisis. On the one hand, the coronavirus pandemic has created a health crisis and on the other hand, countries are facing economic crisis. Due to the rising outbreak of coronavirus and lockdown measure in the world, the government of the country has lost many economic assets. The progress of the country seems to have stagnated for some time. After World War II, the whole world is facing the most difficult situation today. In this pandemic situation, all countries of the world need to co-operate among themselves, in which all countries need to unite and fight against the coronavirus effectively. This is not the time to fight or blame each other politically. Rather it is time for all countries to co-operate and help each other to save the global economic and financial structure so that the country is on the path of progress again. Doctors, Researchers, Scientists and Medical Sciences from all over the world are looking for ways to prevent infection of coronavirus but not yet successful. We hope that the vaccine of the Covid-19 will be discovered very soon and get control over the disease.

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