

Future of BRI in the Post-COVID World

Over the past few years, China has challenged traditional concepts of development in all sectors. First, it has emerged as a powerhouse state with an unconventional approach that has been viewed with a lot of skepticism for various reasons. Since it developed in relative isolation with a system different from most nation states, many across the world see it as a mystery. Second, the world's approach towards transformation in the current political order has always been based on aggression rather than cooperation, as chosen by China. China's approach towards power is unprecedented, and hence, there are those who are doubtful of its actual intentions.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one project that has raised many red flags with the *status quo*. It is China's model of cross-continental connectivity that aims to implement this development model transcending borders and territories.

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a huge blow to Chinese efforts to lend support to small-scale economies by connecting them across continents through the ancient silk route under the spirit of BRI. Challenges, which the BRI is now facing, have increased manifold since the outbreak. Countries need to revive their economies in these testing times, and the lending and borrowing capacity of both developed and underdeveloped countries is undergoing massive upheaval. Ironically, the Chinese dream is also facing criticism that they are providing support to the poor countries along the route, by utilising its industrial might to cater to the needs of the health sector across the world, and providing essential support to the pandemic-hit communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, thus, altered the BRI prospects in various ways - making some of its key features irrelevant for the times to come, while at the same time, paving and leading the way through innovative strategies such as health and digital technology. This panel will focus on the following key questions:

1. How traditional development projects would be impacted in post-COVID scenario?
2. Will China be able to maintain the flow of investment into the BRI projects given the new social and economic constraints?
3. How will the evolution of BRI in the post-pandemic world affect the countries involved?
4. How will the transformation of BRI impact countries like Pakistan who are relying massively on the project?
5. What implications can the new face of BRI hold for China, in view of the response of the West?

Panel Organisers

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