



**Reframing South Asian  
Regional Cooperation  
in the New Context**  
*National and Global Dimensions*  
4-5 November 2023, Dhaka, Bangladesh



### Plenary Session 3

## **Geo Strategic Factors Underpinning Contemporary Trends in South Asian Cooperation**

Sunday, 5 November 2023 | 9:30 am – 11:00 am

Venue: Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Dhaka

In South Asia there has always been strong economic arguments in favor of regional integration but political as well as geo strategic factors have impeded the emergence of an effective South Asian community. The political conflict between India and Pakistan, their security concerns, the dominance of India vis-a-vis her small neighbors, the super power rivalries for expanding influence in the region, all these factors have traditionally played a negative role inhibiting cooperation in the region.

In recent years we have observed some new trends in global as well as regional geo politics which have created further challenges for regional cooperation. The panel discussion will focus on the impact of these trends on the relationship between the countries of the region and prospects for regional cooperation. It will also explore whether these trends will open up pathways for a new reconfigured South Asia. Some of the contemporary geo political trends are presented below:

1. China has emerged as a global economic powerhouse. She is also a major economic partner of all South Asian countries in terms of trade and capital flows. The rise of China has led to growing contestation between the US and China in all regions of the world including South Asia. Contestations have also emerged between China and India. New economic and strategic groupings such as the Quad and other comprehensive economic partnerships have emerged. The South Asian countries have responded differently to these contestations and new groupings. The guiding questions for the panelists are:
  - **How is the US-China and China-India contestations affecting relationships between the countries of the region?**
  - **Are these contestations promoting or hindering regional cooperation?**
  - **Are these contestations creating new opportunities for a reconfigured South Asia?**
2. India's evolution towards the status of a global economic power and its aspiration to be a global player manifested through its leading role in BRICS and its entrepreneurial role in convening the recent G-20 summit in India have elevated her vision beyond the boundaries of South Asia. Her Look East Policy of strengthening relations with ASEAN and other Asia Pacific countries, Middle East and Central Asia have also contributed to a perception that India is giving less priority to South Asia. The guiding questions for the panelists are:
  - **Is India's preoccupation to be a global player making her relationship with the neighbors in South Asia less of a priority?**

- **Does India speak in all the different fora as a leader of South Asia or on behalf of just India?**
  - **Can India leverage her enhanced global presence to seek greater economic benefits for her South Asian neighbors?**
3. The globalization process is itself going through transformative changes and is moving the international economic community away from the idea of a more open, integrated economic order. The initiatives of successive US administrations and now the EU towards more protective and exclusionary practices of economic relations have led to an increase in the multiplicity of trading arrangements and terms of capital transfer across the international economy. The guiding questions for the panelists are:
- **What has been the impact of these transformative changes on the countries of South Asia?**
  - **Have they impacted the relationships between the countries?**
  - **Is there a scope for collective action by South Asian countries to respond to these changes?**
4. The growth in the politicization of international economic relations and the weaponization of trade and investment flows as strategic resources through such instruments as economic sanctions (both primary and secondary) and the terms on which trade and investment take place has impacted negatively on all countries, but particularly the less developed ones, as seen by the fallout from the Ukraine war. The guiding questions for the panelists are:
- **How are these trends impacting on South Asian countries?**
  - **Is there a scope for greater collective action within South Asia to respond to the weaponization of the economic instruments?**

**The geo strategic trends identified above and the guiding questions are only suggestive. The panelists are free to identify other trends and raise other questions.**