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PLENARY SESSION 4

A Reflection on Diplomacy and Policy Post-pandemic



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Considering the theme of the conference, 'Post-pandemic World Order: Issues and Challenges' and the focus on multidisciplinary, plenary session four converged the aspects of vaccine diplomacy, migration, and geriatric crisis during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chairing the session, **Prof. Arvind Kumar**, *Professor of United States Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi* made a remark on the importance of ideological debates which would help in the development of significant research ideas.



Professor Arvind Kumar delivering his speech as a Chair for the session

On the above note, the first speaker **Prof. S.Y. Surendra Kumar**, *Professor and Chairperson, Department of Political Science, Bangalore University* presented a paper on 'India and China's Vaccine Diplomacy: A Soft Power Perspective'. He made important observations on how the role of Covid 19 'vaccine' as soft power has resulted in the re-emergence of the ideological divide between the East and the West, new political identities between have and have-nots – where States became more pragmatic in terms of survival setting aside the concept of collective security. Vaccine diplomacy aims at creating a mutual relationship which can be called as public health diplomacy. Vaccine diplomacy is not a new concept and with time has become important for grants and other aspects. Emphasis was made on India's leading position in providing vaccines to different countries in need, especially in the form of grants, accessibility, and affordability. Such an act has strengthened the image of India as a humanitarian country.

China's vaccine diplomacy, on the other hand, has been backed by Chinese authoritarian institutions. Both the countries started with advantages – while India has a market of cheap pharmacy, China made vaccines affordable for developing countries. While India had limited commercialisation unlike China, China faced criticism regarding the West looking in for vaccine nationalism.

He opined that the pandemic allowed India and China to achieve a moderate growth rate in the post-pandemic period, unlike the economies of the West. Further, the most vital aspect is that China and India emerged as key players in the global arena by providing the vaccines to fight the virus at a lower cost/free for developing and least developed nations. Therefore, many academics, decision-makers, and political figures view China's and India's vaccine diplomacy as a successful form of soft power strategy that has strengthened the stature of both rising powers. Concluding his remarks, he highlighted how geo-political interests are similar to both countries and despite using vaccines as a soft power, its impact remains short lived.



Professor S.Y. Surendra Kumar sharing his thoughts on vaccine diplomacy

Next was **Dr. Vanita Banjan**, Associate Professor, SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Empowered Autonomous), Mumbai, Maharashtra who presented a paper on 'The Migrant Population: A Chronicle of Covid- 19's Impact and the Role of Civil Society'. She laid emphasis on the role played by civil societies in tackling the challenges posed by Covid- 19. She broadly gave an overview of the three organisations viz. Khana Chahiya, Sonu Sood Foundation, and Money Life Formation. While 'Khana Chahiye' focussed on providing nutritious food to the migrants travelling during Covid, 'Sonu Sood Foundation' focussed on providing health benefits, vehicles facilities for seamless communication. 'Money Life Foundation' on the other hand emphasised on providing housing to the migrants. Dr. Vanita highlighted collaboration of the three organisations and the government in handling the COVID situation when it comes to the plight of the migrants. Mention was made on the pivotal role of citizens who volunteered in different arenas and extended helping hand to these organisations in providing humanitarian relief to the migrants. Summing up, emphasis was made on active engagement of the three NGOs, government and citizens in providing support, aid, and advocacy for irregular migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic and how NGOs play a vital role in disseminating and amplifying information.



Dr. Vanita Banjan sharing her thought on migrant population

It is said, "we are not living in fear, we are living in faith". The third speaker in this plenary was **Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee**, Associate Professor, Centre for Women Studies, Bangalore University, who presented a paper on 'Pandemic and Beyond: Reflection on Geriatric Crisis and Intervention' making an impactful analysis on the vulnerable section of the population who faced neglect, i.e. the old population. Stress was made on India's lack of geriatric policy or social security benefits. During COVID, the notion of family had changed with the care challenges being humongous in the nuclear family. Multiplicity of problems were noticed for old age. She explicitly elaborated on inter-generational conflict to be one of the reasons for making communication intervention a challenge. She pointed out that traditional social values demand the elderly members be treated with utmost honour and respect. However, in the absence of well-defined state-supported social-security benefits like access to quality health care and financial support, families are more or less responsible for elders' care. With increased life expectancy and recent changes favouring smaller family sizes, migration, increasing professional demand for both men and women and the absence of social security benefits and institutional care services causing much strain for caregivers, followed by increasing vulnerabilities of the elders within families.

Deducing her arguments, she emphasised on the adoption of geriatric policy, access to health from institutional perspectives, universal access, pension schemes and participatory inclusion to be the need of the hour to address the geriatric crisis in India. It is therefore crucial to draw lessons from the pandemic to construct a more supportive and inclusive society for older adults.



Dr. Sudeshna Mukherjee sharing her thoughts on geriatric crisis and intervention

The remarks made during the plenary session were beautifully aligned with the conference theme showcasing the multi-dimensional perspectives on the post-pandemic world order. The discussions that

followed hinted at the fact that as much as India is gaining popularity in foreign policy making and practices, it is also essential to take a closer eye on the domestic policies catering to societal needs.



Speakers of plenary session 4 with the chair