

## **IN SEARCH FOR A NEW MULTILATERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

- The passing away of Pope Francis in April this year has given us the rare opportunity to contemplate the pace of change the world has gone through in the 12 years between his pontification and his death
  - o Change is the constant variable of the modern times. And by early 21st century, humankind as a whole has come to accept the very fast nature of change. What has shocked us within the last 12 years was not the pace of change, though, but the extreme speed and volatility of the process of change. When Pope Francis was elected, the world was still at early stages of the digital age. Today, Artificial Intelligence is leading us into an ambivalent future.
  - o We were all witnessing change back then, in 2013, and was predicting that the process of change would fundamentally transform our world, our societies, our norms. But few people predicted that change would be so fast and unexpectedly transforming.
  - o The closest example of how fast, transformative change has impacted global networks was when a Chinese AI company disclosed its DeepSeek generative AI early this year: when the whole world was looking at the Silicon Valley to lead the way in generative AI, the Chinese company have shocked the world powers and markets fundamentally. And it is no coincidence today that the Trump administration's most fundamental priority is to arrange a tariff regime to block the global footprint of China in almost all areas, from AI to electric vehicles to pharmaceuticals.
  - o In my speech today, I would like to draw your attention to how the transformative dynamics of change have drastically altered the status-quo ante in many walks of life, leading the values-laden liberal democratic

global order to falter. And I will elaborate how it can be replaced with a more egalitarian new international order.

- The transformative change process is leading to further decentralization of power in global politics, which in turn leads to more multipolarization. Yet, multipolarization doesn't produce balances by itself.
  - o In the speech I delivered here last year, I had underlined the emergence of the multipolar world. Today, most honoured to be back in St Petersburg again, I would argue that the global decentralization of power is both a reason and a result, and hence a complementing aspect of the fast and relentless change process that we are witnessing.
  - o Along with the decentralization of power, which enables a more multi-polar world, the strong process of change and transformation is breaking up status-quo ante: power asymmetries are becoming exponentially larger, niche actors emerge to make stronger impacts on major powers, public sentiments not necessarily leading up to public reactions, and the ways of doing politics, especially between nations, retreating back to Bismarckian Realpolitik.
  - o The emerging new global Realpolitik depends on the might of the mightier, exponentially more than before. During the Israeli invasion of Gaza, we have seen that Israel's actions had only one limit: the calculations and decisions of PM Netanyahu's government. Not the "recommendations" or "warnings" of world powers, not any international treaty, not any sort of moral anchor, not any democratic dissent delivered by the hundreds of thousands of protesters from all over the world had any deterrence on Israel.
  - o So, the multipolarization of the new emerging global order does not necessarily mean checks and balances on each other of *equivalent forces*.

The terrain is asymmetrical and highly uneven. Hence, today's most fundamental question that needs to be answered is this: what may be the new perspective that should be a reference point for global politics and international relations, when the toolkit of post-second-world-war liberal democratic order is fastly dismantling?

- For establishing a more just and sustainable international order, we have to diagnose the shortcomings of the status-quo ante, and find answers to why the value-laden liberal democratic 'global order' is dismantling so quickly.
  - o Tragic disparities and double standards seem to be the strongest underlying reason of most of the reaction, and hence "revanche" to the liberal democratic order. The disparities are between the limits of power of even otherwise close nations and peoples. And double standards are about whether a nation, or a people, are politically and discursively on the "accepted" or "non-accepted" bracket. So, for example, while Russian football teams may be blocked from attending international tournaments *as a result of* the war in Ukraine, Israeli teams may continue to play in those very tournaments *despite* the invasion of Gaza. This is double standards, pure and naked, and is causing a lot of disturbance on the side of those who are not favoured.
  - o The natural limits and challenges of participative democracy come as another set of reasons. Participative democracy is hitherto the most humanitarian political system the *humankind* has invented. Yet, its biggest strength may well become its biggest enemy: the mandate of the masses, the psychology of which may well be manipulated, may opt for the worst choices.
  - o The ills of global capitalism is yet another underlying reason. It may sound as a cliché, yet the 80-20 parity is still there, even turning worse: 80 per

cent of the global wealth being owned by 20 per cent of globe's population. So while parts of California or Norway may today be living the wealthy life of the future, parts of Eritrea or Yemen are still living with the grotesque remains of the 20th century, "age of extremes", as late British socialist scholar Eric Hobsbawm preferred to call.

- Finally, massive global human movements, either as immigration for economic reasons, or as seeking refuge escaping persecution or war, have been one of the most dominant contributing factors to the despair of liberal democracies. The world's richest nations, the histories of most having some sort of colonialism, were in pains to accept refugees and immigrants. Closing borders, rising border walls, deporting undocumented immigrants all had the same pretext: protecting the jobs and livelihoods of the middle classes, whose living standards gradually worsened with changing dynamics of global supply and demand – but not necessarily as a result of incoming immigrants.
  - There are many other contributing factors to the faltering process of liberal democratic global system. Yet, I believe these four that I have just summarized constitute the backbone.
- The diagnosis point to multiple insufficiencies is on the side of liberal democratic world order. Therefore, elaborating solutions and/or alternatives require plural viewpoints and a more egalitarian debate.
- Values impose a position of superiority, principles don't. Therefore, for establishing a new international system and transforming the world, I believe that our priority should be on agreeing on a set of principles rather than values. These principles should be guiding, not imposing. And more important than anything, they should not prioritize the

ideological/cultural/religious/ethnic references of any one nation or group of nations.

- The preconceptions based on “west vs the rest” have to change. Modernity, and postmodernity thereof, have been the products of a process of secular enlightenment that was born in Europe. Yet, this process has never been solely limited to Europe. Many countries, nations and peoples from different regions of the world, from Japan to Argentina, from India to Ghana, have made their peculiar and valuable contributions to the project of modernity.
  - Indeed, the material growth that most parts of the Western world has realized from the second half of 19th century onwards has largely been a result or a consequence of a brutal colonial experience. Therefore, at an age when information has become a truly global flow, rather than a west-centered static entity, it is high time to abandon the idea of western superiority over the rest of the world.
- The need for a new, multi-centered, more egalitarian international order is both necessary and urgent. The multiple crises that we are experiencing all over the world make this all the more imperative.
- In my address last year, I have underlined the importance of BRICS as an alternate model to contemplate for the launch of a new international world order. BRICS is still valuable, and it will gain more prominence in the years to come. Now, the real challenge that lies ahead is, how can we multiply the models like BRICS? How can we create attraction centers that would lure nations, especially those which are tired and exhausted as a result of decades long efforts to catch up with the so-called ‘first world’?
  - We need new stories, new narratives. We need new vocabularies, new grammars. We need new and untried, unconsumed methodologies. We

need new ways of doing things, talking among nations, connecting peoples. Each nation, each people, may have their unique contributions for the establishment of a principles-based new international order. The trick is in unearthing their potential. And that can only be possible when we are able to talk to each other without the burdens of old ages, histories and vocabularies.

- We can establish a new international order only when we are able to write a new vocabulary that may enable *the subaltern to speak*, so as to use the beautiful term Gayatri Spivak created. Easier said than done, some may say. It may well be the opposite.

Thank you very much indeed for your attention.