[Abdul Sattar](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/abdul-sattar)

December 30, 2020

**Forging unity in Asia**

The writer is a freelance journalist.

With the rapid bounce back, the Chinese economy is fast recovering, raising the expectations that it will overtake the US as the largest economy in 2028. This projection has stunned many in the Western world which thought that the communist country would emerge as the biggest economy in 2033.

The West seems to have been flabbergasted by the alacrity that the rising economic power demonstrated in dealing with the pandemic that ravaged country after country, bringing commercial and trade activities to a halt for weeks besides slowing down the pace of manufacturing. The US, the UK, Germany and some other Western countries are still grappling with the situation but Beijing is on the march on expanding its economy.

The projection has been offered by the think tank, the Centre for Economics and Business Research, in its annual report published recently. The report says that China looked set for average economic growth of 5.7 percent a year from 2021-25 before slowing to 4.5 percent a year from 2026-30. The report predicts that the US economy might have a strong post-pandemic rebound next year but its growth would slow to 1.9 percent a year between 2022 and 2024 and then to 1.6 percent after that. According to the think tank, Japan will remain the world’s third-biggest economy, in dollar terms, until the early 2030s when it would be overtaken by India, pushing Germany down from fourth to fifth. The UK, currently the fifth biggest economy by the CEBR’s measure, is expected to slip to sixth place from 2024.

Many in Asia believe this augurs well for the continent, which has been dominated by Western powers throughout most of modern history. India was colonized by the mighty British Empire while China suffered at the hands of Japan as well as European powers. The US also exploited the giant country before the communist revolution of 1949 through interventions, machinations and economic slavery. It is interesting to note that three powers from Asia will make it to the top positions on global economic hierarchy, with the Chinese being the biggest economic masters while Japan is expected to retain its position as the third biggest economy and India expected to push down Germany, taking fourth position.

Those who are lured into believing that this could herald an era of Asian ascendancy are mistaken because it is not only economic factors that determine the fate of nations but political considerations as well that prevent states from shedding their past and moving forward. It is ironic that the European powers that fought terrible wars emerged as a unified force after World War Two. The Thirty-Year War, the hundred years of conflict, the scramble for European dominance and a myriad of other controversial issues were consigned to the dustbin of history when the collective power of the West was threatened by the rise of communist ideology and the decolonization of third world countries. The UK did not hesitate in collaborating with its former colony, the US, recognizing Washington as the master of the new world. And France decided to hobnob with its arch enemies, Germany and Britain.

But does such possibility exist in the ancient continent? The answer is very problematic. Unlike European states, the geographical entities in Asia do not see any homogeneity. With their different religions, diverse culture and antagonistic concepts of nationalism, they seem to be a world apart. It is not only cultures that divide them but religious differences also dampen all hopes of unity.

The Chinese cannot get rid of a hegemonic Japan that not only threatened their interests now but has been their tormentor in the past as well. The memories of Japanese occupation and brutalities are still fresh in millions of minds in China that are not ready to forget it. India under Modi is seeking regional dominance which is not possible under the watchful eye of the dragon that is ready to compete with New Delhi in all fields. The BJP-led government in New Delhi wants to muster support by challenging the socialist country that defeated the largest democracy in the war of 1962 and is still considered a big national security threat in the power corridors of New Delhi.

Though the possibility of regional cohesion does not exist, it can be created. India and China both seek economic development. Japan does not want its progress to be hampered by conflicts and tensions. All three states are likely to have a gargantuan appetite for energy. The Middle East is depleting and it is estimated that the Central Asian States will emerge as one of the biggest hubs of energy supply in the world. If Afghanistan is stabilized and ties between India and Pakistan are normalized, the region could offer a lot of economic opportunities. The Central Asian States also need massive projects of infrastructure that China can accomplish. Such mega business initiatives can not only benefit Japanese companies, they can also help the growth of the Indian economy.

But before that dream can be translated into a reality, Japan and China will have to sort out their differences. It is ironic that Tokyo could forget the barbaric attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, hobnobbing with Washington, which is not negative per se, but one wonders why the Japan leadership does not hold an olive branch to China that is ready to make a lot of compromises for the sake of regional stability, economic growth and trade promotion. Japan’s entry into a four-country strategic alliance against China has only led to more suspicions. If Tokyo could normalize ties with countries that are thousands of miles away, it could definitely think of ways to have cordial relations with China.

The same could be said about India that suffered the worst form of humiliation at the hands of the British Empire, but today it is one of the closest friends of London. It even dares to not demand reparation for the colonial enslavement and plundering by the British. Some researchers claim that the British looted more than $45 trillion from India during the colonial times. The killing of around 35 million Indians in Bihar, Orissa and Bengal, in what some Indian historians call British imposed famines, are also blamed on London. It is interesting to note that New Delhi wants to forget this all but it loves to peddle anti-Chinese propaganda by invoking some alleged incidents of atrocities that the communist country committed during the Sino-India war.

One of the ways to forge unity among the Asian states would be to create an effective forum that might bring the leaders of the continent on one platform. This may be used as merely a discussion club but initially it might provide an opportunity to the people of these diverse cultures to explore the points that could provide them a sense of oneness. Such a platform could be kept apolitical initially, allowing the countries to discuss the myriad of challenges that this ancient continent is facing.

The environment as well as natural calamities could be some of the points that might force the states in the continent to ponder over ways that might mitigate the detrimental effects caused by global warming. Exchange of students on a massive scale could also help allay the apprehensions of one country’s people about others. Connectivity and free movement could also go a long way in bringing the people of the continent closer. Since the three countries are the economic powers of the continent, they should be the first to come up with such a mechanism.

Email: egalitarianism444@gmail.com