

Dhaka defends China's OBOR project

Countries must not become "isolated in the name of sovereignty," said Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque, striking a counter to India's tough position against China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative during a discussion on Asian connectivity projects.

"Economic issues now dictate how much sovereignty one should exert," Mr. Haque said at the World Economic Forum in Delhi. "We cannot be isolated in the name of sovereignty... There are times when you have to put the sovereignty issue behind, in the back seat, to the economic benefits to your people."

'High costs involved'

"We in South Asia are the least integrated compared to ASEAN countries," conceded Congress leader and Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs Shashi Tharoor, speaking during the discussion "Asia's New Normal" at the WEF conference, but warned that while India could not "dictate" to its neighbours, they must see the high costs of the Belt and Road Initiative.

"Chinese are now coming to build projects in Pakistan and in Sri Lanka they are increasingly seeing the exorbitant costs of Chinese aid. Many now call Sri Lanka's Hambantota port project, a white elephant," Mr. Tharoor added.

Mr. Haque's comments came in defence of Bangladesh's decision to join the 60-nation connectivity project promoted by China, even as concerns grow over the "debt trap" that the massive infrastructure projects are leading smaller SAARC countries like Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka into. In May, India had refused to attend China's Belt and Road Forum.

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