

## **The Public Healthcare System and COVID-19 Pandemic in South Asia**

South Asia inherited a well-established public healthcare system from the colonial Raj, which witnessed further improvements since then. South Asia also claims to the historically rooted indigenous healthcare systems i.e. Ayurveda. Yet, western healthcare system remains the most dominant and prevalent form in the region, but in practicality both work hand in hand to provide universal healthcare. The public healthcare system in South Asia claims to many achievements with dedicated professionals at all levels. The controlling and almost eradication of malaria is one of such achievements. The entry of the private sector into the healthcare sphere and prevalence of 'private practice' in the last few decades caused a wedge in the welfare structure of the healthcare system. At the time of the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the recent past, the main challenge the public healthcare system confronted was how to cope with growing healthcare demand with the existing flawed structures and minimum resources.

Today, South Asia has emerged as a global hotspot of COVID-19 Pandemic where India has accounted for almost half of all global infections and a quarter of deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to the existing public healthcare system in the region. This crisis highlighted both strengths and weaknesses of the public healthcare system. It is already facing a structural crisis as how to maintain effective welfare healthcare structures in the face of resource deficit.

Thus, the public healthcare system in South Asia has been put to test like never before by the pandemic. How does the public healthcare system in South Asia face this challenge? What are the positive and negative experiences and lessons one can derive from this challenge? What is the direction of the public healthcare system in post-COVID-19 South Asia?

In this backdrop, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies organizes a webinar on the topic *The Public Healthcare System and COVID-19 Pandemic in South Asia*. Four renowned South Asian scholars will present their views during a panel discussion.

Dr. Nihal Abeysinghe (Sri Lanka)

Prof. Karori Singh (India)

Dr. Nishchal Pandey (Nepal)

Prof. Moonis Ahmer (Pakistan)