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**Israel says Gaza war is like WWII.
Experts say it's 'justifying brutality'**



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**Justin Trudeau's belated and
shameful volte face on Gaza**



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Editorial

Dr. Busharat Elahi Jamil
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Once again, on February 8, 2024, after the burial of true democratic values the drama of General Elections seems to be staged in Pakistan. Elections in Pakistan is a less political and more of a psychological and defective thriller. Establishment plays its key role to manipulate psychology of the so-called politicians steering these corrupt political clutches to mislead the emotions of the common masses.

In the 75 years history of the Country, the results of the General elections have ever endured pro-Establishment but never pro-democratic. Somehow, democratic political system prevails in a limited capacity, so Pakistan's election results are approved and concern directly to the intentional and domestic establishments.

In fact, corrupt political classes and limited democracy in Pakistan is more suitable for them to fulfill their objectives. Perhaps these are the weird reasons why elections have never been held in fair and free manners in Country.

In Pakistan, participation in the elections is a costly process leaving no opportunities for the common masses to be the part of democratic course where only elite and privileged classes can only contest. Usually, so-called politicians or their financiers spend black money on respective election campaigns.

Historically to run the election campaign according to the rules, the expenditure limits respectively were in 1970 for NA Rs. 25000 and for PA Rs. 15000, in 1977 Rs. 40,000 and Rs. 25000, in 1988 Rs 500,000 and Rs. 300,000, in 1993 Rs. 10,00,000 and Rs. 600,000, in 2002 Rs. 15,00,000 and Rs. 10,00,000, in 2017 Rs. 40,00,000 and Rs. 20,00,000. In 2023 the limit stays unchanged (Dunya News).

But unfortunately, candidates spend way more than the fixated limits. Governments are formed through political manipulations and horse trading, on which billions of rupees have been spent. Governments formed on the basis of power, corruption and black money have never been proven suitable for the true democratic values and country's honourable survival. But this is what's been happening in the country since 1947, and Pakistan is now standing on the verge of destruction.

Politicians, illiterate masses and establishments all stratus are equally responsible of it. In fact, Pakistan is facing real threats not from outside but internally because lack of sincere and honest leadership.

The definite integrity and development of the Country is conditional in commencement of free and fair elections and the participation of the common masses with true democratic norms. It can only be possible with political vision, wisdom, will and consciousness as well as with the participation of the educated class in the political fabric of Pakistan.

The practised limited democratic system and status-quo must be broken. And the February 8, 2024 should be the day in Pakistan when the people of the Country see the dawn of real democracy with the role and rule of common masses.

Israel is losing the war against Hamas – but Netanyahu and his government will never admit it

By: Paul Rogers



Until recently the war narrative on Gaza has been very largely controlled by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the country's ministry of defence. Israel's international reputation may have plummeted with the killing of more than 20,000 Palestinians, the wounding of more than 50,000 and the destruction of much of Gaza, but the IDF could still sell a plausible narrative of a severely weakened Hamas, even claiming that the war in northern Gaza was largely complete, and success in southern Gaza would follow before too long.

The narrative was helped by severe difficulties for the few journalists still operating in Gaza, including the risk to their personal safety, while the international press corps was stuck in Jerusalem and dependent on IDF sources for much of their information. That changed as a different picture began to emerge. First there was a lack of evidence to support the IDF's claim of a Hamas headquarters under al-Shifa hospital, then the IDF could not identify the location of the Israeli hostages, despite having some of the world's most advanced intelligence. Very recently there have been two further incidents. On 12 December, there was a skilful triple ambush staged by Hamas paramilitaries in a part of Gaza supposedly controlled by Israeli forces. An IDF unit was ambushed and took casualties. Further troops were sent to aid that unit, and they were then ambushed, as were reinforcements.

Ten IDF soldiers were reported killed and other seriously wounded, but it was their seniority that counted, including as it did a colonel and three majors from the elite Golani Brigade. That Hamas, supposedly decimated and with thousands of troops already killed, could mount such an operation anywhere in Gaza, let alone a district reportedly already under IDF control, should raise doubts about the idea that Israel is making substantial progress in the war. A further indication came a few days later, when three Israeli hostages succeeded in getting away from their captors, only to be killed by IDF soldiers, even though shirtless and

carrying a white flag. What has since made that worse, and is causing considerable anger in Israel, is that calls from the hostages were picked up by an audio-equipped IDF search-dog five days before they were killed. There are other, wider indications of the IDF's problems. Official casualty figures have shown more than 460 military personnel killed in Gaza, Israel and the occupied West Bank and about 1,900 wounded. But other sources suggest far greater numbers of wounded.

Ten days ago, Israel's leading daily, Yedioth Ahronoth, published information obtained from the ministry of defence's rehabilitation department. The head of the department, Limor Luria, was reported as saying that more than 2,000 IDF soldiers had been registered as disabled since the conflict began – with 58% of all those it had treated suffering from severe injuries to their hands and feet – suggesting a far higher casualty toll than the official figure. Meanwhile, the Times of Israel has reported the number of injured IDF soldiers, Israel Police and other security forces as 6,125.

There have also been a number of friendly fire casualties, with the same paper reporting 20 out of 105 deaths due to such fire or accidents during fighting. Overall, the IDF is still following the well-rehearsed Dahiya doctrine of massive force in responding to irregular war, causing extensive social and economic damage, undermining the will of the insurgents to fight while deterring future threats to Israel's security. But it is going badly wrong. Criticism is coming from unexpected quarters, including from the former UK defence minister, Ben Wallace, who has warned of an impact lasting 50 years. Even the Biden administration is becoming thoroughly uneasy at what is unfolding, yet Benjamin Netanyahu and the war cabinet are determined to continue for as long as they can.

It is worth recognising why. The 7 October attacks and the brutality involved struck Israel's assumption of security to the core, which means that the great majority of Israeli Jews have so far continued to support Netanyahu's response. Even that, though, is fraying and is made worse by the killing of the three hostages by IDF troops.

An effect of all this is that the IDF commanders are coming under huge pressure to succeed, and will go as far as the war cabinet will allow. Many of those commanders are highly intelligent if inevitably single-minded people, and will now know that for all Netanyahu's rhetoric, Hamas, or at least Hamas's ideas, cannot be defeated by military force. They also know that while talks are stalling, pressure from the families of hostages may soon result in another humanitarian pause. Therefore, their aim will be to damage Hamas as much as they can, as quickly as they can, while they can, whatever the cost to Palestinians. For evidence of this approach, witness this week's intense air raids.

What makes that possible is Netanyahu's dependence on an extremist minority of religious fundamentalists and trenchant Zionists in his government. They would not have anything like the wider support in Israel were it not for the tragedy of 7 October, yet they are doing more and more harm to Israel's long-term security. Not only does Israel risk becoming a pariah state, even among its allies, but it will also fuel a generation of radical opposition from a reconstituted Hamas or its inevitable successor.

It needs saving from itself, but that will depend, more than anything, on Joe Biden and the people around him. Perhaps pushed on by the rapidly changing public mood in western Europe, they must recognise their role in bringing an immediate end to this conflict.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/21/israel-losing-war-against-hamas-netanyahu-idf>

Israel says Gaza war is like WWII.

Experts say it's 'justifying brutality'

By: Alasdair Soussi



Israel's campaign of relentless bombardment against the Gaza Strip had been raging for three weeks when the country's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was asked to address the heavy civilian death toll in the Palestinian enclave. Netanyahu, who had earlier evoked the 9/11 attacks on New York's Twin Towers and the Pentagon in 2001 to describe the deadly Hamas assault on southern Israel on October 7, looked to the second world war for validation, on this occasion. The hawkish Israeli premier referred to the time in 1945 – he mistakenly mentioned 1944 – when a British air raid, which had been targeting a Gestapo site, erroneously hit a school in Copenhagen killing 86 children. "That is not a war crime," he told reporters. "That is not something you blame Britain for doing. That was a legitimate act of war with tragic consequences that accompany such legitimate actions."

Since then, the Allied campaign against Nazi Germany and Japan during World War II has become something of an historical precedent for an Israeli state seeking to justify the large-scale killings of the people of Gaza as it ostensibly pursues Hamas fighters. Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Tzipi Hotovely, has compared Israel's campaign with the devastating Allied bombing of Dresden, which, conducted over three nights in 1945, was intended to force the Nazis into surrender, and led to the deaths of some 25,000-35,000 Germans. Non-state affiliated advocates of Israel have also drawn similar comparisons. Yet, these attempts erase the roots of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their land during the creation of Israel in 1948, the destruction of 500 towns and villages at the time, and the subsequent illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. They also ignore how World War II led to a new international law regime, and serve to dehumanise Palestinians while justifying Israel's decades-long violence and discrimination – described by many international rights groups as akin to apartheid – against Palestinians, say historians and analysts. Israeli historian and socialist activist Ilan Pappé told Al Jazeera that these efforts by Israel are aimed "as a justification for its brutal policies towards" Palestinians and that they represent an old playbook used by the country.

He cited the instance when former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin compared the

then-leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat, to Hitler, and war-torn Beirut to Berlin, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. "I feel as a prime minister empowered to instruct a valiant army facing 'Berlin' where, amongst innocent civilians, Hitler and his henchmen hide in a bunker deep beneath the surface," Begin said in a telegram to then-United States President Ronald Reagan in early August 1982. But Begin's words prompted criticism from many in his own country, with Israeli novelist Amos Oz writing that "the urge to revive Hitler, only to kill him again and again, is the result of pain that poets can permit themselves to use, but not statesmen".

Reaching into the past to legitimise modern-day conflicts can also be ahistorical. Scott Lucas, a specialist in US and British foreign policy at the University of Birmingham, said the relentless use of World War II by Israel and its supporters to mitigate criticism of its bloody war on Gaza suggests that Israel wants to "wish away the post-1945 pledge – by lawyers, NGOs, activists and politicians – to say we need a better system so civilians do not suffer needlessly in war zones". He added that Israel's decision to opt out of membership of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its attempts to "actively ... undermine [the authority] of the United Nations", founded after the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, make its claims to be part of an Allied-like struggle disingenuous. Israel has repeatedly accused the UN's agencies and its officials, including Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, of bias because they have called for a ceasefire. Meanwhile, Israeli bombs have killed more UN staff members in Gaza since October 7 than in any conflict in the history of the organisation.

"Civilians will be killed in wartime," Lucas acknowledged, but added that Israel appeared to be breaching the international law requirement of proportionality. In essence, a military whose war leads to civilian deaths, including through attacks on hospitals, schools and shelters – targets Israel has repeatedly struck during this war – must be able to show proportionate military gains through those strikes. That's a bar Israel hasn't met, according to many experts. "You are currently having an excessive number of civilians who are being killed because there are not adequate protections that are being applied by the power that is carrying out the attack," Lucas said. "And that's what the Israelis should be judged by. Bringing in World War II and other narratives is [just] peripheral."

Israel's supporters continue to argue that the parallel with World War II holds. Jake Wallis Simons, editor of the London-based Jewish Chronicle, said that there were "two points of similarity" between the conflicts. "The first is a sense of existential threat both during World War II and in the attacks by Hamas upon Israel," claimed Wallis Simons. "The other is the nature of the aggressor." He described Hamas's actions as "barbarism". But UN experts, international human rights groups and many nations around the world have warned that it is Israel's actions since October 7 – more than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, and almost the entire population of 2.3 million people has been displaced – that could constitute modern-day genocide. Earlier this week, Human Rights Watch accused Israel of using food as a weapon of war. Israel has maintained a blockade on Gaza since 2007, and since the start of the current war, has made it even more difficult for aid to enter the Strip. Right at the start of the current war, Israel also imposed a strict block on the entry of fuel and water – a restriction it has largely kept in place.

Against that backdrop, it's useful for Israel to project World War II onto the conflict with Palestine, suggested German-Palestinian academic Anna Younes. It helps Israel dehumanise Palestinians and blunts sensitivity towards their suffering. "By conflating Israel with Jewishness, it's easy to project Nazism ... onto Palestinians, but also onto all of their supporters," Younes told Al Jazeera. "Nazism has thus become a globalised Eurocentric rhetorical vessel for everything ... which doesn't deserve empathy and context, and is free to be killed."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/23/israel-gaza-war-wwii-palestine>

US Supreme Court says it will not intervene yet to rule on Trump prosecution

The issue on whether Mr Trump can be prosecuted for his actions to overturn the 2020 election results will now be decided by a lower court. The US Supreme Court has said it will not immediately take up a plea by special counsel Jack Smith to rule on whether former president Donald Trump can be prosecuted for his actions to overturn the 2020 election results. The issue will now be decided by the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which has signalled it will act quickly to decide the case. Special counsel Jack Smith had cautioned that even a rapid appellate decision might not get to the Supreme Court in time for review and final word before the court's traditional summer break. Mr Smith had pressed the Supreme Court to intervene over concerns that the legal fight over the issue could delay the start of Mr Trump's trial, now scheduled for March 4, beyond next year's presidential election. US District Judge Tanya Chutkan has put the case on hold while Mr Trump pursues his claim in higher courts that he is immune from prosecution. Ms Chutkan raised the possibility of keeping the March date if the case promptly returns to her court. She has already rejected Mr Trump's team's arguments that an ex-president could not be prosecuted over acts that fall within the official duties of the job. "Former presidents enjoy no special conditions on their federal criminal liability," Ms Chutkan wrote in her December 1 ruling. "Defendant may be subject to federal investigation, indictment, prosecution, conviction, and punishment for any criminal acts undertaken while in office."



The Supreme Court separately has agreed to hear a case over the charge of obstruction of an official proceeding that has been brought against Mr Trump as well as more than 300 of his supporters who stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021. In the immunity case, Mr Smith had tried to persuade the justices to take up the matter directly, bypassing the appeals court. "This case presents a fundamental question at the heart of our democracy: whether a former president is absolutely immune from federal prosecution for crimes committed while in office or is constitutionally protected from federal prosecution when he has been impeached but not convicted before the criminal proceedings begin," prosecutors wrote.

Underscoring the urgency for prosecutors in securing a quick resolution that can push the case forward, Smith and his team wrote: "It is of imperative public importance that respondent's claims of immunity be resolved by this Court and that respondent's trial proceed as promptly as possible if his claim of immunity is rejected." US Justice Department policy prohibits the indictment of a sitting president. Though there's no such bar against prosecution for a former commander in chief, lawyers for Mr Trump say that he cannot be charged for actions that fell within his official duties as president – a claim that prosecutors have vigorously rejected. Mr Trump faces charges accusing him of working to overturn the results of the 2020 election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden before the violent riot by his supporters at

the US Capitol. He has denied any wrongdoing. The high court still could act quickly once the appeals court issues its decision. A Supreme Court case usually lasts several months, but on rare occasions, the justices can move more quickly. Nearly 50 years ago, the justices acted within two months of being asked to force then-president Richard Nixon to turn over Oval Office recordings in the Watergate scandal. The tapes were then used later in 1974 in the corruption prosecutions of Mr Nixon's former aides. It took the high court just a few days to effectively decide the 2000 presidential election for Republican George W Bush over Democrat Al Gore.

<https://www.lbc.co.uk/world-news/d481c217179143b997cd79fdbf4cface/>

Israel Gaza: Hamas says no more hostage releases until war ends

Hamas, the group which controls the Gaza Strip, has ruled out any more hostage releases until Israel agrees to a "full cessation of aggression". Israel says it has killed more than 2,000 Hamas fighters in Gaza since a truce earlier this month when more than 100 hostages were freed. Around 120 people abducted from Israel on 7 October are believed to be still in captivity in Gaza. Efforts continue at the United Nations to pass a resolution on the war. The US has said it still has serious concerns over the draft UN Security Council resolution, with voting now postponed to Friday. Fighting continues in Gaza, with Israel bombarding the north and south of the territory and Hamas firing rockets at Tel Aviv. Among the Palestinians reported killed were the director of the police station in the southern city of Khan Younis and a daughter of the head of the Gaza health ministry. The week-long truce this month brought an increased flow of aid into Gaza, where the UN has warned that the population is at risk of famine if the war between Israel and Hamas continues. Negotiations on a new truce have been taking place in Cairo, Egypt, though initial talks on Wednesday bore no agreement. In a statement, Hamas said: "There is a Palestinian national decision that there should be no talk about prisoners or exchange deals except after a full cessation of aggression." It is unclear to which other Palestinian factions the statement was referring. Islamic Jihad, a smaller group in the Gaza Strip, is among those known to also be holding Israeli hostages. The Hamas statement puts the Israeli government in a very difficult position. It has said it thinks the best way to get the release of hostages is military pressure on Hamas and by staging rescue operations. But so far that approach has not really worked. Only one hostage - Ori Megidish - has actually been rescued. The government is also under huge pressure from the relatives of the hostages still being held, with some telling it the strategy of force is not working. Hamas is putting pressure on Israel to stop the war altogether but without any guarantee that the group is going to stop its armed actions. So the Israeli government is extremely reluctant to stop fighting until it feels it has completely degraded Hamas capability and it has not done that yet. This will be a huge disappointment for the people of Gaza, who are desperate for this war to stop. Early on Friday, the territory's Hamas-run health ministry put the overall death toll there since 7 October at 20,057, including at least 8,000 children and 6,200 women. When Hamas and their allies broke through the heavily guarded perimeter with Israel on 7 October they killed 1,200 people.



Fighting continues in Gaza, with Israel bombarding the north and south of the territory and Hamas firing rockets at Tel Aviv. Among the Palestinians reported killed were the director of the police station in the southern city of Khan Younis and a daughter of the head of the Gaza health ministry. The week-long truce this month brought an increased flow of aid into Gaza, where the UN has warned that the population is at risk of famine if the war between Israel and Hamas continues. Negotiations on a new truce have been taking place in Cairo, Egypt, though initial talks on Wednesday bore no agreement. In a statement, Hamas said: "There is a Palestinian national decision that there should be no talk about prisoners or exchange deals except after a full cessation of aggression." It is unclear to which other Palestinian factions the statement was referring. Islamic Jihad, a smaller group in the Gaza Strip, is among those known to also be holding Israeli hostages. The Hamas statement puts the Israeli government in a very difficult position. It has said it thinks the best way to get the release of hostages is military pressure on Hamas and by staging rescue operations. But so far that approach has not really worked. Only one hostage - Ori Megidish - has actually been rescued. The government is also under huge pressure from the relatives of the hostages still being held, with some telling it the strategy of force is not working. Hamas is putting pressure on Israel to stop the war altogether but without any guarantee that the group is going to stop its armed actions. So the Israeli government is extremely reluctant to stop fighting until it feels it has completely degraded Hamas capability and it has not done that yet. This will be a huge disappointment for the people of Gaza, who are desperate for this war to stop. Early on Friday, the territory's Hamas-run health ministry put the overall death toll there since 7 October at 20,057, including at least 8,000 children and 6,200 women. When Hamas and their allies broke through the heavily guarded perimeter with Israel on 7 October they killed 1,200 people.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67797747>

Ukraine war: Male citizens living abroad to be asked to join army

By: Robert Greenall

Ukrainian men between the ages of 25 and 60 living abroad will be asked to report for military service, Defence Minister Rustem Umerov has said. He described this as an "invitation" - but seemed to suggest anyone who did not comply would be sanctioned. However, a spokesman later clarified that no call-up was being considered. President Zelensky told journalists on Tuesday that 450,000-500,000 new soldiers



were needed but achieving this was a "sensitive issue". This comes as Ukraine's recent counter-offensive appears to have stalled.

Kyiv has also seen setbacks in provisions of aid, with US Republicans blocking a \$61bn (€55bn; £48bn) military package and Hungary stopping an EU financial deal worth €50bn (\$55bn; £43bn). In an analysis of figures from EU statistics agency Eurostat in November, BBC Ukrainian found that some 768,000 Ukrainian men aged 18-64 had left the country for the EU alone since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion. The figure does not include citizens living outside the EU, or those resident anywhere abroad since before February 2022. In an interview for the media outlets Die Welt, Bild and Politico, Mr Umerov described the recruitment drive as "not a punishment" but "an honour".

"We are still discussing what should happen if they don't come voluntarily," he said. But later a spokesman for the ministry appeared to deny any kind of coercion was involved, and said "accents were shifted" in the interview. "There is no discussion on the agenda of a call-up from abroad," Illarion Pavlyuk said, quoted by Ukrainian media. "The minister is calling on all citizens of Ukraine to join the army, wherever they may be," he added. "Just because you haven't received call-up papers, doesn't mean the threat to Ukraine has disappeared. Does that apply to Ukrainians abroad? Absolutely." There are no recruitment centres outside Ukraine, and the Ukrainian authorities have no means to force anyone to attend them.

The defence minister said that it was important to be fair, informing mobilised men how they would be trained and equipped, when and where they would serve and when they would be discharged. Mr Zelensky suggested in his end-of-year news conference on Tuesday that there were currently 500,000 Ukrainian troops at the front. He also said there were issues with rotation and holidays. Currently conscripts and volunteers are obliged to serve until the end of the war, and are only allowed 10 days' leave a year. In comparison, Russian President Vladimir Putin said this week there were 617,000 Russian troops taking part in the so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67787173>

Ukraine military seeks extra 500,000 soldiers - President Zelensky

By: Jaroslav Lukiv



Ukraine's military wants to mobilise up to 500,000 extra people, President Volodymyr Zelensky has revealed, as the war with Russia nears a two-year mark. At a news conference in Kyiv, he said his commanders were seeking "450,000-500,000 individuals", admitting this was a "sensitive" and costly issue. He said he needed more details before backing the move, hinting that 500,000 soldiers were already on the front. His comments come in the wake of aid setbacks from the US and the EU. Republicans in the US Congress first blocked a \$60bn (£47bn) military package for Ukraine earlier this month. This week, representatives of both the White House and the State Department said the US was planning one more military aid package to Ukraine - but that it had limited ability to send more help after that unless Congress acted. The US setback was followed by Hungary's blocking of the EU's €50bn (\$55bn; £43bn) financial aid deal last week. EU leaders, however, said Ukraine would not be left without support. Ukraine is facing an ammunition shortage as it continues to fight occupying Russian forces, following Moscow's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Kyiv's counter-offensive ground to a halt at the start of winter and there are fears that the Russians could simply outgun Ukraine. Olena Zelenska, Ukraine's first lady, warned in a BBC interview earlier this month that Ukrainians were in "mortal danger" of being left to die without further Western support. Russia President Vladimir Putin said this week that Moscow would continue its invasion, vowing that all his goals would be achieved.

The Kremlin leader also said that 617,000 Russian soldiers were currently taking part in what Moscow describes as its "special military operation". But he admitted that the armed forces had problems with air defence systems and communication, and needed to increase the production of drones. President Zelensky's end-of-year news conference was held in the Ukrainian capital on Tuesday, with the time and venue being kept secret from the general public. Invited Ukrainian and foreign media had been given the details in their confirmation letters. Appearing in his trademark military-style clothes, the Ukrainian leader was asked a wide range of questions during the two-hour event. He revealed that Ukraine's top military

commanders had "proposed to mobilise an additional 450,000-500,000 individuals" for the country's war effort. He said this was a "very serious number" and he needed more in-depth discussion before committing to the plan. "I need specifics: what will happen to the million-strong army of Ukraine, what will happen to those guys who have been defending our state for two years? We have issues of rotation and holidays. It should be a comprehensive plan." But he ruled out any proposals to mobilise women. When asked by the BBC's Jessica Parker about whether Ukraine could be on the cusp of starting to lose the war, Mr Zelensky was firm. "No," was the answer. It's the answer you would expect, but he's not alone in expressing this kind of determination, our correspondent in Kyiv says. Many people she has met will not countenance anything other than beating back their Russian invaders, she adds.

During the briefing, Mr Zelensky also said that:

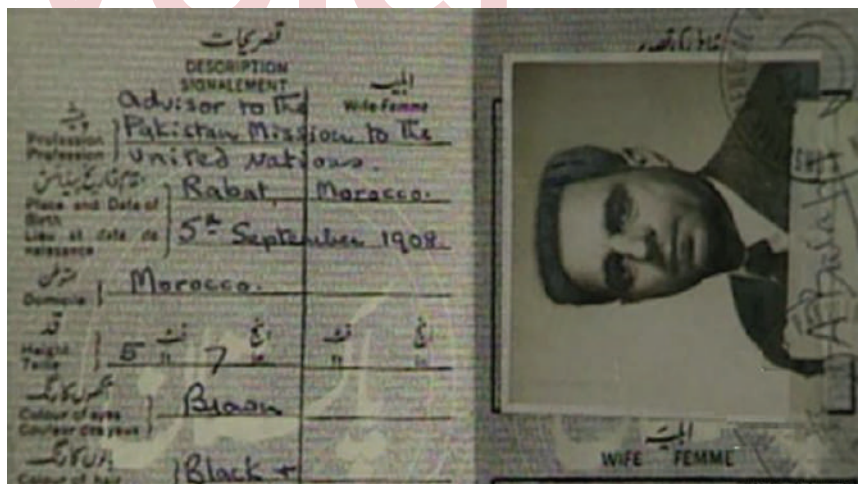
- Ukraine would be able to produce a million drones in 2024
- He had "working relations" with Ukraine's top military commander Valerii Zaluzhnyi, playing down reports of a rift between the pair
- Peace talks with Russia were not currently feasible, stressing that he would seek to restore in full Ukraine's internationally recognised borders, including Crimea

During the whole event, the Ukrainian president sought to strike a confident note - but sometimes he appeared to be tense and tetchy when pressed over reports of corruption among Ukrainian government officials and lawmakers.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67767246>

Pakistan's role in the Independence of Morocco:

In 1952 when Morocco was under French rule and they were fighting for their independence, Sultan Mohammed V of Morocco sent Ahmed Balafrej to US to address UN Security Council. However, French delegates did not allow him to speak saying that because Morocco was a French colony therefore, Ahmed Bulferg being subject of France can not speak at the UN forum. At this humiliation of Ahmed Balafrej by French, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Zafarullah Khan immediately got Pakistani embassy at US opened at night and offered Ahmed Balafrej Pakistani nationality and issued him Pakistani Passport due which on the next day he was able to address the UN Security council as Pakistani citizen in favour of Morocco. This gave great boost to the Moroccan independence movement internationally and back at home



Finally when Morocco became independent in 1956, the Sultan Mohammed appointed Ahmed Balafrej as Prime Minister of Morocco and he used to hang his framed Pakistani Passport in his Office

Volunteers breathe polluted air to test impact on brain

By: Rebecca Morelle and Alison Francis

In a lab in Manchester, volunteers are donning masks to breathe in lungfuls of polluted air. They're being exposed to different kinds of fumes, from diesel to cleaning products, in a bid to understand how pollution impacts the brain. Scientists are analysing blood samples and the results of cognitive tests taken before and after exposure. While it's well known that air quality affects the lungs and cardiovascular system, the brain is less studied. Dr Ian Mudway, an environmental toxicologist from Imperial College London, is one of the scientists leading the study.

"Over the last 10 years, we have begun to see statistical associations between air pollution and a whole range of brain-related issues - all the way from how children learn, the way in which their cognition changes, to mental health and increased risks of dementia. "What we're trying to do in this study is to actually do experiments to understand why there's an association, to find out what the underlying biological mechanisms are that link air pollution to adverse effects on the human brain." The experiments are being carried out at the University of Manchester where researchers are creating four different types of pollution: diesel exhaust, wood smoke, cleaning products and cooking fumes (created by frying a pork chop in a fume cupboard). The pollutant levels are carefully measured and controlled, then fed into an air chamber - essentially a room-sized plastic sac - and piped out to the volunteers to breathe in. The participants come to the lab multiple times over several months, and for each visit they are exposed to a different pollutant or clean air for an hour. They never know what they're breathing in while the experiments take place. Prof Gordon McFiggans, from the University of Manchester's Centre for Atmospheric Science, says a key aim is to rank the risk associated with each pollutant - both indoor and outdoor.

"There's a lot of emerging evidence that indoor air pollution can actually be more harmful than outdoor air pollution," he explained. "And of course, when you open a window or you have mechanical ventilation, you can get outdoor pollutants inside and also indoor pollutants on the outside, so there's this whole wide range of exposures that everybody's receiving."



ing. "And I think what we need to do is have some comprehensive guidance to individuals, so they're aware of the possibilities of different sorts of implications for their health." The team says the brain tests are a direct way to look at cognitive function, while the biological samples can reveal what's happening to the body. "What we want to do is understand the pathways by which the pollution actually affects the brain," Prof McFiggans says.

He says the team wants to establish if the pollutants are directly reaching the brain or whether it's an indirect effect. One possibility is that the pollutants cause inflammation in other parts of the body, like the lungs, and the chemicals produced by this biological process then make their way to the brain. "At the moment we just don't know," he says. The World Health Organization says 99% of the global population breathes in air that exceeds the UN's limits for common air pollutants and the combined effects of outside and indoor air pollution contribute to seven million premature deaths every year. The team says understanding more about how pollution is impacting brain health is vital. And although at first glance the study seems small - it involves 13 people - it's one of the largest analyses of its kind. T

his is because each volunteer is separately exposed to four pollutants (and clean air), and these results are compared with each other and then cross-compared with the results of every other participant to produce an analysis that will be statistically significant. Bryony Evens is one of those taking part. She says she's happy to breathe in pollution in the name of science - and passes the hours hooked up to the air chamber by reading a book. She says: "If they can get more data on these sorts of things, it feels like it's a really worthwhile use of my time to help with the study like this." Anything that can be done to find out things that cause us damage, just in our normal way of life, that can be changed, seems like a really valuable thing to do." The results are expected over the coming months.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-67031322>

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Watching the watchdogs: Why the West misinterprets Middle East power shifts

By: Rami G Khouri

“In Yemen, there is wisdom,” goes the medieval Arab saying.

Remember that, if you’re trying to sort out how the Israel-Palestine confrontation in Gaza rattles the Middle East – because ongoing Yemeni attacks against Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea clarify one of the region’s most important political dynamics of recent times. The rocket and drone attacks on Israeli-owned or -bound ships in recent weeks are a show of support for besieged Palestinians in Gaza by Ansar Allah (Houthis), who control most of northern Yemen. Ansar Allah say they would stop these attacks only when Israel ends its genocidal siege and bombardment of the Palestinian enclave. These attacks are part of a coordinated military reaction by the three core Arab members of the Iran-led anti-Israel (and anti-West) “Axis of Resistance”, Hezbollah, Hamas and Ansar Allah, to Israel’s latest assault on the Palestinians. At one point last week, Israel and the United States simultaneously exchanged direct fire with Axis of Resistance forces in both Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine, in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and also Yemen – which can also be seen as a peculiar low-intensity, indirect military engagement with Iran. Any assessment of how the region has evolved since October 7, and what likely lies ahead, must acknowledge three critical points relating to the Axis of Resistance’s regional network, military capabilities and trajectory. The mainstream US media and political elite tend to ignore all three points, which are:

Groups within the axis can coordinate across the region and face Israel as a united front

The widespread fear in the West that this latest Israel-Hamas confrontation would spark a full-fledged regional war between the US-Israel and half a dozen Arab-Iranian forces has not materialised. However, neither has the confrontation remained confined to Gaza – it has sparked the first serious coordinated battlefield action by the Axis of Resistance across the region. This reflects Hezbollah’s talk all year of the “unity of fronts”, ie, Axis members now coordinate and assist one another in battle, or between battles, in times of preparation.

Ansar Allah can challenge Israel/the US militarily to deter or secure concessions from them, just like Hezbollah and Hamas

For decades, Hezbollah and Hamas were the only two Arab powers that faced down Israel militarily, and forced it into ceasefires, prisoner exchanges and other concessions. Ansar Allah’s ongoing drone and missile attacks on Red Sea shipping routes will likely similarly challenge Israel. These attacks may eventually provide the Yemeni group with important leverage against its Western adversaries, especially if, as expected, the US and Israel do not send ground troops into Yemen, but rely solely on air power in their efforts to protect trade routes.

All three leading Arab members of the Axis of Resistance have significantly improved their military capabilities in the past two decades

Hezbollah was the first Axis member to prove its military prowess against Israel. The impasse between the Lebanon-based group and Israel in the 2006 war led to an informal truce based on mutual deterrence. Both parties realised that a fully-fledged war would inflict severe damage to national assets and result in unacceptable numbers of civilian casualties on both sides; they have since confined their confrontations to limited tit-for-tat attacks that result in limited casualties. On October 7, by attacking Israel at an unprecedented scale and then

managing to defend its assets to date, Hamas has also proved that it has built significant military prowess. Ansar Allah's capabilities are also improving – after forcing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates into ending their war on Yemen, in the past month it attacked at least 100 vessels in the Red Sea with high efficiency. A senior US military official called this a “very significant breadth of attacks” not seen in at least “two generations.”

We cannot yet predict what this means for the future, but this much is clear: Hamas's new prowess in attacking Israel and defending its own assets brings it close to Hezbollah's qualitative capabilities; and Ansar Allah's proven competence in drone and missile attacks against Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Red Sea shipping heightens its military proficiency.

The emerging reality is that the Axis of Resistance that unites Iran with half a dozen big and small Arab non-state, armed actors is growing stronger, and will likely continue to do so if the issues that drive the partnership remain unresolved – especially the Palestine conflict, and Israeli-American aggression, threats or sanctions against Arab parties. Former American diplomat in Yemen Dr Nabeel Khoury, now a senior fellow at the Arab Center Washington, also explained to me in an interview that after the end of the war in Yemen, Ansar Allah now seem ready to act on a regional level.

Yet you would be ignorant of this if your knowledge about the region comes from the mainstream US media. For the American media largely follow the American political elite, and both tend to ignore Middle East realities that do not comply with Western preconceptions of “weak” Arabs who only respond to the use of force by “righteous” Israeli-American armies” – despite the recent events in Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen that have shattered such racist visions for good. The increasing power, integration, and influence of the Axis of Resistance rank among the most significant geo-strategic developments in the Middle East in the last half century.

The combination of state-anchored Arab militancy by Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Palestine) and Ansar Allah (Yemen) alongside Iran's resistance to American and Israeli provocations are best understood through their common underlying values of “resistance” and “defiance”. The American media and political class, and most of the West, still refuse to see or acknowledge this, because Israel, the US and their Arab allies are the ones being resisted and defied. They prefer to assess developments in the region through their imagined prism of Islamist extremism that is blindly anti-American and anti-Israeli. And they assume they can handle any Middle Eastern challenge through Israeli-American military attacks, sanctions or threats.

Not surprisingly, scholars routinely confirm, the US and Western media mostly report on Gaza through distorted frames, usually reflecting Israeli and US policies. So we should expect them also to report on Yemen and the expanding Axis of Resistance mainly through Western and Israeli fears of growing Iranian influence. This includes the recently taken steps of sending an American armada to the region and creating a 10-country task force to conduct joint patrols in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, and the Gulf of Aden, and to provide intelligence. This aims to keep maritime traffic flowing, though top global shippers like Denmark's AP Moller-Maersk and Germany's Hapag-Lloyd already diverted their ships to other routes.

Washington is also actively considering military strikes against Ansar Allah, though Axis of Resistance and Yemeni history – in line with their defiance attitude – suggest this would not deter future attacks against ships.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/22/watching-the-watchdogs-why-the-west-misinterprets-middle-east-power-shifts>

Isabel dos Santos has £580m of assets frozen by UK high court

By: Rupert Neate and agency

Isabel dos Santos, the former president of Angola's self-exiled billionaire daughter who has long faced claims of corruption, has had £580m of assets frozen by the UK high court. Dos Santos, Africa's first female billionaire, is being sued by the Angolan telecoms company Unitel, which she founded during her father's 38-year reign as president. Jose Eduardo dos Santos ruled Angola until 2017, and died last year. Unitel asked the high court in London to grant a worldwide freezing order over her assets at a hearing last month, and that order was granted by Judge Robert Bright on Wednesday.



He gave Dos Santos until next month to provide Unitel with a disclosure of her assets, which include property in London, Monaco and Dubai. The businesswoman is thought to own a house in St Mary's Place, close to the Royal Albert Hall in South Kensington, which is valued at about a £21m. Dos Santos is being sued over loans made to a separate Dutch company, Unitel International Holdings (UIH), in 2012 and 2013, when she was a Unitel director, to fund UIH's acquisition of shares in telecoms companies. The loans were not repaid and about £300m is outstanding, according to Unitel.

However, Dos Santos claims to be the victim of a "campaign of oppression" by the Angolan state and accuses Unitel of being itself responsible for UIH's inability to repay the loans because of its alleged role in Angola's unlawful seizure of UIH assets. Unitel denies any involvement in the alleged asset seizure and said at last month's hearing that Dos Santos was trying to turn the case into "another battle in a PR war against her father's successor", João Lourenço. Concerns about the source of Dos Santos's wealth were raised by an investigation in 2020 by the Guardian and journalists from partner organisations in 20 countries, which was based on a huge tranche of confidential documents.

The Luanda Leaks investigation, led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, suggested Dos Santos had benefited from extraordinary opportunities afforded to her by her father's government. Dos Santos and her husband, the businessman and art collector Sindika Dokolo, said computers belonging to their employees and legal advisers had been hacked and claimed to be subjects of a politically motivated witch-hunt led by Lourenço. They rejected any allegation of wrongdoing and denied being financed by state money.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/21/isabel-dos-santos-has-580m-of-assets-frozen-by-uk-high-court>

LDP political funds scandal

Japan's top news story of 2023

A political funds scandal involving members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has been picked as the top domestic news story of 2023 by senior editors of Kyodo News and its member or subscriber newspapers and broadcasters.



(1) LDP's largest faction ousted from cabinet amid political funds scandal.

Members of the LDP's largest faction once led by the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as well as those belonging to a faction led by former LDP Secretary General

Toshihiro Nikai, came under investigation by prosecutors for allegedly failing to declare hundreds of millions of yen of fundraising party revenue in political funds reports. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida effectively forced out members of the Abe faction from his cabinet in December, while prosecutors began questioning the faction's lawmakers on a voluntary basis.

(2) Victims speak out in Johnny's sex abuse scandal. Allegations that Johnny Kitagawa, the late head of Japan's top male talent agency formerly known as Johnny & Associates Inc., had sexually abused aspiring teenage pop singers for decades was brought into the spotlight following a BBC documentary in March featuring interviews with multiple people claiming to be victims. The agency admitted to the allegations, with his niece Julie Keiko Fujishima stepping down as president. Domestic media outlets were also criticized for years of silence on the matter.

(3) Legal status of COVID-19 downgraded; overseas tourists return. The government in May downgraded the legal status of COVID-19 to Class 5, or the same category as seasonal influenza. The government no longer legally recommends hospitalization for coronavirus patients nor asks the public to refrain from going out. The move, alongside a weak yen, contributed to a sharp recovery in overseas visitors.

(4) Consumer inflation hits 41-year high. Consumer inflation in Japan accelerated to 3.0 percent in fiscal 2022 through March, the fastest pace in 41 years. Prices rose for a wide range of items including food and household goods as the weak yen inflated import costs and Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to higher energy prices.

(5) Average summer temperatures hit record high. Average temperatures for the June-August period became the hottest since records began in 1898, 1.76 C higher than the three-month average recorded between 1991 and 2020, and exceeded the previous record in 2010 that saw the mercury rise 1.08 C above the average.

(6) Japan releases treated water from Fukushima nuclear plant. Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc started discharging treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea after diluting the concentration of tritium. TEPCO plans on releasing the water through 2051. The move prompted China to ban imports of all seafood products from Japan.

(7) Government files for court order to dissolve Unification Church. The Japanese government filed a request with the Tokyo District Court in October to dissolve the Unification Church, which has been found responsible in some civil lawsuits for pressuring people into making huge donations, in a move that will deprive the group of its tax benefits. The religious organization opposed the move, saying civil law torts do not constitute requirements to issue a dissolution order.

(8) Shogi prodigy Fujii becomes 1st to hold all 8 titles. Shogi prodigy Sota Fujii won the best-of-five Oza series against Takuya Nagase in October, making him the first player of the traditional board game ever to hold eight titles.

(9) Japan hosts G7 summit in Hiroshima, joined by Zelenskyy. Japan hosted the Group of Seven summit in Hiroshima in May, marking the first time for the leaders of the nations including nuclear powers the United States, France and Britain to visit the atomic-bombed city at the same time. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also joined the meeting.

(10) Hanshin wins 1st Japan Series title since 1985 The Hanshin Tigers in November won their first Japan Series championship since 1985 by beating the defending champion Orix Buffaloes, their second victory in the franchise's history.

<https://japantoday.com/category/national/ldp-political-funds-scandal-japan's-top-news-story-of-2023>



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Justin Trudeau's belated and shameful volte face on Gaza

By: Andrew Mitrovica

Some of Israel's most prominent enablers now claim to abhor the scope of Israel's wanton killing of Palestinians with a barrage of bullets, bombs, and rampaging bulldozers. Earlier this week, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak joined France and Germany in calling for a "sustainable ceasefire" to stop the killing. Like his European allies, Sunak said that "too many civilian lives have been lost". Sunak's belated admonition invites several questions: When did he realise that "too many [Palestinian] lives have been lost"? What was the number of



dead Palestinians that tipped into "too many"? Why didn't 5,000, 10,000 or 15,000 dead Palestinians constitute "too many"? It is touching, isn't it, to watch Sunak and craven company find, surprisingly, a moral compass when, all along, we warned them that this is what was going to happen. We told them that their fulsome embrace of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was bound to mean the litany of horrors the world has witnessed in the shattered remains of Gaza and the occupied West Bank. But Sunak and craven company did not listen. They ignored us. So, they backed, once again, Netanyahu's permanent licence to kill as many Palestinians as he wants to, for as long as he wants to.

Netanyahu has obliged them. Happily. Eagerly. Indiscriminately. Almost 20,000 Palestinians have been killed – mostly children and women. Thousands of others are buried beneath the rubble. Thousands more have been maimed in body, mind, and perhaps their souls. Netanyahu, true to his foul nature, has dismissed every one of those dead and damaged human beings, including boys and girls, as "collateral damage". Apparently, Netanyahu killed too many Palestinians, too quickly for London's, Berlin's, and Paris's liking. Hence, the qualified volte-face. Israel has the right to defend itself, they say. But it shouldn't kill that many Palestinian civilians that quickly. It's not a good look, they say. Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has finally had a "humanitarian" epiphany too.

Not too long ago, Trudeau also told Netanyahu that he could, in effect, do whatever he wanted to do in Gaza and the West Bank since Israel had the right to defend itself. The silly, verging-on-juvenile hubris. As if Netanyahu needed Trudeau's blessing to do what he has done in Gaza and the West Bank. Anyway, several weeks later, like Sunak et al, Trudeau appears to be having second thoughts. Today, he agrees that Israel may have gone too far, too quickly, in Gaza and the West Bank. Trudeau had Canada's UN ambassador, Bob Rae, announce the sudden change of strategic heart. Rae told the General Assembly last week that Canada supported a ceasefire. Trudeau's decision has provoked a furious rhetorical response from the "no ceasefire" quarters inside and outside the Liberal caucus who, predictably, have insisted that the jejune prime minister had not only abandoned Israel, but

sided with the murderous Hamas. The carnage in Gaza is no longer palatable. Only zealots refuse to acknowledge that the winds have shifted. Trudeau can see what most of us can see. It is, of course, an indelible shame that he and the other pusillanimous prime ministers and presidents waited so long.

If they had heeded the alarm, they might have saved a lot of Palestinian boys and girls from what former British Defence Minister Ben Wallace has described as Israel's "killing rage". Still, despite the emerging ceasefire refrain, I don't believe that Israel will end its "killing rage" soon. It's too late. As long as US President Joe Biden keeps telling Netanyahu that he can do whatever he wants to Palestinians, for as long as he wants to, the "killing rage" will claim more Palestinians. Inevitably, 20,000 will become 30,000 and on and on it will go until Israel, and Israel alone, decides its "killing rage" is spent. That doesn't mean that Trudeau is powerless to help Palestinians in desperate straits. To help relieve their shocking hardship and suffering. To extend a generous, welcoming hand to a people whose generosity and welcoming spirit is familiar to anyone who has visited Gaza or the West Bank.

Trudeau can help but it will require the will to help. It will require Trudeau to push back against the noxious naysayers who will denounce him for doing the right thing, at the right time – just as he did when Syrians and Ukrainians, fleeing want and fear, found haven in Canada. Trudeau did it on the eve of Christmas in 2015. Back then, in an important display of solidarity, Trudeau greeted the first Syrian refugees to Canada at airports as part of "Operation Syrian Refugees." "As a country, we opened our arms and our hearts to people and families fleeing conflict, insecurity, and persecution," Trudeau said in December 2020. Later, many of the thousands of Syrian refugees who came to Canada would become citizens. They built new lives here. They went to school. They opened businesses. They became "valued members of the community".

And, as a tangible expression of gratitude, they, in turn, have helped refugees who have arrived after them because they understood, as Canadians, it was their duty. In 2022, Trudeau erased bureaucratic barriers to allow many Ukrainians to settle in Canada. It was a humanitarian emergency, Trudeau said, that demanded a swift, humanitarian answer. As of late November 2023, more than 200,000 Ukrainians have settled in Canada – far from the disfiguring war that has changed their lives and homeland forever. The applications of another nearly one million Ukrainians for "temporary residency" in Canada have been approved, as have new immigration rules to make that "temporary" status "permanent". Canada had confirmed its compassionate bona fides. The test will be whether Trudeau can show that same compassion for Palestinians. Will he open Canada's "arms" and "hearts" to Palestinian families "fleeing conflict, insecurity, and persecution"?

The realist in me doubts that he will. Political calculations trump humanity even in the face of the strafing, starvation, and siege Palestinians are enduring. Syrian and Ukrainian lives matter. Palestinians are the "international community's" unwanted orphans. Trudeau will not risk the wrath of the noxious naysayers – and their faithful friends in the establishment press – who traffic in odious caricatures about who the Palestinian civilians are. That's why, I suspect, Trudeau broke his word, as prime minister, to 100 injured Palestinian children that he had vowed, as opposition leader, to help arrange care for in Canada to mend their broken bodies and minds. A politician who deserts children is, I'm afraid, likely incapable of summoning the decency to admit that he was wrong and to try to save them. That will be Trudeau's other lasting shame. When he had the means and opportunity to heal children, Trudeau shunned them and their families because they were Palestinians.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/20/justin-trudeaus-belated-and-shameful-volte-face-on-gaza>

Here's what happened when Canadian Christmas trees first came to Trinidad

By: Bob Hepburn



Gordon Cressy has spent a lifetime helping children, from running group homes for troubled youth to heading the United Way Greater Toronto, chairing the YMCA Canada, co-founding the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund Canada and creating the country's first Take Our Kids to Work Day.

He's also been a huge supporter of the Toronto Star Santa Claus Fund and knows well how much children can experience joy during Christmas. These experiences can create a lifetime of happy memories not just for children in the Greater Toronto Area, but for those around the world.

Sixty years ago, Cressy spearheaded one of those joyful Christmas experiences on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. It was the fall of 1963, and Cressy was just 19 and fresh out of high school in Toronto when he volunteered to work at the YMCA in Trinidad. Six weeks after he arrived, the head of the cash-starved YMCA left, and Cressy was made the executive director.

With a lot of difficulty, he managed to raise a record amount of money that helped the YMCA survive its financial crisis. He did in memorable style – by bringing Canadian Christmas trees to the island for the first time.

Cressy remembered that his local church in Toronto used to fundraise by selling Christmas trees. Because there was no history of Christmas trees in Trinidad, the YMCA steering committee thought Cressy's crazy idea just might work, and it gave him the go-ahead.

He contacted the YMCA in Saint John, N.B., which sourced 1,500 Scotch pines. The trees were loaded on a cargo ship and were to arrive in Trinidad on Dec. 15. Everything was going smoothly until a small fire on the ship meant the trees had to be put on another ship in Bermuda, and were now set to arrive on Dec. 22.

But to Cressy's horror, dockworkers were striking in Bermuda, and he learned the ship wouldn't arrive in Barbados until Dec. 22 – and wouldn't get to Trinidad until after Christmas! In desperation, Cressy and a YMCA committee member appealed to the head of British West Indian Airways for help. The airline agreed to fly a cargo plane to Barbados where Cressy and several others would load the trees from the ship.

Again, disaster almost struck because it was a Sunday and the Bajan dockworkers had the day off. However, a few workers were hanging out at the docks and, after some gentle persuading, got together to put the trees onto trucks, drive them to the airport and stuff them into every nook and cranny on the plane.

"There was a festive atmosphere when we arrived (back in Trinidad), with Christmas carols blasting on the radio," Cressy recalls in his new book, "Gordon Cressy Tells Great Stories." "Trinidad's TV station covered the arrival. Families came by that night to buy trees, and for the next two days we sold trees nonstop. By Christmas Eve we had sold out! We turned a bad situation into a wonderful ending. People had their trees."

In Trinidad, Cressy's Christmas tree adventure is revered to this day. Several years ago, Tony Ramjewan, a Trinidad resident, wrote to Cressy, relating how his mother and grandmother would tell him about the first Christmas trees on the island. "I always hear that name every Christmas, Gordon Cressy, the young man who changed Christmas in Trinidad," Ramjewan wrote. "Every Christmas all my family would get together and my grandma would tell us about her first real tree and the troubles you went through to get the trees to Trinidad."

"I just wanted to thank you for bringing that joy to my family and the tradition of my grandma telling us your story every Christmas morning." Gordon Cressy has spent a lifetime raising and donating money for countless worthy causes, including the Toronto Star Santa Claus Fund. All have brought joy and happy memories to children, whether in Trinidad or Toronto.

By supporting the Santa Claus Fund, you too can help create joyful Christmas memories that will last a lifetime – just as Gordon Cressy helped create a Christmas tradition for the children of Trinidad that is still remembered on the island some 60 years later.

https://www.thestar.com/initiatives/santa-claus-fund/heres-what-happened-when-canadian-christmas-trees-first-came-to-trinidad/article_183aa0a4-9ace-11ee-b8b2-fb8be674e1ec.html

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Iceland volcano: eruption begins on Reykjanes peninsula after weeks of activity

By: Miranda Bryant in Stockholm, Helen Livingstone and agencies



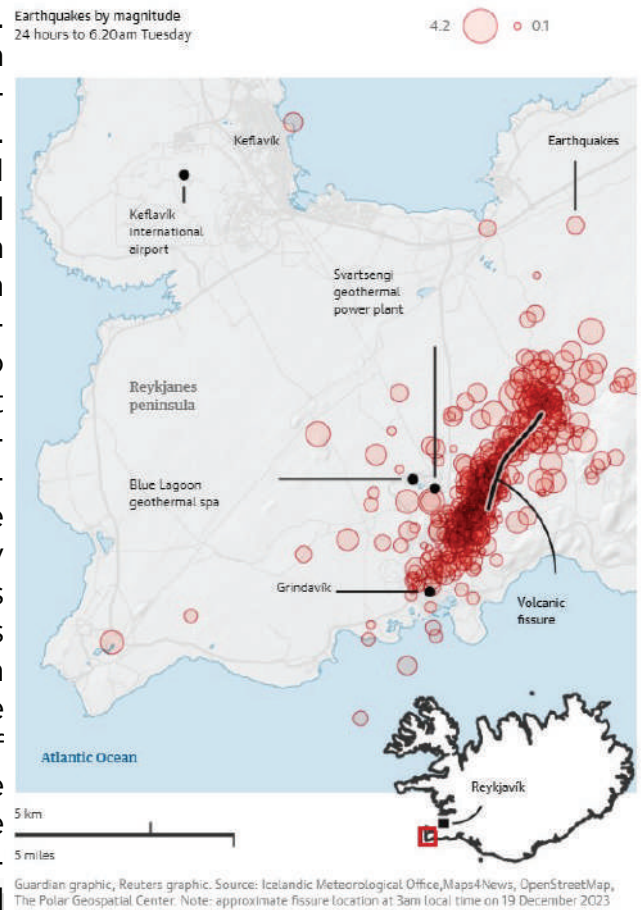
A volcano on the Reykjanes peninsula in south-west Iceland has erupted after weeks of intense earthquake activity, spewing glowing orange jets of lava surrounded by billowing clouds of red smoke. “Warning: eruption has started north of Grindavík by Hagafell,” the meteorological office said on its website on Monday. The eruption started a few kilometres from Grindavík, a fishing town located about 25 miles (40km) south-west of Iceland’s capital, Reykjavík. The town with a population of 4,000 was evacuated in November after the area was hit by a “seismic swarm” of more than 1,000 small earthquakes in 24 hours. The government on Tuesday said the eruption did not present a threat to life, adding that there were no disruptions to flights to and from Iceland, while international flight corridors remained open.

Although unlikely, as this type of eruption does not usually produce much ash, experts said there could yet be some effect on air travel. Describing the style of eruption as “amongst the most spectacular ever seen”, Matthew Watson, professor of volcanoes and climate at the University of Bristol, said: “There will be a strong pull for tourists. Tourists should strictly follow official advice as there are significant hazards, such as new breakouts, which can quickly put people in harm’s way.” The eruption began at about 10.17pm local time after a series of small earthquakes at about 9pm, the met office said. Iceland’s prime minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, said her thoughts were with the people of Grindavík “now we see the Earth opening up”. “Our thoughts are with the local people as before, we hope for the best, but it can be clear that this is quite an eruption. It is important to give emergency responders space to do their work and follow traffic instructions.”

Iceland’s president, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, said: “Our priorities remain to protect lives and infrastructure. Civil defence has closed off the affected area. We now wait to see what the forces of nature have in store. We are prepared and remain vigilant.” Images and livestreams

by the local news outlet RUV showed lava spewing from fissures in the ground, which on Monday night travelled more than 100 metres (330ft) into the air. The Icelandic met office initially said the magma was moving to the south-west and that the eruption might continue in the direction of Grindavík. Then, the crack in the Earth's surface was about 2.1 miles long and had grown rapidly. Between 100 and 200 cubic metres (3,530 and 7,060 cubic ft) of lava was emerging per second, several times more than in previous eruptions in the area. But by late morning on Tuesday, lava from the eruption appeared to be flowing away from the town, offering hope that homes that have survived the weeks of earthquakes in Grindavík might be spared. The southernmost point of the fissure – which had since grown to 4km (2.5 miles) long – was still 3km away from Grindavík, the met office said. “The eruption is taking place north of the watershed, so lava does not flow towards Grindavík,” geologist Bjorn Oddson told public broadcaster RUV. Local police said they had raised their alert level as a result of the eruption and the country's civil defence advised the public not to approach the area while emergency personnel assessed the situation. Reykjavík's international airport, which is located

Iceland's Grindavík volcano erupted on Monday after weeks of intense earthquake activity



nearby, remained open albeit with numerous delays listed for arrivals and departures. Iceland's foreign minister, Bjarni Benediktsson, said on X there were “no disruptions to flights to and from Iceland and international flight corridors remain open”. Several eruptions have occurred in unpopulated areas in recent years on the Reykjanes peninsula, but the latest outbreak could pose a risk to Grindavík, authorities have said. Since November's evacuation order people have been allowed to return to their homes between 7am and 9pm each day, and some businesses have reopened. People have not been allowed to stay overnight or walk around the town. Before Monday night's eruption they had been waiting for an update this week to find out whether the evacuation rules would be lifted in time for Christmas. Thousands of quakes have occurred in the area in the past two months, but magnitudes were declining in recent weeks, leading some experts to think the risk of an eruption had abated. Many from the town are struggling amid housing shortages, and some are angry that they are still not allowed to stay in their homes overnight.

According to local reports one person who lives in Grindavík was recently threatened with arrest after breaking the rules to stay at home with his wife for several nights. The Blue Lagoon spa, one of the country's most popular tourist attractions, reopened on Sunday for the first time in more than a month – despite the fears of a potential volcanic eruption. At the time management said the decision was made in “close collaboration with the authorities”. On Tuesday another statement was released saying it had once again closed. Reykjanes is a volcanic and seismic hotspot. In March 2021, lava fountains erupted spectacularly from a 500- to 750-metre-long (1,640- to 2,460ft-long) fissure in the ground in the Fagradalsfjall volcanic system. Iceland is home to 33 active volcano systems, the highest number in Europe.

<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/19/iceland-volcano-erupted-reykjanes-peninsula-grindavik-blue-lagoon>

Why political polls are mostly wrong

By: Dr Rana Jawad Asghar



As the election season approaches, we have started seeing different media outlets conducting political polls. We have already seen messages showing 90% popularity claims for one side or another. As an epidemiologist, I could safely state that most of these political polls in Pakistan are completely wrong and are just part of political campaigns.

Polls or surveys need to be done in a very methodological and scientific manner. Just think about it: A district X has one million people with 500,000 eligible voters. A poll taker or someone doing a survey can't interview even a few hundred people. Based on very few individuals' responses, he has to estimate or extrapolate results for hundreds of thousands of people. It's not an impossible task, and in epidemiology, we do this all the time. If we want to know how many children are malnourished, it's not possible for us to personally examine all children in the city or district. So, we design a survey, and then we need to select a few kids from the district to accurately estimate malnutrition. The first step is to calculate how many kids we need to personally examine in this district to accurately estimate malnourishment in children in this district. Once we get this number, we need to find out the best approach to identify or select these children to be physically examined. There are different methodologies, and we need to be aware of the strengths and challenges of each.

The most accurate system is complete randomisation. It saves results from many biases and errors. For example, you could have a voter list and then let the computer randomly select people. In developed countries, researchers used to pick some random phone numbers from the phone directory and then call them. That was true before mobile phones, as most houses in the West used to have one phone line. In our part of the world, where we don't have a complete listing of people living in any area, we do cluster sampling. In this, we divide a city into different clusters (geographic). Once we have the required numbers of people we need to interview, we distribute them as per the population of each cluster, as some areas will be highly populated, and some will have a scant population. This makes sure that no area is over or under sampled. Each cluster is sometimes even subdivided into different sub-clusters. Then each team is tasked with going to the edge of each sector and making their way to the centre of the clusters. By this technique, we ensure the sampling of people living outside villages or cities who are normally marginalised and missed in most surveys.

Once we have results, we use a lot of statistical tests to check if any difference between these two groups is real or just due to chance. Even with the best techniques, there is still an element of chance. It is possible to pick certain similar people even in randomisation just by chance. We reject any results if the risk of chance is greater than 5% in our calculations. We also analyse how many people did not answer our questions, how many houses did not open their doors to us because it's important to know if the poll was attended by all or just some sections of society.

Sensitive questions like which political leader you like or not are very difficult to answer by marginalised sections of society. Sometimes people will give an answer that they think the interviewer wants to hear. That is why any behavioural surveys need to be done in a discreet way in an atmosphere of trust. None of this happens in Pakistan.

Polls on Twitter, Facebook, newspapers or TV websites are just useless, as only a subsection of followers of each social media account are responding and this is no reflection of the general voting public.

There are ways we could also do qualitative assessments, but they are not polls and should not be given any numbers or percentages. The election is coming close, and you should vote based on how you rate your political party, not on what these fake polls are telling you. The one who really gets votes on election day will actually win.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2450851/why-political-polls-are-mostly-wrong>

Unfair delivery

DEEMING the party's internal polls unlawful, the ECP has dealt another blow to the PTI by stripping the latter of its electoral symbol. With its supporters no longer able to vote for the 'bat', the PTI is looking to challenge the decision in court. It is a controversial move by the electoral body, which has, ironically, not taken a similar position against other major parties that are hardly known as beacons of internal democracy. However, this is not the first time a political party in Pakistan has been deprived of its poll symbol. One of the most defining memories is of the PPP being forced to give up the 'sword' during the 1988 elections, although its replacement, the 'arrow', still drew enough voters to enable the party to come to power. The difference is that the PTI cannot contest under any symbol, with its politicians having

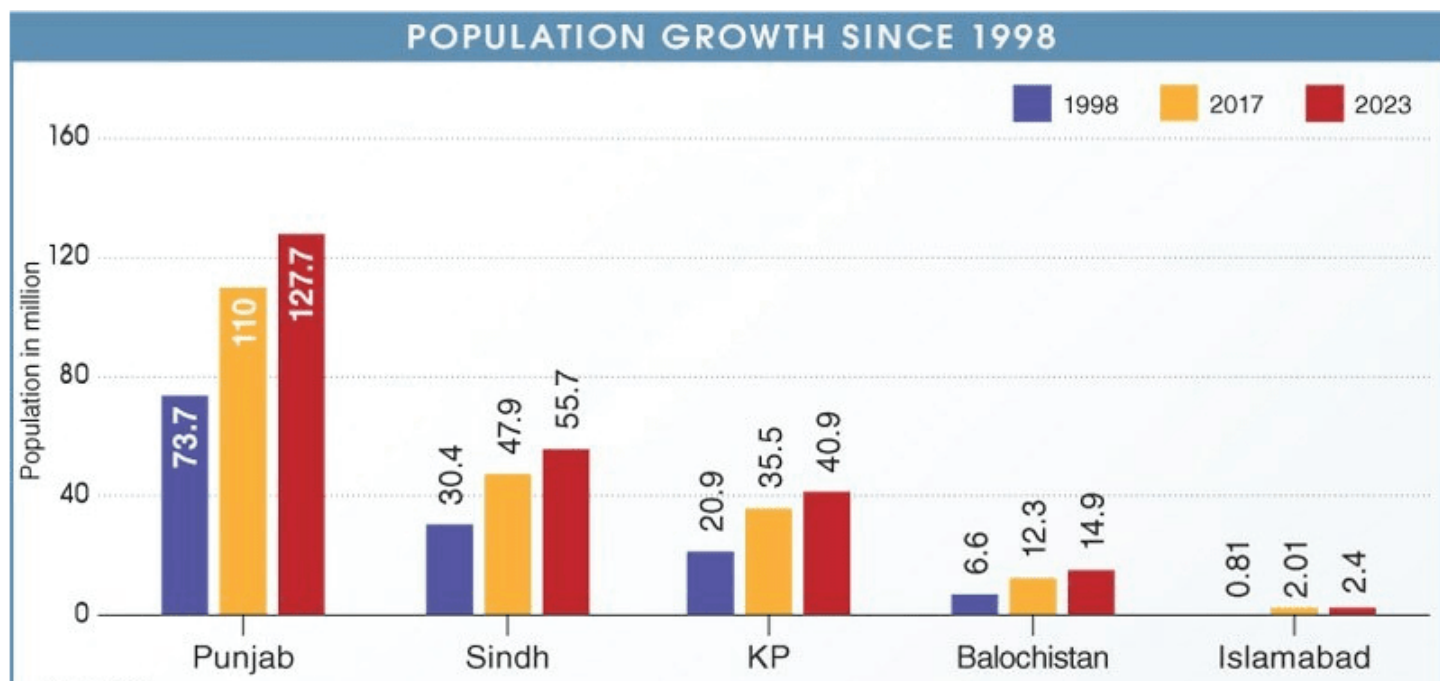


to run as independent candidates. Many see the ECP's decision as part of the ongoing crack-down against the PTI. From incarcerations, to 'disappearances' and press conferences announcing departures from the parties, there has been no attempt by the state apparatus to disguise its antipathy. Another effort to make the electoral field as uneven as possible is evident in the state's use of brute force to keep potential PTI candidates out of the contest at the stage of filing nomination papers. Ever since the announcement of the election schedule, not a day has gone by without reports of police across Punjab forcibly breaking into homes of prospective PTI candidates, harassing their families, damaging their property, and detaining them to stop them from filing nomination papers. There have also been allegations about election officials refusing to receive their papers. On Thursday, police went a step further when they forcibly entered the home of this paper's correspondent in Mianwali for reporting on these incidents — without any regard for the law and privacy. Yet the ECP, which is responsible for ensuring a transparent, free and fair poll process, has not been too bothered by these happenings. With the deadline for filing nominations extended, following appeals from multiple political parties, it remains to be seen whether steps will be taken to curtail the illegal disruptions caused by the law enforcers. It is already apparent to most that the entire electoral process has been turned into a farce.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1800139/unfair-delivery>

Gender and population

By: Nida Kirmani



ACCORDING to Pakistan's 2023 census, our country's population has officially surpassed the 240 million mark — an increase of 33.8m people since the previous census in 2017. The growth rate jumped from 2.4 per cent in 2017 to 2.55pc in 2023, which is a worrying reversal of what was an otherwise downward trend. Over two decades ago, Pakistan committed to reaching replacement-level population growth rates (2.1pc) by 2020. However, the recent census figures indicate that we are even further from reaching this goal than we were six years ago; this is a clear indication of decades of failed policies and a lack of commitment on the part of the government to reaching this goal. If we continue at this rate, Pakistan will move from being the sixth most populous country in the world to the fifth — a race we do not want to be winning. For anyone concerned about the well-being of those living in this country, particularly the well-being of its women, this should be serious cause for concern.

Pakistan's population growth rate stands in stark contrast to other countries in our region. India's growth rate in 2023 was 1.10pc, Nepal's 1.25pc, Bangladesh 1.26pc, and Sri Lanka a mere 0.83pc. While economically advanced countries, such as Japan and South Korea, are worrying about an aging population, for developing countries like our own, such a high growth rate is unsustainable and will inevitably lead to a host of environmental and social problems. One consequence that we are currently facing is the increasing youth bulge, with millions of frustrated young women and men who are unable to be absorbed into the economy.

High population growth is a symptom of poverty and a lack of human development in general. Hence, the most underdeveloped province, Balochistan, also has the highest growth rate in the country (3.2pc). Consequently, Balochistan also has the highest maternal mortality rate of any of the provinces (298 per 100,000 births), which is by far the highest in the region. Persistent poverty is one of the major factors behind the high growth rate. Contrary to the popular belief that poor people have more children because they are ignorant, having

more kids for those lacking productive assets is actually a very rational decision. The more children one has, the more people there are to contribute to the family income. If the cost of having a child outweighs the benefits in terms of income, then families are likely to have fewer children. But this is only a small part of the story. Many women end up having more children not because they want to but simply because they do not have access to contraceptive methods or control over their health-related decision-making. Despite decades of population planning and technological advances in reproductive health, according to the UNFPA, 5.5m women in Pakistan had an unmet need for contraceptives in 2020 resulting in millions of unwanted pregnancies.

For this reason, Pakistan also has one of the highest abortions rates in the world — 50 per 1,000 pregnancies according to a study published by the Population Council in 2012. It can be assumed that this number has only increased given the current rise in the population growth rate overall. Most of these abortions are conducted under the table by untrained providers, often resulting in the death of the mother, thus contributing to higher maternal mortality rates overall. Countless women die silently every year due to unsafe abortions. This is a tragedy that could easily be averted if only there was political will.

High population growth rates are both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. Despite Pakistan committing to meeting SDG-5, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, little concrete action has been taken.

In 2023, Pakistan ranked 142 out of 146 in the Global Gender Inequality Index. Low rates of female education, labour force participation, early marriages, a lack of decision-making power within the household, and a lack of access to healthcare (including contraceptives) all contribute to higher birth rates.

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2017-2018), only 7pc of currently married women of reproductive age were able to make decisions regarding their contraceptive use. Rather than treating women as fully productive members of society, they are too often treated as vessels to produce more children, whether they like it or not.

Large family sizes with inadequate spacing are harmful to women's physical and mental health and hinder their full economic, social and political participation. Furthermore, discrimination against women and girls also leads to the practice of son preference; many families have more children in the hopes of producing more sons. It is a vicious cycle.

Until and unless gender equality is placed at the centre of the political agenda, and women and girls are valued for their full human potential, our population growth rates are unlikely to decrease. And until and unless the population growth rate starts to decline, the achievement of gender equality in Pakistan will remain a distant dream.

Even though it is women who bear the burden of childbearing and child-rearing, and despite the heaps of research pointing to the connection between women's empowerment and lower fertility rates, discussions of population planning, if they happen at all, rarely make any mention of women's rights. Rather, the focus is generally on 'family planning', which involves meeting blunt targets with regards to contraception.

While even this would be a welcome step given the government's poor track record over the past decades, a holistic approach focused on poverty reduction, equitable development, and most importantly, treating women not as targets for family planning but as full human beings is urgently required to bring the population growth rate down to sustainable levels.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1800136/gender-and-population>

On suspension of 141 MPs, Manoj Kumar Jha writes: I hope I am not compelled to write another piece soon with the title, 'RIP Indian Democracy'

By: Manoj Kumar Jha



On the anniversary of the 2001 terror attack on the Parliament of India, the security of the new Parliament building was breached. The government sought first to downplay the incident, probably because the breach was explicitly facilitated by the office of one of the MPs of the BJP. The disquiet among the Opposition members grew because Home Minister Amit Shah, who seems to have an opinion on virtually every subject under the sun, did not deem it important to appraise Parliament about the security breach and the measures taken by his ministry in response. In his shocking refusal to make a statement on the floor, the home minister has displayed what can only be called a willful dereliction of national duty.

Astoundingly, a large number of MPs who were expressing their concern and pressurising the government to give up indifference on a matter of national security have been suspended. The suspensions this week follow an already strong trend of excluding and targeting MPs whose voices have helped focus the nation's attention on matters of grave socio-legal and economic concerns — discipline and propriety seem a cover. While safeguarding the dignity of the House and maintaining discipline is an important prerequisite of democratic parliamentary functioning, we must ask ourselves what this requirement is aimed at.

Is the claim of being the mother of democracy just a jumla — a flippant and hollow phrase? Discipline without deliberation and care is just abuse.

One of the avenues from which Parliament draws power is the power of self-protection. It is a matter of regret that the Parliament of India has been reduced to a House that fails to take self-protection seriously or worse a parliament that fails in self-protection quite literally. In a literal sense, this self-preservation pertains to the physical security of the building and the persons working there. This is heightened by the fact that the building and the Members of Parliament are rendered symbolically more important because they represent all of India's

citizens, indeed the nation itself. But in the figurative sense, it pertains to protecting the sanctity of the democratic processes. When senior minister Piyush Goel sought to justify the record-breaking number of suspensions of Opposition MPs by alleging that the Opposition does not want the House to run, he conveniently forgot that Parliament is not bereft of morals. Parliamentarians cannot be expected to unquestioningly submit to the mass production of legislation by the executive without any application of mind.

The dissent of MPs to the unprecedented abuse of democracy by the government and the enabling of this abuse by the chairs of the two Houses cannot be termed a disruption of Parliament. A virtual exclusion of the Opposition by suspension is an unparalleled shameful episode in India's parliamentary history.

Already the BJP ran parliamentary business with open contempt for democratic values even if they repeatedly faced embarrassment due to shoddy legislation and no stakeholder consultation. The tactics of mass exclusion of Opposition MPs have rendered the entire Parliament of India a chamber of silence, a giant rubber stamp.

The Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament (including the well of the House) are not meant to be ritual spaces where everyone must perform according to the prescribed order. The Parliament of India is no place of worship where the priest commands the devotees to bow their heads in supplication.

Everyone knows that the people of India do not elect a prime minister, although the BJP continuously runs election campaigns as a vote for the PM. What is often not recognised, but is important to highlight, is that Indian voters do not merely elect a government, they also elect an Opposition. The Opposition represents the diversity of views among the Indian electorates and is tasked with the important role of critiquing the government and thereby strengthening people's interest in the legislative and even the policy-making process.

The arrogance of the BJP led by PM Modi and HM Shah has reached astounding proportions now. No MP should not face suspension without first being heard by an impartial and experienced forum.

While the Parliament of India has the power to constitute itself, it has no provision to alter the composition of the House by any measure whatsoever except through election by the electorate of that constituency. Indeed, in India, even the electorate has no power to recall an MP once elected. With this kind of mass suspension, we can see and hear the arrival of an authoritarian state which loves to use fear and intimidation to suppress opposition and maintain complete control over all institutions.

If the idea to suspend parliamentarians was to have a chilling effect — discouraging others from asking critical questions and challenging the status quo due to the fear of similar punitive measures, let me convey that history shall judge this regime as one of those who came through the route of democracy to kill the spirit of parliamentary democracy.

No individual should have the authority to dismiss or exclude members from parliament business in a manner that changes the composition of the House, thereby altering its constitution. Doing so goes against the principles of democracy and amounts to subverting democracy. I hope I am not compelled to write another piece soon with the title, "RIP Indian Democracy".

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/suspension-mps-manoj-kumar-jha-indian-democracy-9076127/>

Ram Madhav writes: Opposition today needs to learn from Atal Bihari Vajpayee

By: Ram Madhav



It is said that “leaders are born, they are not made”. But those destined to become leaders need a nurturing institutional environment. India is fortunate that its Independence era leadership chose for its diverse people the political system of parliamentary democracy. In the last seven decades, it not only functioned successfully but also produced a great lineup of luminary leaders.

India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru was a product of the Independence movement itself, not necessarily the parliamentary route. It is well known that the majority of the provincial Congress committees recommended Sardar Patel for the post. But Nehru evolved as a parliamentarian and mass leader over a decade-and-a-half-long parliamentary career.

Congress set in motion the evil of dynastic politics after Nehru’s demise, which continues to be the bane of the party to this day. There is a stark difference between leaders who are the products of parliamentary democracy and those of dynastic politics. The dynasts can never fully appreciate and demonstrate the leadership values and principles of parliamentary democracy.

One shining star of the Indian parliamentary democracy was Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It has been 99 years since the stalwart politician and former prime minister was born, and five years since he departed. Vajpayee did not inherit politics. He entered it as a young activist, struggled his way through the rough and tumble and evolved through the parliamentary process into a mature statesman.

Vajpayee was an outstanding example of political leadership in a democratic polity. When he first entered the Parliament in 1957, he was just a 33-year-old ideologically motivated young man trained in the RSS brand of Hindu idealism. That idealism, coupled with unmatched oratorical skills, made him popular both inside and outside Parliament in no time. In the Congress-dominated political era in the first three decades after Independence, Vajpayee emerged as the ideological alternative and can be given much of the credit for the BJP’s

spectacular rise from the fringes to the mainstream. He was a bitter critic of Nehru's policies, occasionally going to the extent of throwing veiled personal criticisms. "You have a split personality," he once told Nehru and threw the jibe that the then PM had an "inverted vision" because he did too much of Shirshasana – the yogic posture of standing on one's head. But there was always decorum, unlike the cheap antics of the Opposition today. As Vajpayee rose in stature, Nehru, too, admired him and introduced him to a foreign dignitary as someone who would be the prime minister one day.

Vajpayee was well known for his great oratory. But he was not a demagogue. As a poet par excellence, he measured his words carefully. American journalist Edward Murrow once said of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that he "mobilised the English language and sent it into battle". Vajpayee, like his successor Modi, used his facility with language to disarm his opponents many a times. It earned him the sobriquet of "wordsmith". He remained the most enigmatic politician of our times. Admirers called him a moderate – "the right man in a wrong party". Critics saw in him a "Teflon-coated" Hindutva-vadi. Vajpayee, irrespective of the accolades, remained a leader who always held the nation above everything else, including his party. Behind his mild-mannered façade hid a strong nationalist, who couldn't be browbeaten by circumstances. He became prime minister three times and remained in office for over six years.

The country saw both the avatars of Vajpayee during those six years. Leading a 23-party coalition was not easy. He was pulled down by a recalcitrant regional ally in 1999. But he never held it against anybody. He insisted that regional parties had come to stay. When asked whether the era of coalitions would end, his answer, after the characteristic pause, was that even then the politics of consensus must continue. National parties must develop an understanding of regional aspirations, he used to exhort. The nuclear tests in 1998 showed the tougher side of Vajpayee. He boldly declared in Parliament that "India is now a nuclear weapon state. This is a reality that cannot be denied". He later told the media that he knew sanctions would come, but that did not deter him. Then came the Kargil War. The six-week-long war saw the Vajpayee government backing the armed forces fully in successfully defeating and driving out the enemy. Just a year before, he was in Lahore riding a bus.

Atal ji's greatness is not limited to his prime ministership. He represented an ideal as an Opposition leader, something that the present-day Opposition fails to demonstrate. He was with the government when the Bangladesh War happened in 1971. He was with the Narasimha Rao government when India needed a united and strong voice at the UN to defeat Pakistan's machinations. Arun Jaitley, delivering the memorial address for Vajpayee, recalled that his best orations were not when he was on the treasury benches, but when he occupied the other side. Among the best was his obituary address for Jawaharlal Nehru in Parliament in 1964.

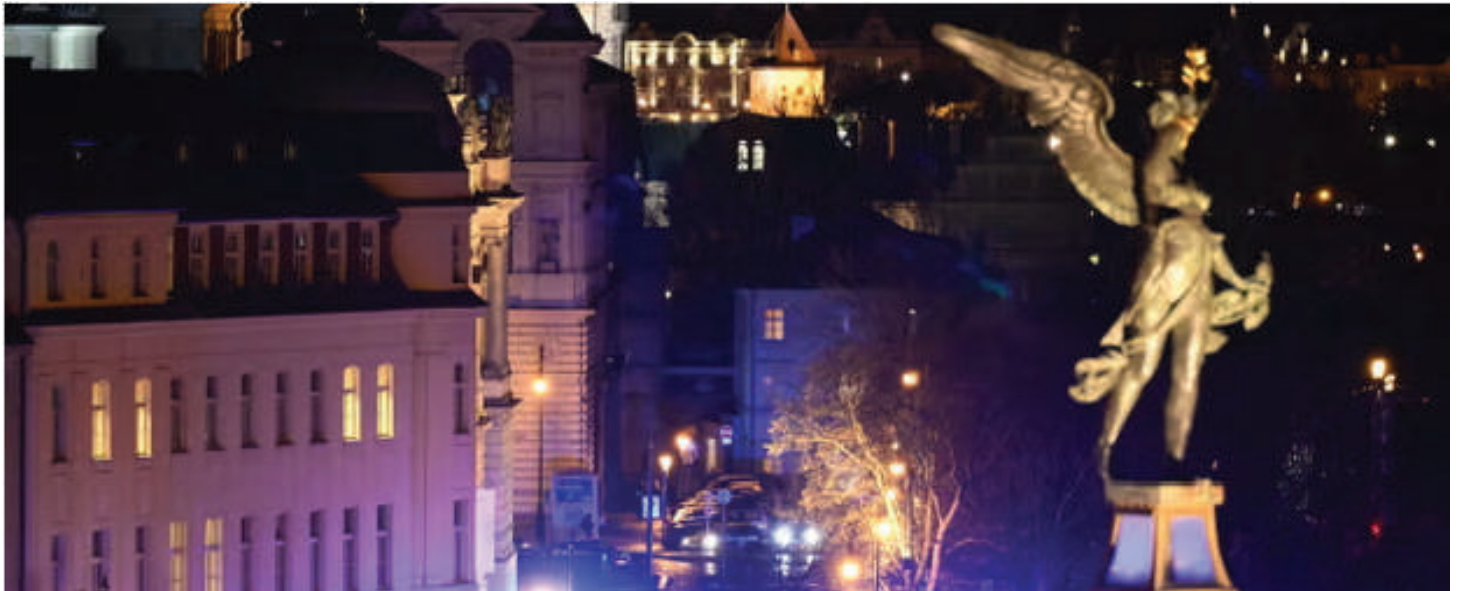
"Ek sapna tha jo adhoora rah gaya, ek geet tha jo goonga ho gaya/ Ek lau thi jo anant mein vileen ho gayi/ Bharat mata aaj shok magn hai, uska sabse laadla rajkumar kho gaya/ Vishwa ke rangmanch se ek pramukh abhineta apana antim abhinaya dikha kar, antar dhyani ho gaya." (A dream is incomplete; A song is silent/ There was a flame that diffused into eternity/ Bharat Mata is grieving today; she lost her most beloved prince/ A famous actor departed from the world stage after performing his final act.)

What a quality tribute to a political adversary! Jaitley's quip – "I hope those who claim the political legacy of Pandit Ji, if they have an aptitude for reading will certainly read these two paragraphs" – sums up what the Opposition lacks today.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/atal-bihari-vajpayee-independence-era-leadership-parliamentary-democracy-suspension-of-oppn-mps-9079536/>

Shock in Prague but shootings not unknown in Czech Republic

By: Robert Tait



A fatal mass shooting in the cloistered environs of Prague might seem a bolt from the blue. In a city historically renowned for defenestrations but less for violent crime, safety and security are taken for granted much more than in most European capitals. The reaction of Prague's mayor, Bohuslav Svoboda, whose offices at Prague New Town Hall lie a short distance from the scene of the crime, conveyed many locals' bewilderment as they struggled to digest the horror that had unfolded. "We always thought that this was a thing that did not concern us," he told Česká Televize, the national public broadcaster. "Now it turns out that unfortunately our world is also changing and the problem of the individual shooter is emerging here as well." Yet the incident is arguably less out of context than such remarks imply. Police said on Thursday that the gunman legally owned multiple firearms, a fact that may be explained by the fact that the Czech Republic has among the most permissive gun ownership laws in the EU. The "right to acquire, keep and bear firearms" is recognised in Czech firearms legislation, while a constitutional amendment made to the charter of fundamental rights as recently as 2021 legally guarantees "the right to defend one's own life or the life of another person with a weapon". The amendment was adopted after a petition signed by 102,000 citizens that was organised in opposition to a European Commission proposal to restrict firearm possession throughout the EU. The opposition reflected a long history of gun ownership in the Czech lands, dating back to the Hussite rebellion against the Catholic church in 1419. Although strictly controlled during the 1939-45 Nazi occupation, and by the communist regime that ruled Czechoslovakia during the cold war, widespread gun ownership made a comeback after the 1989 Velvet Revolution that heralded the end of communism. By 2020 there were more than 307,000 legal gun owners, in a country of about 10.6 million people, the vast majority of them citing safety and protection concerns as the reasons for ownership. Ownership goes hand in hand with a proud tradition of Czech armament manufacture. And, perhaps not unrelatedly, mass shootings in the relatively tranquil central European country are not unknown. In one attack, in February 2015, a 63-year-old man used two guns to shoot eight people dead in a restaurant in the eastern town of Uherský Brod before killing himself. As with the Prague shooting, the gunman legally owned both firearms. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/21/shock-in-prague-shootings-czech-republic>

Sculptor sues Swedish glassmaker for €1m in test of EU ‘bestseller clause’

By: Philip Oltermann

One of Sweden’s longest-established glass-makers is facing what could be a landmark legal challenge over €1m in royalties it has allegedly failed to pay to the creator of one its most famous pieces, in a test of an EU-wide “bestseller” right that was brought in to strengthen cultural creators against producers and publishers.

Cloudy of hue and with a rustic texture that breaks the flickering tealight inside, the “snowball” glass lantern is a classic item of Swedish household design, as ubiquitous in the Nordic country’s homes as the Billy bookcase. With more than 15m sold worldwide, it has also been a reliable money-spinner for its manufacturer, Kosta Boda.

Yet the sculptor Ann Wolff, whom the company credits as the inventor the snöbollen, has not seen a penny for her design classic since the mid-1980s, due to the time-limited contract she signed with the glassmaking company in the 1970s. Fifty years after she came up with her design, the Swedish visual artists organisation KRO is now suing Kosta Boda for unfair remuneration.

German-born Wolff, 86, started working for companies in southern Sweden’s “kingdom of crystal” in the late 1960s, joining Kosta Boda on an individual part-time contract in 1972. Her snowball-shaped candle holder was the end result of a year of formal experimentation, during which she blew glass into snowdrifts to see how the material reacted. The final design was made from a clay model that Wolff then used to form an iron mould to cast the glass. “It’s a design that felt both warm and cold at the same time, a bit of yin and a bit of yang,” Wolff recalled. “I felt it was an experiment that had potential, but I never expected it to be become such a massive hit.” As the snowball gained momentum as a bestseller, Wolff earned 2% in royalties for each sale of the glass lantern, allowing her to expand her practice and eventually resign from the company to set up her own studio. But in June 1984, Kosta Boda informed her in a two-sentence letter that her copyright for the snowball had expired after 10 years, as used to be common for works of applied art in Sweden. It wasn’t until Wolff read about a change in Swedish copyright law at the start of this year that she came up with



the idea of approaching the manufacturer about retrospective pay for her design. “I thought, that sounds interesting, maybe we can get something off the ground,” she said. Her proposal to the company was to use the unpaid royalties to set up a joint prize or fellowship for young female glassmaking artists, marking the 50th anniversary of the iconic design.

But Kosta Boda, now part of the New Wave Group, a conglomerate with a turnover of 9bn Swedish kronor (€806m) in 2022, showed no interest in her proposal. After a meeting between Wolff and Kosta Boda’s CEO later in the year, the company instead offered her a lump-sum payment of 400,000 kronor and 4% in royalties on further sales. In return, they wanted permission to also produce the transparent candle holder in yellow, blue and red.

This time Wolff passed on the offer. “It was out of the question, because snowballs aren’t red,” she said. “If we make a deal, it should be a fair one.” According to her lawyer’s estimates, the sculptor would have earned between 10m and 15m kronor if she had continued to receive 2% in royalties on every one of the 15m snowball lanterns sold, which would still have been a relatively low cut by contemporary standards.

The change in Sweden’s copyright law that triggered the dispute was the result of a 2019 EU directive designed to allow artistic creators to seek retrospective compensation for works that have become unexpected bestsellers.

With considerable delay, the new copyright law has, as of the end of this year, been implemented into national legislation of most of the 27 member states, though the extent to which it can be applied varies from country to country. In Sweden, where the bestseller clause introduced a new principle into national copyright law, it only allows artists to retrospectively claim back royalties for a limited period.

In an email to the Guardian, Kosta Boda said it could not comment on the specifics of the royalties dispute due to the pending court case, but highlighted the fact that Sweden’s version of the bestseller clause “explicitly only applies to agreements entered on 1 January 2003 or later”.

“We have the outmost respect for Ms Wolff – her contributions for Kosta Boda and beyond – and will await the verdict of the competent Swedish courts,” said Filip Trulsson, Kosta Boda’s chief commercial officer. Lawyers acting on Wolff’s behalf, however, argue that the bestseller clause has established a principle that highlights the unfairness of the agreement that Kosta Boda made her sign in 1972.

“A major change in the Swedish copyright law in 1961 meant that works of applied arts have since enjoyed the same copyright protection as other works, today lasting for 70 years after the death of the author,” said Katarina Renman Claesson, a lawyer for KRO who is advising Wolff’s lawsuit. “Yet even though Ann Wolff signed her contract with Kosta Boda in 1972, the company argues that the pre-1960 law applies in this case.”

In Sweden, a country known not just for its glassware and ceramics but its furniture and interior design, a victory for the claimant in the legal snowball fight could trigger an avalanche of similar cases. “Sweden is a small country, and few if any of the individual designers creating really successful designed products have the financial resources to challenge unfair clauses and contracts in a cases against big companies,” added Renman Claesson. “So there is great interest in this case.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/23/sculptor-sues-swedish-glassmaker-for-1m-in-test-of-eu-bestseller-clause>

Sanctions threat looms over

Bangladesh's garment sector ahead of elections

By: Faisal Mahmud

Dhaka, Bangladesh — Weeks after turbulent wage-hike protests and subsequent factory closures, Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry, a key revenue earner for the nation, is dealing with a new phase of anxiety: "possible" economic sanctions by the country's Western partners. The United States and European Union collectively account for more than 80 percent of Bangladesh's multibillion-dollar apparel sales, and any sanction on the RMG industry would put a severe dent in its already beleaguered economy, said analysts. The threat of sanctions from the US arose once Dhaka announced



January 7 for national elections in what is likely to be another seemingly one-sided vote. Those concerns were further boosted in early December when a key garment supplier to the US was warned of sanctions in a letter of credit (LC) from a foreign garment buyer. An LC is issued by financial institutions or similar parties to guarantee payment to sellers of goods and services after appropriate documentations are presented. It essentially helps in avoiding risk by having intermediate buyer and seller banks that ensure proper payment. According to the LC, a copy of which was obtained by Al Jazeera, the Western buyer stated: "We will not process transactions involving any country, region or party sanctioned by the UN, US, EU, UK. We are not liable for any delay, non-performance or/ disclosure of information for sanction-based causes." Should the clause kick in, the garment manufacturer in Bangladesh would likely incur massive losses as the buyer wouldn't be liable to make any payment for the orders placed with that apparel producer. Both industry leaders and government officials have dismissed the threat as a "rumour" and "antigovernment" propaganda and say no such economic sanction can be imposed, especially on the garment sector, as it is a fully compliant industry and abides by all the international labour laws. Faruque Hassan, President of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said that the LC came from a particular buyer, and was not a statutory order or notice by "any specific country or countries". "From BGMEA, we have already contacted the buyer and the issue was sorted out. It was just a cautionary clause inserted by the bank who prepared the LC on behalf of the buyers," Hassan told Al Jazeera, "It doesn't mean that any country is planning to impose some sanctions on our industry."

Behind the uneasiness

Hassan however admitted that many factory owners had expressed their concerns in a recent BGMEA meeting over that LC clause and the "ongoing political turmoil of Bangladesh has given birth to all sorts of speculations". Bangladesh's national election is due in less than three weeks but several political unrests have disrupted the country's business and economy. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition party, has boycotted the elec-

tion amidst concerns of severe poll rigging. That sets up the elections as a repeat of one-sided polls held in 2014, in which Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League won 153 out of 300 parliamentary seats uncontested. BNP says no free and fair election is possible under a partisan government and gave an example of the 2018 poll, in which it took part. Independent observers termed it a severely “rigged” election which saw Awami League securing 288 out of 300 seats, a result that The Washington Post said could only be expected in a country like North Korea. For the last few months, opposition parties have been staging protests on the streets to press home the demand of installing a neutral election-time caretaker government. The government has, since late October, used brute force and court cases to suppress the protests. In November alone, more than 10,000 BNP leaders and activists were thrown in jail. None have received bail so far. Khondokar Golam Moazzem, research director of Bangladeshi think tank Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) told Al Jazeera that the current political upheaval has obviously played its role in propagating the widespread notion that Bangladesh’s RMG industry might face an economic sanction. The United States has already taken a tough stance with a new visa policy for Bangladesh in September in which it said it would impose a visa sanction on “individuals undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh”. The warning note in the LC also came at a time of severe unrest in the RMG sector over minimum wage hikes in which four workers died. It also coincided with the introduction by the US, Bangladesh’s single largest garment buyer, of the Presidential Memorandum on Advancing Worker Empowerment, Rights, and High Labor Standards Globally. The memorandum is the Biden administration’s effort “to pursue a whole-of-government approach to advancing worker empowerment and organizing, workers’ rights, and labor standards globally”. While introducing the bill, the US Secretary of State specifically mentioned a firebrand garment labour activist in Bangladesh and said: “We want to be there for people like Kalpona Akter, a Bangladeshi garment worker and activist, who says that she is alive today because the US embassy advocated on her behalf.” After the new US bill, the Ministry of Commerce in Bangladesh received a letter from the Bangladesh embassy in Washington, DC in which the embassy speculated that “Bangladesh could be among the countries targeted by the new US Memorandum”. Al Jazeera has seen the letter and Commerce Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh acknowledged its receipt and told Al Jazeera that the Bangladesh government had already informed the US about the recent steps they had taken to protect labour rights in Bangladesh. “We are very serious about labour rights and we are the signatory of all the ILO conventions.”

How serious are the sanction concerns?

Germany-based Bangladeshi financial analyst Zia Hassan told Al Jazeera that the prospect of US sanctions on Bangladesh’s garment industry cannot be ruled out. “Historical patterns indicate wide visa sanctions are likely in retaliation for suspected election manipulation – a typical American response to alleged voting fraud globally,” he said adding that while the US doesn’t typically impose economic sanctions on grounds of a country’s politics alone, the possible garment trade sanction could hinge on issues of workers’ rights. “Denial of a fair bargain in wages negotiations, labour violations through threats, imprisonment or even murder of vocal labour advocates may see the US act on its warnings to sanction labour abuse,” he said. Labour rights activist Akter told Al Jazeera that even though the workers were back at work after the revision of the minimum wage hike, their demands had not been met and the anger over injustice to the workers is still bubbling in the sector. “Hundreds of our workers were thrown in jail for taking part in the protests and they are not given bail as of now. The hike that was given is not at all sufficient to fight the rising inflations. So the industry’s claim that the workers’ rights are protected is not true,” she said. “However, we obviously don’t want any sanction on this industry. It will be devastating not only for our workers but also for our economy,” she added.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/12/22/sanctions-threat-looms-over-bangladeshs-garment-sector-ahead-of>

The Drawbacks of Capitalism and Communism

By: Dr. Maqsood Jafri



Eminent Tunisian poetess and thinker Ms. Hela Tekali has asked me to explain the drawbacks of Capitalism and Communism. She writes:” What is the difference between capitalism and communism and what are their drawbacks and their impact on citizens.” Very briefly, I would like to answer this question and wish that people should understand that these two economic systems are poles apart. On December 8, 2023, I had written an exclusive and implicit article titled “ On the Islamic Economic System “, which was published in a leading English daily newspaper. There are three economic theories or systems. First: Capitalism. In the economic terminology, it is called “ Laissez faire capitalism “, which means “ free enterprise”. It is the policy of leaving things to take their own course, without interference. In Economics, it is abstention by the government from interfering in the working of the free market. The book of Scottish Economist Adam Smith titled “ The Wealth of Nations” published in 1776 is considered the Bible of capitalism. The capitalists claim that free market economy encourages and enhances free competition that leads to the production and provides best commodities on cheaper rates. Second; free economy is the base of freedom of individuals and solidifies the foundations of democracy. This claim has failed as capitalistic competition has taken the shape of monopolization. In America and in the Western countries, small businesses have failed and throttled and only Big Companies have control over economy. Besides, in capitalist societies, the Natural and un- Natural resources are in the hands of individuals. The state has no control on any means of production or human resources and public services. Feudalism is the natural product of capitalism. So far as the claim of the freedom of the individual and democracy is concerned, both have become the toys and playthings in the hands of the capitalists. Majority of the inhabitants of the Capitalist countries live hand to mouth in a miserable condition. There is no social justice in capitalist states. Karl Marx is the father and founder of modern Scientific Socialism. In his book titled “ Das Capital,” he rejected capitalism and proposed Communism. The communists claim economic and social justice. In the

Communist states all natural resources such as land, and minerals are State property. Even, people can not do private jobs. It is known as a State controlled economy. There is one party rule and no democratic institutions. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell had written a book titled “ Road to Serfdom”, in which he named communist state as a “ Prison.” The communists feel pride and pronounce that they provide basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, education and health care to their citizens. Their claim, apparently, is appealing but the reality is different. The ruling class enjoys the perks and privileges and the majority of the people neither have political freedom nor economic parity. They can not oppose the authoritarian rule and the financial corruption of the ruling coterie. Communist state is a fascist state. Islam believes in an egalitarian state, which provides both, political freedom and social justice. But, unfortunately, in Muslim countries, neither, there is democracy nor social justice, as these countries are under the stone wall of monarchy and capitalism. The Quran says:” Land belongs to God.” Then it says: “ All the treasures of the skies and the earth belong to God.” These Quranic Verses reject feudalism. The Quran further says: “ They ask you what to spend/ surrender; say : more than need.” This verse clearly rejects capitalism. To provide basic needs to all citizens is the duty of an Islamic State. Islam condemns Usury; which is the negation of extra wealth. Besides, economic justice, Islam ensures human dignity, equality, justice and freedom. The Quran addresses the Holy Prophet: “ Counsel with them in the matters.” This verse is the basis of the democratic system in an Islamic state. In my opinion, the Scandinavian counties, Denmark, Sweden and Norway are very close to Islamic polity and economy, as they are social welfare states. Islamic state is a democratic welfare state but out of fifty seven Muslim countries, not a Single Muslim country in an Islamic country. There is a difference between a Muslim country and an Islamic country. Muslim country means, a country where the Muslims live and Islamic country is a country where Islamic laws are implemented, enforced and established. It is called Islamic welfare state.



Five new soft-furred hedgehog species discovered

By Victoria Gill

Scientists have discovered five new species of soft-furred hedgehogs from South East Asia. The revelation required several scientific missions to the animals' tropical forest home to study them. Researchers also re-evaluated specimens of the mammals which had been in museum collections for decades. This detailed, biological spot-the-difference study revealed that two of the animals in the museums were new species to science. Three others - that had been categorised as subtypes of one species - were confirmed to be sufficiently distinct from each other to be formally recognised as individual species. One of the lead researchers, Dr Melissa Hawkins, from the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (SMNH), told BBC News that the discovery showed the "amazing" diversity of life on our planet still to be revealed. "We think we know about the natural world," said Dr Hawkins, "but even groups like mammals - especially the little things that live in difficult-to-reach habitats - we really don't know much at all. "Finding animals like these could bring some attention to [rainforest] ecosystems that are very threatened," she said.

What are soft-furred hedgehogs?

The animals belong to a group of hedgehogs called Hylomys, all of which live in South East Asia. There were previously only two known species, and this discovery brings the tally to seven. They are small, long-nosed mammals and, while they are members of the same family as the more familiar hedgehog, are furry rather than spiny. Dr Arlo Hinckley, also from SMNH, said a discovery like this was "particularly important in South East Asia, which has the highest rates of deforestation in the world".

How do you discover a new species?

This is challenging when you are studying what Dr Hawkins described as "little brown things" that live in dense forest. To the non-expert eye, the diminutive mammals



look alike, but the team found key differences in their genetic codes, and differences in their physical shape - particularly their heads and teeth. "Their skulls are really cool - they're tiny, but they have these really sharp teeth," said Dr Hawkins. "If they were bigger animals they'd be pretty scary." The scientists named one particularly long-fanged species - that they discovered in one of the museum collections - *Hylomys macarong*, a name derived from the Vietnamese word for "vampire". As well as studying the animals in the wild, the researchers examined specimens from a total of 14 different natural history collections across Asia, Europe and the US. The two newly discovered species - *Hylomys vorax* and *Hylomys macarong* - were discovered in the collections of the Smithsonian and Drexel University in Philadelphia, where they had remained in drawers for several decades. "We kind of say we can time travel as museum curators," said Dr Hawkins. "We can pop down the hall, look in the collection and go anywhere in the world." The researchers gathered enough genetic material from the three other species, which were previously categorised as subspecies, to reveal that they were biologically distinct. Each different *Hylomys* species appears to live in a slightly different habitat - some in the lowland forests and some at higher altitudes. Finding animals that are the result of millions of years of evolution and are unique to one area of tropical forest, said Dr Hinckley, "is a bit like the inclusion of a Picasso in an art gallery or the discovery of an archaeological site in a city". "It gives these places additional value, and hopefully funding to protect such an important heritage."

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-67780254>

Bury North MP James Daly defends remarks over poor parenting

By: Phil McCann & PA News

A Conservative MP has defended his comments where he said most children who struggle in his constituency were "the products of crap parents". Bury North MP James Daly made the remark to the *i* newspaper while analysing election prospects. His Labour rival accused him of "insulting the parenting skills" of his constituents. But Mr Daly said he wanted to help people from disadvantaged backgrounds have the best chance to succeed. Speaking to the newspaper initially, Mr Daly stressed the importance of "stability" offered by the family unit as he outlined what the New Conservatives group of MPs stands for. The Bury North MP said: "I think New Conservatives represent very much working-class conservatism. "We're not a strange right-wing sect. It's just people who want to give people the best chance to succeed and thrive in life. "When you think about the family, it's about stability. "Most of the kids who struggle in Bury are the products of crap parents and so what do we do to try to address that issue? "On the left it would just be we'll throw money at this and hope something sticks, somebody like me thinks about this more fundamentally."



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'Fruitful life' : In response to the article, James Frith, Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate for Bury North, said it was "revealing to see how little James Daly thinks of his own constituents". "Rather than insulting the parenting skills of people in Bury, he should look closer to home," he said. Mr Daly has since responded to the criticism, adding he wanted "to ensure those from most disadvantaged backgrounds have best chance to thrive and succeed". "The state on its own can't achieve this and parents have a crucial role to play in ensuring they are able to support their children through early years. "I want to make sure that no matter your background you have the best chance to have a happy, positive fruitful life." <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-67842890>

Do electric cars really produce fewer carbon emissions than petrol or diesel vehicles?

By: Jasper Jolly

There is a spectre haunting electric cars: the question of greenwashing. What if, for all the green hopes attached to zero-emissions cars, the truth is that they fail to achieve their main goal of cutting world-heating carbon emissions? Our EV mythbusters series has looked at some of the most persistent criticisms of electric cars, ranging from car fires to battery mining, range anxiety to cost concerns. This article asks: do electric cars really produce fewer carbon emissions than petrol or diesel?

The claim: In the US, the Florida senator Rick Scott said there was “ample evidence to suggest that EVs are not as clean as people are being led to believe and folks deserve to know the truth”. He and other Republican colleagues introduced the (suggestively named) “Directing Independent Research To Yield Carbon Assessment Regarding Electric Vehicles (DIRTY CAR EV) Act”, which tried to call for analysis of the carbon footprint of vehicles. A recent article in the UK’s Daily Mail reported that “the environmental benefit of electric cars may never be felt” because many electric vehicles “will never hit their mileage target as owners upgrade to newer models, leaving swathes of used electric cars sitting unwanted on garage forecourts”. But it is not only the rightwing press. In June, the Guardian published an article by the actor Rowan Atkinson in which he said he felt “duped” by EVs’ carbon claims and that the reality was “very different”, citing Volvo research suggesting greenhouse gas emissions during production of an electric car are almost 70% higher than when manufacturing a petrol one. “It seems a perverse choice of hardware with which to lead the automobile’s fight against the climate crisis,” Atkinson wrote.



The science: Any assessment of carbon emissions associated with a product needs to look at its whole life cycle, from manufacture to scrapping (and, hopefully, recycling). Many claims about electric cars’ supposedly worse environmental toll focus on manufacturing and ignore the actual use of the cars. The grain of truth in the criticism is that EVs do indeed take significantly more energy to manufacture. Battery production requires large amounts of electricity to heat ovens to bake electrode materials, and to charge and discharge the battery to prepare it for use. While electricity can be produced with zero emissions, most countries still burn carbon-heavy fossil fuels to turn generators. Analysis by the Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois, cited by the US Environmental Protection Agency, suggests that manufacturing battery cars produces about 60% more carbon emissions than their fossil fuel

cousins. That means that electric cars start with a big carbon disadvantage, sometimes described as a “carbon debt”. However, Eoin Devane, a senior analyst for surface transport at the Climate Change Committee, the UK government’s climate science adviser, said: “If you look at the data, that ‘carbon debt’ is paid off within about two years of driving the vehicle.” The vast majority of fossil fuel cars’ carbon footprint comes in use, when exhaust pipes constantly spew carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Transport & Environment (T&E), a campaign group, calculates that a new petrol car will produce about 27 tonnes if driven for 100,000 kilometres (62,000 miles), and 49 tonnes over 200,000km. Electric cars, by contrast, use less energy and can charge from zero-carbon sources. Just how much greener electric cars can be in operation depends on how much renewable electricity is used in local grids. Transport & Environment has a handy online calculator that allows you to play with the grid, choosing between different countries’ energy mixes and whether the battery was made in carbon-heavy China or greener Sweden. Where the lines cross indicates how many miles are needed for a battery car to win on carbon emissions. Lucien Mathieu, T&E’s cars director, said that even if you choose a worst-case scenario – vehicles made and driven with electricity largely from coal – the electric car will win out after about 70,000km (about six years of driving). “The more you drive an electric car, the better it gets,” he said. The picture for electric cars will improve as power from the wind and the sun replaces gas and oil, reducing carbon emissions from generating electricity. Colin Walker, the head of transport at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit thinktank, said: “Even if you have a really dirty grid, EVs are still better for the environment. That will keep going as the grid gets cleaner and cleaner.” We also need to take into account the future of the technologies. Auke Hoekstra, an energy transition researcher at the Eindhoven University of Technology, said emissions from fossil fuel cars cannot fall much further, meaning they are not a viable technology for a zero-emissions world. Yet battery development is still in relative infancy, and is likely to tip the balance further in favour of electric cars. Batteries are “a good endgame solution” for the transition to net zero, Hoekstra said. “The gasoline engine is basically going nowhere.”

Any caveats? : Batteries are not the only way to get cars to net zero. You can fill them with “e-fuels” – petrol made with carbon from the air, hydrogen from water, and green electricity. That technology works and will probably be used to power classic cars long into the future. Other people advocate using the hydrogen in fuel cells to run a motor. However, in either case the energy efficiency is drastically lower than using that electricity directly, and the fuel is likely to be needed for planes, which are much harder to decarbonise. And there was an important point in Atkinson’s Guardian article: replacing an old, little-used car with a brand new electric car may not make sense because of the “carbon debt”. “If the vehicle is not being regularly used there is certainly a case to wait until the point you’re going to replace it anyway,” said the CCC’s Devane. However, he and others cautioned that any calculation of relative carbon savings for individuals would be complicated. And, Hoekstra added, “not having an electric car is better for the environment” if you can rely on public transport instead.

The verdict: The scientific consensus is overwhelming: on any realistic like-for-like comparison a battery car will be cleaner than its petrol or diesel equivalent. Burning fossil fuels to make and drive electric cars will still cause emissions, but at a lower level than inefficient fossil fuel engines. That is true of today’s grid (in richer economies, at least) but in tomorrow’s grid the benefits will grow as long as countries continue to shift away from coal and gas to generate electricity. Putting batteries in cars so far appears to be the only practical way to shift the tens of millions of light vehicles sold every year towards net zero emissions.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/23/do-electric-cars-really-produce-fewer-carbon-emissions-than-petrol-or-diesel-vehicles>