



February, 2024

Price: US \$ 4, per copy

Annual Subscription: US \$ 48

E-Mail: info@theglobalvoice.net

www.theglobalvoice.net

A Magazine for Scholarly, Literary, Political, Economic and Religious Activities



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Editorial



Dr. Busharat Elahi Jamil - Assistant Editor

Politics is globally defined as to serve the humanity. In the modern state system democracy provides politics a platform to deliver serving the masses. Nonetheless, in Pakistan people are suffering from the worst form of political services. The conventional politicians or political elites along with their descendants consider it their patrimony to rule. However, simply to rule is or at least should not be a 'right' of a person or certain class but the trust of the people of the Country.

Since 1947, native political system as well as the intellectuals of the country have failed to equip the public with political consciousness and training. People are unaware of their fundamental social and political rights and responsibilities. All they think is a certain corrupt and hegemonic political class enjoying their exploitation in the name of obedience. Illiterate Pakistani nation consider financial and moral corruption of political elite as their right and they even hesitate to raise their voice against this status quo.

They have measured the chain of fake democratic norms and necessity to solve the crisis of Pakistan. The main focus of a true democracy is protection of the people and their rights, but in Pakistan the politicians only relish this facility by protecting their objectives and scoring unlawful goals. On the other hand, those who fight for the rights of the people to save the nation are considered irrational and imprudent inciting the whole system stand against them; no doubt this is happening these days in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, politicians and their handlers have divided the country and its system into classes, stratus, languages, religions, sects as well as promoting the provincialism. General elections under the guise of democracy would have been the worst example of hate politics in the Country.

By promoting respective disgusting slogans and specific ambitions in the general elections, politicians would not hesitate to take any step to destroy national solidarity and integration for their victory and objectives. They divide the nation to please their handlers. Tragically, in Islamic Republic of Pakistan the religious political stratus explain these horrifying situations as the fate of Pakistani nation.

This is the vibrant reason why Pakistanis have not been blessed with a real, brave and devoted leader who can change their fortunes and improve the conditions of the Country and advance the Country according to the innovative values and spirit of the factual democracy. The end of status-quo and raise in political consciousness with true democratic spirit is the only solution of Pakistani socio-political crisis. Through elimination of corrupt political practices, the hegemony of a certain political elite can be abolished.

In fact, it is the very political system of a Country that should be subjected to the public consciousness, not the people to any system. People's political mindfulness, awareness of their rights and peace of mind reflects a real democratic system. Pakistani people have to think in this direction to enjoy the benefits of the democracy to save Country by electing a real leader in approaching general elections.

Oil supply tightens in Europe over Red Sea disruptions



The structure of the global benchmark Brent crude futures market and some physical markets in Europe and Africa have been reflecting tighter supply partly over concerns about shipping delays as vessels avoid the Red Sea due to missile and drone attacks.

The disruptions – which have been the largest to global trade since the COVID-19 pandemic – have combined with other factors such as rising Chinese demand to increase competition for crude supply that does not have to transit the Suez Canal, and analysts say this is most evident in European markets.

In a sign of tighter supply, the market structure of Brent – which is used to price nearly 80 percent of the world's traded oil – hit its most bullish in two months on Friday, as tankers diverted from the Red Sea following recent air strikes by the United States and United Kingdom on targets in Yemen.

In response to Israel's war on Gaza, rebels from the Iran-aligned group that controls northern Yemen and its western coastline have launched a wave of assaults on ships in the Red Sea.

By targeting vessels with perceived links to Israel, the Houthis are attempting to force Tel Aviv to stop the war and allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

Houthi activity has so far been concentrated in the narrow strait of Bab al-Mandeb, which connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea. Approximately 50 ships sail through the strait every day, heading to and from the Suez Canal – a central artery for global trade.

Some of the world's largest shipping companies have suspended transit in the region, forcing vessels to sail around the Cape of Good Hope in Southern Africa. The lengthier route has raised freight rates due to higher fuel, crew and insurance costs. "Brent is the most impacted futures contract when it comes to Red Sea/Suez Canal disruptions," Viktor Katona, lead

crude analyst at Kpler, told the Reuters news agency. "So who suffers the most on the physical front? Undoubtedly, it is European refiners."

The premium of the first-month Brent contract to the six-month contract LCOc1-LCOc7 rose to as much as \$2.15 a barrel on Friday, the highest since early November.

This structure, called backwardation, indicates a perception of tighter supply for prompt delivery.

Less oil heads to Europe

Less Middle Eastern crude is heading to Europe, with the volume nearly halved to about 570,000 barrels per day (bpd) in December from 1.07 million bpd in October, Kpler data showed.

Ships travelling through the Suez Canal have taken on greater strategic significance since the war in Ukraine, as sanctions against Russia have made Europe more dependent on oil from the Middle East, which supplies one-third of the world's Brent crude.

But it's challenging to measure the impact of Red Sea shipping separately, one crude trader told Reuters. "It's a strong market everywhere, but people are very nervous."

Other developments have also tightened the European crude market including a drop in Libyan supply due to protests, the first such disruption for months, and lower Nigerian exports.

Angolan crude, which also heads to Europe without having to pass through the Suez Canal, is seeing higher demand from China and India because of issues around Iranian and Russian crude, reducing the supply that could come to Europe.

China's oil trade with Iran has stalled as Tehran withholds shipments and demands higher prices, while India's imports of Russian crude have fallen due to currency challenges, although India attributed the drop to unattractive prices.

Meanwhile, Russia leapfrogged Saudi Arabia to become China's top crude oil supplier in 2023, data showed on Saturday, as the world's biggest crude importer defied Western sanctions over Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine to buy vast quantities of discounted oil for its processing plants.

Russia shipped a record 107.02 million metric tonnes of crude oil to China last year, equivalent to 2.14 million bpd, the Chinese customs data showed, far more than other major oil exporters such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

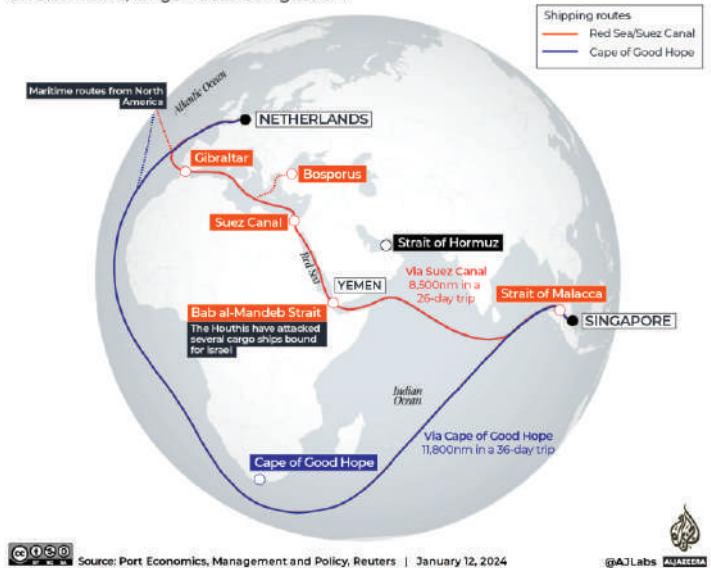
Imports from Saudi Arabia, previously China's largest supplier, fell 1.8 percent to 85.96 million tonnes, as the Middle East oil giant lost market share to cheaper Russian crude.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/20/oil-supply-tightens-in-europe-over-red-sea-disruptions>

ECONOMY

Alternative shipping route to avoid the Red Sea

Attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea have disrupted maritime trade along major shipping routes via the Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandeb Strait, leading to an alternative, longer route being taken.



Yemen war deaths will reach 377,000 by end of the year: UN

A new United Nations report has projected that the death toll from Yemen's war will reach 377,000 by the end of 2021, including those killed as a result of indirect and direct causes. In a report published on Tuesday, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that 70 percent of those killed would be children under the age of five. It found that 60 percent of deaths would have been the result of indirect causes, such as hunger and preventable diseases, with the remainder a result of direct causes like front-line combat and air raids.

"In the case of Yemen, we believe that the number of people who have actually died as a consequence on conflict exceeds the numbers who died in battlefield," UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner said. Yemen has been mired in conflict since 2014, when the Houthi rebel movement seized much of the northern part of the country, including the capital, Sanaa, as the government fled. In March 2015, a coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia intervened in the war with the aim of restoring the government.

The conflict has been deadlocked for years, with Yemen teetering at the brink of a famine, and tens of thousands of people killed. The situation in the country has been described by the UN as the world's worst humanitarian disaster. At least 15.6 million people are living in extreme poverty. The report projected grim outcomes in the near future should the conflict drag on. It said some 1.3 million people would die by 2030, and that 70 percent of those deaths would be the result of indirect causes such as loss of livelihoods, rising food prices, and the deterioration of basic services such as health and education.

The report also found that the number of those experiencing malnutrition would surge to 9.2 million by 2030, and the number of people living in extreme poverty would reach 22 million, or 65 percent of the population.



Scenarios if war were to end now

The report also projected that extreme poverty could disappear in Yemen within a generation if the conflict were to end immediately. Using statistical modelling to analyse future scenarios, the UNDP report said if peace were reached by January 2022, Yemenis could eradicate extreme poverty by 2047. "The study presents a clear picture of what the future could look like with a lasting peace including new, sustainable opportunities for people," said Steiner.

If the conflict ends, the report estimated economic growth of \$450bn by 2050, in addition to halving malnutrition – currently affecting 4.9 million people – by 2025. Further projections showed that focused efforts on empowering women and girls across Yemen could lead to a 30 percent boost of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050, coupled with a halving of maternal mortality by 2029.

However, the UNDP noted that the war "continues to propel in a downward spiral". "The people of Yemen are eager to move forward into a recovery of sustainable and inclusive development," said Khalida Bouzar, Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States. "UNDP stands ready to further strengthen our support to them on this journey to leave no one behind, so that the potential of Yemen and the region can be fully realised – and so that once peace is secured, it can be sustained."

The report emphasises that the upward trend for development and wellbeing must be supported not just by peace efforts, but also by regional and international stakeholders to implement an inclusive and holistic people-centred recovery process that goes beyond infrastructure. Investments focused on agriculture, women's empowerment, capacity development, and effective and inclusive governance were projected to have the highest return on development.

<https://aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/23/un-yemen-recovery-possible-in-one-generation-if-war-stops-now>

IMPORTANT NOTICE

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May Allah be with you - Amen

Why did Iran launch strikes on its allies' territory?

By: Kasra Naji

Iran has launched strikes against targets in three allied countries - Syria, Iraq and Pakistan - in two days. Pakistan responded with a missile attack on Iranian territory. So why did Iran do it, and why did it happen now? Everything suggests Iran's military, the Revolutionary Guards, were under pressure to act from Islamic hardliners inside the country. These hardliners are increasingly unhappy with Iran apparently standing by as Israel kills huge numbers of Palestinians in Gaza. They are also



angry that Iran did nothing after its arch-enemy Israel assassinated a number of top Revolutionary Guard commanders in Syria - and only verbally supported the Houthis when they came under US-UK strikes. And then there's the bomb attack claimed by the Islamic State group (IS) in the Iranian city of Kerman two weeks ago, which killed at least 84 people. The Guards felt they had to act somehow, without ratcheting up tensions with Israel or the US. Iran has been careful not to get directly involved in the Israel-Gaza war - though it does offer military support to Hamas, the Houthis and Hezbollah. But in striking Syria, Iraq and Pakistan, they appear to have scored a few own goals. Iran said the missile and drone attack inside Pakistan targeted militant group Jaish al-Adli - what it calls an "Iranian terrorist group". But Pakistan says it killed two children. Pakistan, a nuclear power, felt it had to respond to the strike - which was a clear violation of Pakistani sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also undermined Pakistan's nuclear deterrence. So it launched attacks of its own against what it said were hideouts of Pakistani "terrorists" based in Iran - the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Balochistan Liberation Front. Iran says three women, two men and four children were killed. The tit-for-tat attacks have left the normally good relations between the neighbours seriously damaged. The Revolutionary Guard did not anticipate this reaction from Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan share a 900km (560 mile) border which is difficult for either to control without cooperation. Pakistan has been a valuable ally in international forums, often voting in favour of Tehran. The attack on Syria appears to have been in response to the killings in Kerman. But even there, there are no reports of a big hit against IS or hardline Sunni groups, as Iran claims. In Iraq - perhaps Iran's closest neighbour and ally - the government is infuriated by attacks where Iran used some 11 ballistic missiles to hit a target in Irbil, in the Iraqi region of Kurdistan. Iran claimed it had targeted an operations centre of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. But Iraqi and Kurdish authorities say the house of a well-known businessman was hit, killing him along with his wife and two children, one of whom was under one year old. Iraq's government has complained to the UN Security Council, which is due to discuss the attacks. The incident has eroded neighbourly relations cultivated over years, in spite of several issues between the two nations. The Revolutionary Guards may have taken the decision to launch the attacks against the three countries after only consulting Iran's supreme leader. There are signs the foreign minister was not consulted before the attacks were launched. The attacks this week appear to have undermined Iran's international position further, putting its defences at risk and making the Revolutionary Guard look reckless and prone to taking uncalculated risks.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68021483>

Trudeau balancing act on Israel-Gaza annoys both sides of debate

By: Nadine Yousif



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has tried to walk a fine line on the Israel-Gaza conflict. But by seeking to appeal to all sides, he has pleased no-one. On Thursday, Israel's envoy to Canada had a request for Mr Trudeau - that Canada "leave no room for misinterpretation" on a matter that the ambassador said was "crystal clear". The matter was South Africa's allegation before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Israel, accusing it of genocide in Gaza. Israel has slammed the claim as false and "grossly distorted".

It was not the first time Canada's prime minister has been asked to define his country's position on the case currently before the UN's highest court. Over the last few days, Mr Trudeau was asked to clarify numerous times where Canada stands on the ICJ case, after its close allies - including the US and the UK - rejected it. Mr Trudeau first told reporters that while Canada supports the ICJ, that did not mean it supported "the premise" of the case, a statement that was widely interpreted as a dismissal.

He then said that Canada would abide by any ruling issued by the ICJ, but refused to comment on whether Canada agreed with the genocide allegation. It was the latest in a string of public statements that have led to accusations that Canada is mincing its words on a conflict that has sharply divided Canadians and much of the world. Pierre Poilievre, leader of the Conservative opposition party, said at a press conference last week that Mr Trudeau "sends out some of his MPs to claim that they support calling Israel genocidal when they are talking to one group of voters. And then he sends out another group to say that they're against calling Israel genocidal."

Throughout the conflict, Mr Trudeau has been broadly in line with Canada's Western allies, repeatedly condemning Hamas's deadly attack on 7 October, while saying that Israel has right to defend itself. Like the US, UK, European Union and others, Canada classifies Hamas as a terrorist organisation. At the same time, he has also underscored the need to protect civilian lives and allow humanitarian aid inside Gaza. And on Thursday, he criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his statements against a future two-state solution,

saying that Canada believed it was "the only way forward" for peace in the region. When pushed, however, Mr Trudeau has struggled to clearly explain Canada's position on the ongoing war, frustrating allies and opening himself up to criticism. "Almost every step he's taken in this conflict has had the effect of upsetting everyone at different times," said Shachi Kurl, president of the Angus Reid Institute, which regularly polls Canadians on national



issues. That includes members of his own Liberal caucus, who, like the public, are deeply divided on the matter. On 20 October, Mr Trudeau was met with boos and shouts of "shame" at an Ontario mosque, where he made an unannounced visit. That same day, he was sent a letter signed by 23 members of his own caucus urging him to advocate for a ceasefire. But when Canada backed a UN General Assembly resolution for a humanitarian ceasefire on 12 December - a break from its historic support for Israel - tensions flared within Mr Trudeau's caucus. Liberal MP Anthony Housefather publicly criticised the government at the time, saying it was "unacceptable" for Canada to throw its weight behind a ceasefire resolution that did not explicitly ask Hamas to drop its weapons.

The response forced the Trudeau government to release a lengthy statement explaining its vote and reiterating its support for Israel. Some have argued Mr Trudeau's vagueness may be part of a larger political calculus, especially given where most Canadians stand on the issue. Polling done by Ms Kurl's institute in November indicated that among Liberal voters, an almost identical number of people - about 20% - sympathise with either Israelis or Palestinians.

Meanwhile, a large chunk of Canadians - about 31% - sympathise with both equally. "In terms of the overall population, there is perhaps more of an understanding that this issue is profoundly complex," Ms Kurl said. Still, the apparent ambiguity may be costing Mr Trudeau's Liberals some support, at a time when they are trailing behind Mr Poilievre's party in the polls. Aurel Braun, a professor of international relations at the University of Toronto, said he had seen an "unprecedented change" in what traditionally has been very strong support for the Liberal party within Canada's Jewish community.

The prime minister's stance was not viewed as "a lack of clarity", he said, but rather as "a huge moral and ethical failure" at a time when antisemitic incidents were on the rise in Canada. Meanwhile, many Muslims are also frustrated with Mr Trudeau's lack of consistency, and with the country's politicians in general, according to Stephen Brown, head of the National Council of Canadian Muslims. "You would never have seen that response prior to the conflict," said Mr Brown about the prime minister being booed at a mosque. The ambiguity was especially "hurtful", he said, at a time when Islamophobic incidents in Canada had also spiked.

While Mr Trudeau has irked both sides, Ms Kurl noted that his comments, at least so far, have not caused any members of his own Liberal party to defect, despite "very passionate voices" within it. "It has been perhaps outwardly awkward for the prime minister," Ms Kurl said. But "he has managed to keep his caucus together".

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68037261>

China promotes peace while US embraces wars

By: Victor Gao

Thailand and China will waive visa requirements for each other's citizens from March, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin announced on Tuesday. It will be a win-win situation for both the Chinese people and the Thai people.



China and Thailand are very friendly toward each other. In terms of culture and the way of doing business, China and Thailand have a lot in common. Against the backdrop, the visa-free policy will promote economic and trade engagement between China and Thailand in many ways.

In December, China and Singapore announced a mutual 30-day visa-free policy. China and Malaysia also have similar mutual visa-free policy. Although the visa waiver schemes with Singapore and Malaysia are not permanent, I hope that Singapore, Malaysia, and other ASEAN countries can also follow Thailand's example. The better such a visa exemption arrangement will be, the better it will be for the recipient countries in terms of boosting their tourist industry.

Traditionally, China has deep and friendly relations with most ASEAN members. Such exchanges of friendship and goodwill are based on hundreds, even thousands, of years. This kind of communication will continue in various forms. As of July 2023, the cumulative bilateral investment between China and ASEAN countries had exceeded \$380 billion, with over 6,500 direct investment enterprises established in ASEAN. China has maintained its position as ASEAN's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years, and the two sides have been each other's top trading partner for three consecutive years.

Tourism could become a catalyst for China and ASEAN countries to expand cooperation and promote integration. Visa waiver programs will promote China and Southeast Asia to be better integrated. There is still a lot of potential for development between China and ASEAN, for example, in environmental cooperation and energy cooperation, and in particular, in cooperation in science and technology. China-ASEAN cooperation will set a good example for many other countries. We will also be in a better position to promote peace, stability and prosperity throughout the world.

What happens between China and ASEAN serves as a stark contrast to the situation in Europe and the Middle East. The Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russia-Ukraine conflict are still going on. It is truly a tragedy to see war rage in other parts of the world. However, in Asia, we have managed to do our best to promote peace and stability and avoid using war as an instrument to solve any bilateral disputes.

The current momentum between China and ASEAN is something that the US will hardly learn. From the financial support given to Ukraine by the US as well as the US' stance in the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all the decisions taken by the US are merely based on its own interests. Actually, most Americans are friendly, and they love peace rather than war. In that sense, I do think people from China, the US, and many other countries in the world can jointly make an effort to make sure that war is not being embraced by any country.

This task is very challenging. A slight carelessness could rock the boat and divert our attention from peaceful engagement and cooperation with each other to confrontation, rivalry, or another version of the Cold War. China will continue to play a very important role in the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. That means China will have a lot of things to do to promote peace and stability. And this visa-free policy between China and Thailand starting in March this year will be a good start for 2024.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1304862.shtml>

While Canadians line up at food banks, corporate profits are never enough: letters

By: Frank Sterle Jr.

Avoidable injustices are forcing many Canadians to choose between essential needs. Unrelenting food-price inflation is pushing more people to use food banks while giant-grocer corporate profits and payouts to corporate officers correspondingly inflate. Yet, the more such corporations make, the more they want — nay, need — to make in the next quarter. It's never enough. Maximizing profits at the expense of those with so much less, or nothing, is a significant part of the nature of the big business beast. Big businesses are getting unaccountably bigger, defying the very spirit of government rules established to ensure healthy competition by limiting concentrated ownership. And while corporate officers shrug their shoulders and defensively say their job is only to protect shareholders' bottom-line interests, the shareholders shrug their shoulders while defensively stating that they just collect the dividends and that the big bosses are the ones to make the moral and ethical decisions. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, meanwhile, criticizes the Justin Trudeau Liberals for the unaffordability of housing as well as food, both of which are largely due to real-estate speculation or greedflation, respectively. But Poilievre's Tories, like Trudeau's Liberals, are in bed with Big Business and their lobbyists. Mix in promised Conservative austerity measures with the unaffordability crisis, and you get a breeding ground for worsened economic conditions, thus human suffering. Spared from this turmoil, of course, will be the well-to-do, which tend to side with the money-first minded Tories. What will Poilievre do about the fact that the more giant-grocers and corporate officers make, the more they will go after in the next quarter?



Numerous shopping carts are parked out front of the Fort York Food Bank on College Street in May 2023 where people line up for donated food.

It's never enough.

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/while-canadians-line-up-at-food-banks-corporate-profits-are-never-enough-letters/article_b9d1ce9e-b54d-11ee-9426-1ba2203f37a2.html

The US plan to revamp the Palestinian Authority is doomed to fail

By: Samer Jaber

For two months now, the United States and other Western countries, backing Israel, have been talking about “the day after” in Gaza. They have rejected Israeli assertions that the Israeli army will remain in control of the Strip and pointed to the Palestinian Authority (PA) as their preferred political actor to take over governance once the war is over. In so doing, the US and its allies have paid little regard to what the Palestinian people want. The current leadership of the PA lost the last democratic elections held in the occupied Palestinian territory in 2006 to Hamas and since then, it has steadily lost popularity. In a recent public opinion poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), some 90 percent of respondents were in favour of the resignation of PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and 60 percent called for the dismantling of the PA itself. Washington is undoubtedly aware of the low public trust in the PA, but there is a reason why it insists on supporting its takeover of Gaza: its leadership has been a reliable partner for decades in maintaining a status quo in the interests of Israel. The US would like that arrangement to continue, so its backing for the PA may be accompanied by an attempt to revamp it in order to solve its legitimacy problem. But even if this effort succeeds, it is unlikely the new iteration of the PA would be sustainable.



Washington is undoubtedly aware of the low public trust in the PA, but there is a reason why it insists on supporting its takeover of Gaza: its leadership has been a reliable partner for decades in maintaining a status quo in the interests of Israel. The US would like that arrangement to continue, so its backing for the PA may be accompanied by an attempt to revamp it in order to solve its legitimacy problem. But even if this effort succeeds, it is unlikely the new iteration of the PA would be sustainable.

A reliable partner

Perhaps one of the main factors that has convinced the US that the PA is a “good choice” for post-war governance in Gaza is its anti-Hamas stance and willingness to conduct security coordination with Israel. Since the commencement of the conflict between Israel and Gaza on October 7, the PA and its leadership have not issued an official statement offering explicit political support for the Palestinian resistance. Their rhetoric has predominantly focused on condemning and disapproving of attacks on civilians on both sides, while also rejecting the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland. In a political address on the ninth day of the war, Abbas criticised Hamas, asserting that their actions did not represent the Palestinian people. He emphasised that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and underscored the importance of peaceful resistance as the only legitimate means to oppose Israeli occupation. This statement was later retracted by his office. In December, Hussein al-Sheikh, a PA official and secretary-general of the executive committee of the PLO, also criticised Hamas in an interview with Reuters. He suggested its armed resistance “method and approach” has failed and led to many casualties among the civilian population. The stance of the PA is consistent with its own

narrow political and economic interests which have come at the expense of the Palestinian national cause. It has systematically and brutally stamped out any opposition and any support for other factions, including Hamas, in order to maintain its rule over West Bank cities while Israel continues with its brutal occupation and dispossession of the Palestinian people. In Israel's war on Gaza in 2008–2009, the PA leadership hoped to regain administrative control of Gaza with assistance from Israel. During that conflict, the PA prohibited any activities in the West Bank in support of Gaza and threatened to arrest participants. I, myself, faced harassment and the threat of arrest for attempting to join a demonstration against the war. Similar positions were adopted by the PA, albeit with less aggressive measures, in subsequent Israeli assaults on Gaza, as its leadership came to recognise that Hamas was unlikely to relinquish its control over the Strip. Since October 7, the PA has taken a bolder stance, marked by more aggressive actions. Its security forces have suppressed demonstrations and marches held in support of Gaza, resorting to shooting live ammunition at participants. Additionally, the PA has recently detained individuals expressing support for the Palestinian resistance. While cracking down on Palestinian protests, the PA has done nothing to protect its people from attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian communities, which have resulted in deaths, injuries and the displacement of hundreds of people in the occupied West Bank. Additionally, the Israeli army has intensified its raids in the PA-administered areas, leading to the arrest of thousands and the killing of hundreds of Palestinians, with no reaction from the PA. The PA's inability to offer basic protection has added to the deterioration of its legitimacy among Palestinians. Furthermore, by taking a stance against the Palestinian resistance and aligning itself with Israel and the US, the PA is only further undermining its own legitimacy.

PA 1.0 and PA 2.0

Washington is aware of the growing unpopularity of the PA and its leadership among Palestinians but it is not giving up on it because it seems to believe that that can be fixed. That is because the US has tried to revamp the authority before as it has always faced problems with legitimacy due to the way it was set up. As a governing institution, the PA was established to bring an end to the first Intifada. Conceived under the interim peace agreements in Oslo, it was envisioned as an administrative body to oversee civil affairs for Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip and certain parts of the West Bank, excluding occupied East Jerusalem. It effectively took on a role as an Israeli security contractor in exchange for certain benefits related to administering Palestinian population centres. The PA faithfully fulfilled its mandate, carrying out routine arrests and surveillance of Palestinian individuals, whether they were involved in actions against Israel or were activists opposing its corrupt practices. Thus, Israel strategically benefitted from the establishment of the PA, but the same cannot be said for the Palestinian people, as they continued to experience the ravages of a military occupation. Despite this, the PA under Yasser Arafat – or what we can call PA 1.0 – leveraged patronage and corruption to maintain some level of support. Notably, Arafat viewed the Oslo process as an interim measure, expecting a fully independent Palestinian state by 2000. He pragmatically engaged in security collaboration with Israel, hoping to build trust and ultimately achieve peaceful coexistence. In 1996, responding to ongoing Palestinian resistance, he even declared a “war on terror” and convened a security summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, involving Israel, Egypt and the US. In 2000, the civil and security arrangements overseen by the PA became increasingly fragile and eventually collapsed, triggering the eruption of the second Intifada. This uprising was a response to Israel's policies of settlement expansion, its firm refusal to accept any form of Palestinian sovereignty between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, and broader social and economic grievances. In 2002, the Bush administration conceived the idea of refurbishing the PA as part of the Road map for peace. While Arafat's leadership was perceived as a hindering factor, he had already collaborated with the US by implementing structural reforms, including the creation of a prime minister's position. Seeking to reshape the Palestinian leadership, the US engaged with potential alternative leaders, including Mahmoud Abbas, who eventually assumed the presi-

dency of the PA in 2005 after the suspicious death of Arafat. The PA took its first blow when Hamas won the elections in 2006 and was able to form a government. The US and EU rejected the results, boycotted the government and suspended financial assistance to the PA, while Israel halted the transfer of tax revenues. Meanwhile, the PA security apparatus leadership refused to deal with the Hamas government and continued their work as usual, claiming they reported to the PA president's office. For several months, Hamas struggled to maintain its PA government, while Abbas and his supporters made significant efforts to isolate it. In 2007, Hamas took over the PA security apparatus in the Gaza Strip and assumed control of all PA institutions. Abbas declared Hamas an unwanted entity in the West Bank and ordered the expulsion of the Hamas government and the imprisonment of many Hamas operatives. After splitting the PA into two entities, one in the Gaza Strip and another in the West Bank, Abbas, along with allies Mohammed Dahlan and Salam Fayyad, led efforts to restructure the PA in the West Bank with full support from the US and the EU. Under what we can call PA 2.0, two major restructuring efforts took place. First, it consolidated the Palestinian security apparatus under a united command. Led by US Army General Keith Dayton, the revamping of the Palestinian security forces aimed at deepening their partnership with the Israeli state and army. Additionally, it sought to cultivate a vested interest among PA personnel in maintaining the role of the PA. Second, the restructuring of the PA consolidated its budget, placing all its resources under the Ministry of Finance. This restructuring did not result in a "better" PA. It remained a dysfunctional entity, which mismanaged resources and service provision, leading to a severe deterioration in living standards for the majority of Palestinians. Its leadership enjoyed certain privileges due to its security coordination with Israel and engaged in widespread corruption practices that have raised concerns even among PA supporters. Meanwhile, Israel's settlement enterprises continued expanding without limits and the violence employed by the Israeli army and settlers against ordinary Palestinians only worsened.

PA 3.0?

The lack of support for the PA leadership and its dysfunction have raised concerns about whether it can play a role in the upcoming post-Gaza war arrangements that the US administration is trying to put together. That is why Washington has signalled it will seek to revamp the PA once again – into PA 3.0 – with the aim of addressing the needs of various parties. The US administration and its allies seek an authority that can provide security to Israel and engage in a peace process without altering the status quo. Since the start of the war, several US envoys have visited Ramallah carrying the same message: that the PA needs to be revamped. In December US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Abbas and al-Sheikh (the PLO secretary general) urging them to "bring new blood" into the government. Al-Sheikh is considered a possible successor to Abbas, who could be part of these efforts to restructure the PA. However, after more than 100 days since the start of the Israeli war on Gaza, it looks like Washington does not have a concrete plan and only has some general ideas which the PA has declared a readiness to discuss. More importantly, the US vision does not seem to take into account the will of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian public clearly demands a leadership that can head a democratic, national entity capable of fulfilling the Palestinian national aspirations, including creating an independent state and realising the Palestinians' right of return to their homelands. Revamping the PA implies intensifying cooperation with Israel and providing Israeli settlers with more security, which effectively means more insecurity and dispossession for the Palestinians. As a result, the Palestinian people will continue to perceive the PA as illegitimate and public anger, upheaval and resistance will continue to grow. In this sense, the US vision for revamping the PA would fail because it would not address the core issues of Israeli occupation and apartheid, which successive American administrations have systematically and purposefully ignored.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/20/the-us-plan-to-revamp-the-palestinian-authority-is-doomed-to-fail>

It's high time for all those at Harvard to **stand with Palestine**

By: Rameen A Javadian

These days one of the most talked-about news stories in the United States is the resignation of Harvard University President Claudine Gay. As Harvard and its leadership are centred in the media, however, Palestinians continue to be killed by US-supplied bombs and buried under the rubble of their homes, schools, mosques and hospitals. While Harvard Yard is filled with speculation about the career of a millionaire academic, two million Palestinians are displaced by carpet bombing intended to ethnically cleanse Gaza. Amid the attempted distractions from an actualised genocide whose targets include families of students at Harvard, those of us in solidarity with Palestine remain subject to relentless attacks.



Indeed, while hundreds of intellectuals at the university mobilised to sign a letter to the Harvard Corporation in support of Gay – the very president who spent weeks denouncing students protesting in solidarity with the victims of the ongoing Nakba – we are barely afforded minimal support. The letter, urging the Harvard Corporation “in the strongest possible terms to defend the independence of the university and to resist political pressures”, received ample attention from the national media. In the end, however, this effort by Harvard faculty not only failed to save Gay’s job but also did not translate into any meaningful support for those of us in solidarity with Palestine who refuse to cower. As Palestinians in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories are subject to unfathomable conditions, relentless killing and irreversible destruction, at Harvard condemnation remains wrongfully assigned to students organising for justice in Palestine. Leading faculty appears ready to back only Gay, who, despite failing to recite the exact script demanded by Zionists, still classifies our activities in support of liberation as “abhorrent”.

When solidarity is reserved for elite academics during an active genocide and there is only limited activity to demand Harvard end its complicity, or even just protect students standing with the oppressed, we have a problem. When a Trump endorsee’s rhetorical trap is left unchallenged and there is no rejection of the harmful premise that students calling for the end of an actual genocide are somehow calling for a hypothetical genocide, we have a problem. When some mobilise to preserve “free inquiry”, but avoid recognising the Palestine exception to free speech, we have a problem. For years, many have asked Harvard to disclose and divest from its material complicity in what has been widely recognised as an apartheid regime. In the past few months of censorship and particularly egregious threats to largely Muslim, Arab, Black, and brown students, we have been subject to attacks on campus. A student-compiled list of over 70 incidents include: a woman in hijab chased by

someone wielding a knife; doxing via a billboard truck while targeted students face job losses, evictions, and academic sanctions; frivolous police reports against visibly Muslim students; and students being followed and harassed for wearing a keffiyeh (by the wife of a Harvard professor who signed the letter in support of Gay). During her limited tenure which held capacity for making various Zionist claims in public and private spheres, President Gay did not recognise a single one of these incidents; not even behind closed doors when rare opportunities for Muslims to express their hurt presented themselves.

Over the fall semester, victims of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism found little support from the majority of faculty signatories on the letter to the Harvard Corporation. Only around 10 percent of the 764 signatories joined an open letter asking Gay to recognise the suffering of Palestinians and denounce the silencing of supporters of Palestinian liberation (which she has never done, not even in her post-resignation op-ed). Even the killing of over 100 family members of a single Palestinian student at Harvard Law School has not been enough to garner sympathy – let alone rage – from this institution.

Recognising pervasive anti-Black racism, speaking out against the bigotry motivating Gay's ousting – even if her administration perpetuated its own modes of injustice against marginalised communities – is necessary. Also necessary is recognising that following an earlier smear campaign by a billionaire mogul against a Black student protester and a Muslim security marshal, Gay would succumb to this hateful campaign and release an email to notify the public that these students are under investigation by local police and the FBI.

While Gay is backed by hundreds of faculty in an attempt to save her elite position, Elom Tetey-Tamaklo was promptly robbed of his job as a residential assistant, with minimal outcry. The president of Harvard at the time even condemned the liberatory phrase “from the river to the sea” Palestine will be free, in communication to the entire Harvard community. While leading intellectuals attempted to rescue Gay under the claim of free speech, many caused disappointment by ignoring Harvard's neglect of its students speaking for a free Palestine.

Now, will these Harvard faculty sign on to support the crucial chapter of Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine? Focus ought to shift towards understanding why many stand by, as students showing solidarity with Palestine face smear campaigns ignored or supported by their universities, and others within these institutions mobilise only for a president who boasts about punishing these students. Some at Harvard shamefully rationalise away speaking against the Zionist genocidal campaign, refusing to use institutional privilege to pursue veritas in the most basic way. Even as the university attempts to restrict speech and censure voices for Palestine, hundreds of faculty, who happily signed an open letter in support of Gay, turn away from their students advocating for justice in Palestine.

As Palestinians are slaughtered, many at Harvard, through rhetoric and actions, support their plight “from the river to the sea”. Yet elite academics and headlines only notify us of a defence for a president who credulously opened herself up to a frivolous congressional hearing. As a grave injustice unfolds before our eyes, at the most basic level, Harvard – as one of the most influential institutions based in a nation that is the strongest ally to the Zionist project – must recognise Palestinian suffering. It is high time for institutions like ours to end their material and moral complicity in this oppression. Let this be the time when people of influence in these spaces finally heed the calls to stand in solidarity with our movement for an end to the ongoing Nakba, before anything else.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/19/its-high-time-for-all-those-at-harvard-to-stand-with-palestine>

LILLEY: Trudeau attacks Poilievre on national unity, media joins in

By: Brian Lilley

The Trudeau Liberals are now playing with Quebec nationalist sentiment to try and gain votes. There is literally no low that the Trudeau Liberals won't sink to in order to try and win votes, including on issues of national unity. On Thursday, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre took to social media to denounce the massive drop in housing starts across Quebec. It was a drop of 32% across the province but 37% in Montreal and 40% in Quebec City. "Massive drop in construction in Quebec, while Trudeau pays billions to incompetent mayors, Marchand and Plante, who block construction sites. Federal money for cities will be tied to the number of houses and apartments built when I am PM," Poilievre posted on X. Bruno Marchand is the mayor of Quebec City and Valerie Plante is the mayor of Montreal. Neither of them have a great record on housing and both deserve to be called out. Yet, despite Poilievre having called out mayors in English Canada using similar language and despite him praising the mayors of Victoriaville, Trois-Rivieres and Saguenay for increasing housing supply, his comments were portrayed as anti-Quebec.



First up was The Canadian Press, the useless, overpriced and biased wire service I've been telling my editors, bosses and CEOs to dump for close to 25 years. CP should be a straight shooter in the news business. Unlike the Toronto Sun, they aren't supposed to have a political slant but there they were within two hours of Poilievre's post turning this into a national unity issue. Right after CP's slanted reporting that made this about Poilievre insulting Quebec came the Liberal Party of Canada with ready-made graphics denouncing his comments. After that came the national media quick to jump on Poilievre's statements without looking at any context, just following the Liberal pied piper.

It's really sad how biased our national media is on this and so many other fronts. Poilievre has blasted mayors across the country for failing to build housing, for standing in the way of new construction, for adding regulations that needlessly drive up costs and no one has said a thing. As soon as he criticizes progressive mayors in Quebec, this becomes a national unity issue. We are treated to pundits who say the perfectly bilingual man who has lived on the Ontario-Quebec border for 25 years, who has sat in Parliament for 20 years, who is married to a Quebecer, doesn't understand the province and likely hates it.

It's really sad how biased our national media is on this and so many other fronts. Poilievre has blasted mayors across the country for failing to build housing, for standing in the way of new construction, for adding regulations that needlessly drive up costs and no one has said a thing. As soon as he criticizes progressive mayors in Quebec, this becomes a national unity issue. We are treated to pundits who say the perfectly bilingual man who has lived on the Ontario-Quebec border for 25 years, who has sat in Parliament for 20 years, who is married to a Quebecer, doesn't understand the province and likely hates it.

Give me a break: This is nothing more than the Liberals playing a dangerous game with national unity, inflaming Quebec nationalist tendencies needlessly to try and salvage some votes and a good part of the national media going along with it. They will reply that I am biased, that I am an opinion columnist, that I regularly back conservative politicians. All of those things are true and I'm upfront about my politics and have been for years and years.

What excuse do the supposedly neutral newsrooms of this country have for playing the Liberal game of inflaming national unity? If you are a neutral observer, an arbiter of the truth, surely you would have seen the posts where Poilievre has called out mayors in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and elsewhere in his crusade to build more housing, to make it more affordable. They ignore that though, because it doesn't fit the narrative.

This coming election will be fascinating because it won't just be CBC, whom Poilievre has promised to defund coming after him, it will be most of the gallery, most of the national media. The mask has been pulled back, people see these outlets for what they are, partisan and biased while not declaring it and pretending to be neutral. With fewer people trusting the media each day, this isn't a good position for my industry but it is the position my colleagues have chosen to take.

<https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/trudeau-attacks-poilievre-on-national-unity-media-joins-in>

US: 2 govt schools in California to introduce **Hindi** as world language

In a first for California, two government schools in the Silicon Valley would be introducing Hindi as a world language in its school curriculum. The decision to introduce Hindi as an optional subject was welcomed by the large Indian American community at Fremont who have been seeking to have their children learn Hindi in schools. Fremont has one of the highest concentrations of Indian Americans in California. The Fremont Unified School District (FUSD) Board voted 4-1 on January 17 to launch a pilot programme that will see Hindi in the curriculum of Horner Middle School and



Irvington High School for the 2024-2025 school year that starts in August. Indian Americans make 65 per cent of the student population in Horner Middle School and Irvington High Schools. The district has a total of 29 elementary school campuses, five middle school campuses, and five high school campuses. During the meeting, FUSD board members Vivek Prasad, Sharon Coco, Larry Sweeney, and President Yajing Zhang showed strong support for the proposal, citing the welfare of students as a major factor in their decision, a media release said. "I look at the demand, and I look at the value that this Hindi offering will produce for the community ... for me it's a no-brainer," said Trustee Vivek Prasad, endorsing the pilot. "If this is successful and if other schools want to offer Hindi, they will be able to in the future... so at this moment in time I'm in favour," was the response of Trustee Sharon Coco, highlighting her commitment to the student community of FUSD. "I'm positive that it (pilot) will go to all high schools and all middle schools, and they will embrace it," stated Trustee Larry Sweeney in support of the proposal. "Who do we serve?" asked President Yajing Zhang, "Students! And so do we serve the students' interest if there is huge evident demand for this class?" Zhang said.

<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/americas/us-two-govt-schools-in-california-to-introduce-hindi-as-world-language>

Britain's Asylum Policy is a Gift to Smugglers | Opinion

By: Andrew Connelly



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government is frequently on the verge of collapse over a doomed quest to subcontract their asylum system to the government of Rwanda. The U.K. has signed a deal with the east African state to receive its unwanted migrants on a one-way ticket, insisting that it will destroy the business model of human smuggling groups that brought around 30,000 people to the U.K. by inflatable boat from Europe last year. The policy is more likely to ensure that smugglers continue to dominate access to Britain. Other governments would be wise not to make the same mistakes.

Rather than efficiently process asylum claims, the U.K. is paying at least \$360 million to the authoritarian regime of Rwandan President Paul Kagame to host their rejected migrants. Without evidence, the government asserts that the threat of being detained, denied access to asylum, and being flown 4,000 miles away would disincentivize future U.K.-bound asylum seekers. In a blow to Sunak's government, last year the U.K. Supreme Court ruled the scheme unlawful. The subsequent attempt to rush through legislation to circumvent the court's decision has led to a vicious internal party rebellion. Meanwhile, not a single migrant has been sent to Rwanda.

While cracking down on "unlawful" migration, the British government extols the virtue of its "safe and legal routes," which are "some of the most generous anywhere." Yet in recent years the U.K. has closed routes for Syrian refugees, families seeking to be reunited, and unaccompanied children stranded in Europe. A government report on safe and legal routes published last week contained zero proposals to open any new ones. An increase in irregular migration should be no surprise.

Ukrainians do not arrive in the U.K. huddled in small boats, nor do Hong Kongers. That's

because they are the beneficiaries of bespoke resettlement schemes allowing them to fly to the country in a safe, legal and dignified manner. Understaffed and poorly managed programs for Afghan refugees—including those that fought the Taliban alongside British forces—have stalled. Relatedly, Afghans are one of the top nationalities that now arrive on small boats. In 2023, aside from those three nationalities, the U.K. resettled just 700 people—an unserious number.

It is impossible to submit asylum applications outside of the U.K., so people must run a global obstacle course with routes set by smugglers in order to put their feet on the territory and plead their case. There are around 100,000 people currently languishing in dysfunctional U.K. bureaucracy awaiting an asylum decision, most of whom paid several thousand dollars to get to the country. Britain's hostile policy creates the market for smuggling gangs and ensures that they sustain astronomical profits.

Britain is not alone in its immigration theatre. Around the world most politicians' claims of stopping illegal immigration rarely stand up to scrutiny. Restrictive policies frequently just shift routes rather than stop the phenomenon. Until recently, the U.K. didn't have a small boats problem, but as border officials have quietly admitted, tightened controls at French ports led smugglers to swap trucks and parking lots for dinghies and beaches. In Australia, successive governments have boasted of "stopping the boats" by sending seaborne migrants to horrific prison islands in the Pacific Ocean, only for airports to register a significant increase in people claiming asylum upon arrival. The European Union has spent billions on building fortifications and bribing dictators and militia to prevent migration, yet 2023 saw the highest number of people arriving irregularly since the 2016 refugee crisis.

Britain's Rwanda gambit is another example of backfiring immigration policy and irresponsible statecraft. Not only will it facilitate more smuggling to the U.K., it will encourage it elsewhere. If migrants are deported to Rwanda, many will seek to continue their journey to Europe, and smuggling operatives will accordingly forge new routes through Africa. In the 2010s, Israel conducted a similar arrangement to send unwanted migrants to Rwanda.

All subsequently left or were removed. Worse still, the policy means the U.K. ignores a brewing conflict. The United States has called for Rwanda to cease its support for the M23 armed group accused of recruiting child soldiers and unspeakable atrocities in neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the grimmest of ironies, a country hired to relieve the U.K. of its refugees may be the cause of a regional refugee crisis.

Politicians benefit from cynically dramatizing irregular immigration, but it doesn't have to be this way. The Biden administration's recent measures, like humanitarian parole, gave order and predictability to the arrivals of nationalities that previously came irregularly, as well as cut out the smuggling middlemen. A return to blanket restrictions will just increase border chaos and cartel profits.

If asylum seekers could begin a screening process online from anywhere in the world, successful applicants would enter legally, by plane, in a managed process. If labor migrants were able to move back and forth between borders in a regulated way, fulfilling market demand, they would eschew smuggler-dominated paths and not be forced to remain undocumented in the underground economy for years.

Countries have the right to decide the level of migration according to their need and humanitarian obligations. Pretending that this level can be zero merely cedes control of entry to smugglers.

<https://www.newsweek.com/britains-asylum-policy-gift-smugglers-opinion-1862254>

Pakistan faced worst economic crisis in 2023, says Human Rights Watch

By: Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan faced one of the worst economic crises in its history in 2023 with poverty, inflation and unemployment soaring, jeopardising millions of people's rights to health, food and an adequate standard of living, according to a report by the Human Rights Watch. In its 740-page 'World Report 2024', made available on Friday, the HRW reviewed human rights practices in more than 100 countries, and observed that the insistence of



the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on austerity and the removal of subsidies without adequate compensatory measures resulted in additional hardship for low-income groups in Pakistan. The country remained exceedingly vulnerable to climate change and faced rates of warming considerably above the global average, making extreme climate events more frequent and intense, according to the report.

Increasing repression by governments in Asia is negatively affecting human rights locally and internationally, the HRW said. Asia, unlike Europe, Africa and the Americas, lacks a meaningful human rights charter or regional institution to safeguard human rights standards, it adds. IMF insistence on removal of subsidies sans compensatory measures adds to hardship for low-income groups. The report says government threats and attacks on the media created a climate of fear among journalists and civil society groups, with many resorting to self-censorship. Authorities pressured or threatened media outlets not to criticise state institutions or the judiciary.

NGOs reported intimidation, harassment, and surveillance of various groups by government authorities. The government used its regulation of INGOs in Pakistan policy to impede the registration and functioning of international humanitarian and human rights groups. The report says violence against women and girls — including rape, murder, acid attacks, domestic violence, denial of education, sexual harassment at work, and child and forced marriage — is a serious problem throughout Pakistan. Human rights defenders estimate that roughly 1,000 women are murdered in so-called “honour killings” every year.

In Punjab, 10,365 cases of violence against women were reported to the police in the first four months of 2023, according to a local NGO. The actual number of incidents is likely to be much higher given barriers to reporting, harmful social norms, and ineffective and harmful responses by the police. Pakistan's conviction rate for rape is less than three per cent.

Over six million primary school-age children and 13m secondary school-age children in Pakistan were out of school, most of them girls. The HRW found that girls miss school for rea-

sons including lack of schools, costs associated with studying, child marriage, harmful child labour, and gender discrimination. A lack of awareness about mental health in Pakistani society contributes to the abuse of those with psychosocial disabilities and mental health conditions. Prisoners who ask for mental health support are often mocked and denied services. The prison system lacks mental health professionals, and prison authorities tend to view any report of a mental health condition with suspicion. Transgender women, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remained under attack. Nearly 37pc of Pakistan's 230 million people faced food insecurity as of 2018, yet only 8.9m families received assistance to mitigate the impact of rampant inflation.

In July, the European Union proposed extending Pakistan's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status by another four years, enabling Pakistan to enjoy trade preferences and access to the European market. Pakistan and China deepened their extensive economic and political ties in 2023, and work continued on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a project consisting of the construction of roads, railways, and energy pipelines. "The threats abusive governments in Asia pose to human rights domestically and internationally demand bold new approaches from rights-respecting governments and democratic institutions," said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at HRW.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1807228>

From The Past Pages Of Dawn:

1974: Fifty Years Ago: Bhutto's caution

HYDERABAD: Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto today [Jan 19] cautioned the people against international conspiracies being hatched against Pakistan and added that there were foreign agents at work within the country to harm the integrity and solidarity of Pakistan. He was addressing an open kutchery at Mirpurkhas. ... Mr Bhutto said that he would strain every nerve to see that no harm was done to Pakistan. ... He further said: "We can proudly say that the struggle launched by the Muslims of the sub-continent was right and it succeeded because it was based on justice and truth." Mr Bhutto [said] that conspiracies did no good to any people and asked what the people of Bangladesh could achieve by hatching a plot against Pakistan. ... Mr Bhutto said there were people in the land that go to Kabul for medical treatment, as if there were no hospitals in the country. And these people do not seek admission in the hospitals there also, but instead indulge in palace intrigues there. The Prime Minister said he had toured Baluchistan and NWFP to take the people of those provinces into confidence and tell them what sinister conspiracies were at work against their interest.



<https://www.dawn.com/news/1807269/from-the-past-pages-of-dawn-1974-fifty-years-ago-bhuttos-caution>

Around the world in 50 days?

6 sailors in 'biggest challenge'

Six sailors set out on the 40,000km around-the-world Ultim Challenge from France yesterday, hoping to complete one of the sport's "biggest challenges" inside 50 days. Under bright winter sunshine in the Brittany port of Brest, the first such race on super-powerful but relatively fragile trimarans got underway. The Edmond de Rotshchild, helmed by Charles Caudrelier, was the early evening leader with an advantage of a few nautical miles. Caudrelier, Tom Laperche (SVR Lazartigue), Thomas Coville (Sodebo), Armel Le Cleac'h (Banque Populaire), Anthony Marchand (Actual) and Eric Peron (Adagio) were the six men to cross the starting line in their 32-metre-long crafts. In mild conditions for a Breton yesterday in January, the six giant multihulls began to fly on their foils, the side appendages which allow the boats to rise above the water to reach breakneck speeds. The fastest could take around 50 days to complete the 21,600 nautical miles of this race, rounding the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa), Cape Leeuwin (Australia) and Cape Horn (Chile) in the process. Their departure from Brest was emotional and tearful.



"Obviously there is emotion, but we will have to quickly switch to racing mode at the start," said Marchand, 38, shedding a tear when his team gathered around the mast of his Ultim to welcome him. "We're going for an extraordinary race, but it will really be extraordinary when we finish it." Sailing out in the morning light towards the starting line out of Brest harbour, the six men were accompanied by their entourages until the last moment. Some crew departed the craft by diving into the frigid sea just before cannon fire marked the start of the race. "Everything comes together for a very beautiful story, I grew up here in Finistere, I learned to sail here. It makes me happy to see everyone gathered to encourage us. It's up to me to succeed in my mission from now on," explained Le Cleac'h, who is setting off on his fourth around the world trip. However, it's his first in a trimaran after three Vendee Globes, including victory in 2017. Completing a solo around-the-world trip in a trimaran is a rare accomplishment. Trimarans are faster but experts regard the craft as much more fragile and riskier than a monohull. Only seven sailors have achieved the feat, including just four who have done it non-stop. The most recent was Francois Gabart, who set the record for the enterprise in 2017 after 42 days spent at sea. Yesterday, he was on the SVR Lazartigue to accompany Laperche who, at 26, has now set off on his first circumnavigation. "There's impatience, stress, concentration, emotion, a little bit of everything...I'm going to make the most of it," said Laperche. "The objective is to cross the finish line with a boat in good condition. It is one of the biggest challenges of all of our careers," added Caudrelier.

<https://www.gulf-times.com/article/675093/events/around-the-world-in-50-days-6-sailors-in-biggest-challenge>

Davos Duplicity: Corporations Promised Not to Fund Election Deniers—But Can't Seem to Quit Them | Opinion

By: Robert B. Reich



Senior executives of America's largest corporations have spent this week in Davos, Switzerland, at the annual World Economic Forum, whose 2024 theme is "Rebuilding Trust."

Hello?

It's hard to come up with any group of Americans, outside of Trump and his congressional loyalists, who have done more to destroy public trust than the senior executives of America's biggest corporations—corrupting democracy by pouring money into political campaigns, fighting unions and suppressing wages, monopolizing their markets and price-gouging consumers, and siphoning off almost all gains to shareholders.

In the 1990s, the Davos World Economic Forum actively promoted the idea of stakeholder capitalism, in which corporations pledged to advance the interests of workers, consumers, communities, and the environment—not just shareholders. (The Forum still promotes the idea on its website.)

Adding to the rank hypocrisy of this week's Davos meetings are American CEOs who say they fear a second Trump administration and the political upheaval it might bring. Multiple attendees have told the New York Times's DealBook that they view the outcome of the U.S. election as a business risk, particularly after Trump beat his Republican rivals in the Iowa caucuses by such a wide margin.

Yet many of them are fueling Trump and political upheaval in America by continuing to bankroll the 147 members of Congress who refused to certify Joe Biden's victory on January 6, 2021. Recall that after the certification vote and storming of the Capitol, a cavalcade of big corporations announced with great fanfare that they had stopped making political contributions to these 147. Since then, most have resumed campaign donations to them—thereby helping the deniers get reelected and threatening the stability of American democracy. All

told, at least 228 of America's biggest Fortune 500 corporations, representing more than two-thirds of some 300 companies with political action committees, have given \$26.3 million to election deniers during the 2021-2024 election cycles.

Shortly after January 6, 2021, Amazon pledged to suspend political contributions to members of Congress who objected to certifying the 2020 presidential election results, according to CNN. By

Sept. 22, 2022—one year, eight months, two weeks, and five days later—Amazon resumed funding them.



Boeing made the same pledge but since May 3, 2021, has given \$652,000 to 85 members of Congress who refused to certify Joe Biden as president. Comcast made the pledge but since then has given \$585,000 to election deniers. Delta made the pledge but has since donated \$325,000 to them.

Other giant corporations that announced they wouldn't support election deniers but reversed course include FedEx, which has given the deniers \$303,000 since January, 2021. Home Depot, \$602,500. Johnson & Johnson, \$138,000. McDonald's, \$107,000. UPS, \$575,000. Verizon, \$250,500. Walmart, \$297,000. Wells Fargo, \$244,500.

The list goes on.

ProPublica has created an app that's tracked all of the campaign contributions that Fortune 500 corporations have made to the 147 deniers over the past two years. If you're interested in knowing which large corporations are devoting money to undermining our democracy, I urge you to use it.

Government watchdog Accountable.US has compiled a list of corporate political donations to election deniers categorized into five major industries. Click to see their findings: 1) Aerospace and Defense; 2) Telecommunications; 3) Oil, Gas, and Electric Utility; 4) Pharmaceutical; 5) Financial. Note that these numbers show only the donations that corporations are openly disclosing—not funds they're channeling through trade associations, super PACs, and dark money groups.

So when you hear pious pronouncements coming out of Davos about the importance of "rebuilding trust" and maintaining a stable democracy in the United States, watch your wallets.

As to your wallets, you might think twice before buying anything from a big American corporation that's using some of the profits from its sales to destroy trust and destabilize American democracy.

<https://www.newsweek.com/davos-duplicity-corporations-promised-not-fund-election-deniers-cant-seem-quit-them-opinion-1862217>

UAE: AI chatbots help students cheat; what teachers are doing about it

By: Nandini Sircar

Institutions across different levels in the UAE have implemented policies to prevent 'cheating' through the use of ChatGPT and other natural language processing tools driven by AI technology. An increasing number of students are using it to complete home assessments with the controversial writing tool generating content of human-like text. To hinder bot-enabled plagiarism, some institutions in the country blocked ChatGPT on school-issued laptops and Wi-Fi while others have implemented the practice of citing or referencing when submitting work to address the issue of AI-supported assignment submissions. Professor Manda Venkatraman, Vice Chancellor, Academics and Dean of Gulf Medical University's College of Medicine, said: "To address this challenge, various tools have been employed, such as plagiarism checkers to identify similarities in work. Additionally, there are software solutions capable of assessing the percentage of work generated by a system. These tools play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of ChatGPT on assignments, allowing educators to ensure the integrity and authenticity of students' work."

AI chatbots redefine ways to cheat

According to educationists, popularisation of AI chatbots has not boosted overall cheating rates in the institutions although they highlight AI technologies, including GPT models, have made it easier for students to find ways to cheat. "The issue of academic dishonesty predates these advancements. Even before the emergence of AI tools, we observed instances of plagiarised assignments and various methods of cheating. It's important to recognise that while technology has evolved, the underlying challenge of maintaining academic integrity remains consistent. AI has simply changed the landscape, making it more crucial than ever to develop robust educational frameworks that emphasize ethical use of technology," he added. They explain it's worth noting that the style adopted by the AI in its responses can be trackable, providing a level of transparency in understanding the origin and



nature of the generated content. James Picowye, Dean of Zayed University's College of Communication and Media Sciences said: "I think AI is an opportunity but everyone needs to be on the same page as to what it does and what it does not do. While there are some educators embracing AI there are many looking at how to put up walls." However, he stressed the importance of students embracing AI in the industry that required them to stay abreast of developments. "Covid gave us an opportunity to rethink how we educate on a global scale and for the most part we have fallen back into the way things were. AI, in my opinion, is going to force us to rethink all parts of our education from KG through PhD and time is not on our sides," added Picowye.



Educators experience instances of similar responses

Meanwhile, educators at the school level highlight they have anticipated instances of similar responses among students using AI. Lisa Johnson, Principal, American Academy for Girls, said: "But this isn't necessarily negative. It encourages us to design assignments that require more personalised and creative input, pushing students to think beyond the standard responses generated by AI. Talking to students about their assignments and gauging their deeper understanding of topics is often a good way of assessing whether our mutual learning goals have been achieved. We emphasize that AI should be a tool for learning enhancement rather than a shortcut to completing tasks." By doing so, educators hope to cultivate a sense of integrity and responsibility among students. Therefore, instead of blocking these tools, some institutions are working to integrate them into their learning framework. Abhilasha Singh, principal, Shining Star International, said: "Banning it in school will not help. ChatGPT presents the question of academic integrity and that's where we need to focus. We do have submissions which we identify as the language and the content doesn't match the students calibre and child faces consequences." She added, "In our school, we have introduced citing or providing references, to work around the challenge of AI supported assignment submissions. It is part of HW policy (homework policy) and classes have to cite "WHF" (with help from) with the name of the person or the source."

<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/uae/uae-educational-institutions-implement-measures-to-combat-bot-enabled-plagiarism>

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Qatar backs NAM's position on just causes

By: QNA/KAMPALA



Qatar participated in the meeting of the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held in Kampala, Uganda on Jan 19-20. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi represented Qatar at the meeting. In his speech at the summit, HE al-Muraikhi extended the congratulations of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni for assuming the presidency of this vital international group, adding that he is confident the presidency will be successful in co-ordinating efforts towards achieving NAM's objectives during the upcoming period, underscoring Qatar's unwavering support in this respect. HE al-Muraikhi praised the stellar efforts exerted by Azerbaijan to co-ordinate NAM's action, particularly during a period that was fraught with unprecedented challenges, highlighting that this convention comes due to gross incidents, primarily the brutal Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip that has been continuing for months, as one of the latest issues that stirred the interest of NAM since its inception, which is the Palestinian cause.

He stressed that the strong and unwavering position of NAM towards the Palestinian cause stems from its rejection of the foreign occupation, the flagrant violations of the UN charter, the international law, the international humanitarian law, and double standards, emphasising that these principles are more crystal clear than any time before considering the current incidents in Gaza. HE al-Muraikhi added that it is vitally important to reiterate NAM's position that represents the international consensus on this just cause and to strongly push forward to stop these heinous massacres, protect the Palestinian people, secure the fundamental needs and prevent the attempts of displacing them from their lands, as well as deprive them of their rights. He added that it is important to push for a just, enduring, and comprehensive settlement based on the international law, international legitimacy, and the two-state solution, in addition to everything that necessitates the establishment of the viable Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and for the Palestinian people to

regain their full rights.

He emphasised that since the beginning of the crisis Qatar has been scrambling for achieving a humanitarian pause for hostilities resulting in durable ceasefire leading to enduring and comprehensive settlement stemming from its belief and achievements in mediation to resolve crises and disputes, as well as its humanitarian efforts. HE al-Muraikhi outlined that those efforts achieved humanitarian pauses, strengthened the access of humanitarian assistance, in addition to releasing hundreds of civilian prisoners from the two sides, asserting that Qatar continues its relentless endeavour to achieve these humanitarian aims in coordination with parties and partners.

He reiterated that this is part of Qatar's iron-clad commitment to perform a constructive role in achieving security, peace and stability at global, regional and local levels, including mediation and facilitating dialogue for the interest of stability in countries of this group, such as Afghanistan, Chad, Lebanon and others, as well as endeavours to address the humanitarian suffering such as the efforts that have recently led to the reunification of a number of Ukrainian children with their families. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs noted that Qatar is keen to be an effective and positive member in the international community as it maintains close bilateral relations, especially with the member states in the international groups it belongs to them, including NAM. He added that stemming from Qatar's keenness to bolster multilateralism, it continues engagement under the umbrella of NAM as an effective platform to enhance multilateralism and collective action to address common challenges and achieve joint interests. He affirmed that NAM could perform a critical role in advancing an international system in which multilateralism has a larger role and reactivate the international organisations, especially the UN to make them more transparent, effective and democratic.

<https://www.gulf-times.com/article/675834/qatar/qatar-takes-part-in-19th-nam-summit-in-uganda>



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Froma Harrop: Biden starts to decouple economy from China

This is a potentially perilous time for our economy and the security of the West. Trade policy with China sits at the center. China is no longer just a trading partner with whom we have differences. It's become a global adversary using trade to dominate militarily as well as economically. China's strategy is to flood the world with its cheap products. We're not talking about T-shirts. We're talking about electric vehicles, of which



China commands almost 60% of the world market. How are Americans and others to compete with manufacturers whose first objective is not to make money, but to put everyone else out of business? "The weakness of Western companies is they have to be profitable," an executive at the TechInsights research firm told The New York Times.

When the supply of solar panels exceeds demand, U.S. factories lay off workers and lower their capacity, a spokesman for the Solar Energy Manufacturers for America Coalition explained. "That's not the way it works in China. They've just continued to build and build and build." China now makes about 80% of the world's solar panels. China's state-directed manufacturers do this with enormous state subsidies. They include direct investment and tax credits. Access to cheaper energy confers another advantage. The Biden administration has put more than \$2 trillion into U.S. manufacturing to build domestic capacity and protect jobs. It also wants American factories to lead the charge against climate change, hence concern over the deluge of Chinese solar panels.

In addition to pushing competition out of the way, China is using trade to obtain the sensitive American technology that can go into weapons systems. Computer chips are in the crosshairs. Former President Donald Trump started some of the pushback on China, but Joe Biden's policy is more muscular. He is rewriting the trade rules in ways his predecessor never ventured. Going beyond tariffs and sanctions, a Biden executive order would do much to close the money spigots that help finance Chinese development of advanced weapons. China is pushing ahead on making computer chips that go into high-tech products with strategic importance. These are semiconductors that the rest of the world wants to make as well. The order would ban Americans in private equity, venture capital, joint ventures and other forms of finance from putting money in any Chinese entity involved in semiconductors, quantum computing or artificial intelligence.

The Biden administration's objective, Bloomberg News says, is "to asphyxiate entire industries key to China's capability on the battlefield and in cyberspace." Brewing in the background is the growing fear that China is cozying up to America's adversaries. For a while, China seemed to be playing the useful role of peacemaker between Ukraine and Russia. But

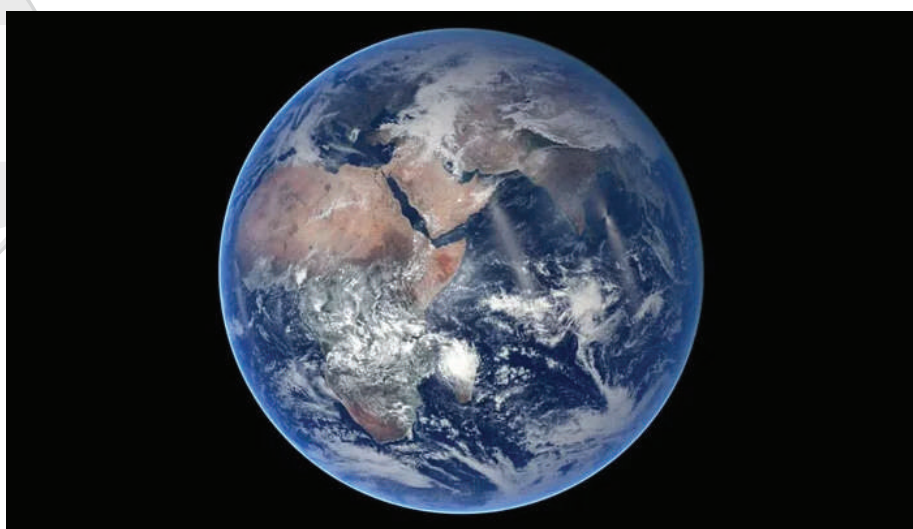
as time goes on, it's shown to be clearly in Russia's corner. In April, the Chinese ambassador to France said in an interview that "ex-Soviet Union countries" are not sovereign states under international law. That would include Ukraine. This did not sit well with the French, who fear further advances by Vladimir Putin's Russia could pull NATO into a war. And it sat even less well with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the Baltic states perpetually feeling threatened by a Russian invasion.

A bipartisan group of House members wants the Biden administration to establish a new "component" tariff that would tax an imported Chinese chip located inside another finished product. Sounds like a solid idea. China is clearly playing not only by different rules, but a different game altogether. One way to protect jobs and national security would be to withdraw from the game. Biden the diplomat denies that America is trying to "decouple" from China. Could fool us, and for many, not entirely displease.

https://www.thedailytimes.com/opinion/from-a-harrop-biden-starts-to-decouple-economy-from-china/article_038d1a6e-b609-11ee-bf59-abaf34503923.html

Origin of life on Earth not a mystery anymore as part of 1.75b years old code cracked

Researchers on a mission to understand the origins of life just learned a small lesson about photosynthesis from 1.75 billion years ago. According to a team of academics' recent study published in *Nature*, microfossils discovered in north Australia's desert exhibit the earliest known evidence of photosynthesis, which might lead to a deeper comprehension of the possible origins of life itself as per *Popular Mechanics*. These microfossils are the remains of



cyanobacteria, an organismal class that may have existed for up to 3.5 billion years, according to researchers (albeit the earliest fossil examples are from about 2 billion years ago). Some of these species may have been able to contribute enormous amounts of oxygen to Earth's atmosphere through photosynthesis during the Great Oxidation Event because, at some point in their evolution, they developed thylakoids, which are structures within cells where photosynthesis takes place. The earliest evidence of photosynthesis discovered to date is provided by these new findings. According to the researchers, these earliest photosynthesising cells formed some 1.75 billion years ago, and their discovery extends the fossil record by at least 1.2 billion years. "[This discovery] allows the unambiguous identification of early oxygenic photosynthesisers and a new redox proxy for probing early Earth ecosystems," the authors wrote in the paper, "highlighting the importance of examining the ultrastructure of fossil cells to decipher their paleobiology and early evolution."

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/amp/1147183-origin-of-life-on-earth-not-a-mystery-anymore-as-part-of-175b-years-old-code-cracked>

The AI revolution in climate science

By: **Giulio Boccaletti**

We have just witnessed the start of a paradigm shift in earth science. A paper published in *Nature* in July showed that a neural network (artificial intelligence) predicted weather better than the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, which has the world's most advanced forecasting system. Then, in November, Google's DeepMind announced that its weather-forecasting AI had produced even stronger predictions. The traditional approach to weather forecasting is to use observations taken at a point in time as initial conditions for equations based on physical principles. By contrast, an AI will ingest data collected over long periods of time and then "learn" the dynamics that traditional equations must describe explicitly. Both the traditional and the AI-based method rely on supercomputers, but the AI has no need for formally developed theories.



Weather forecasting determines when and where planes fly, which routes ships take, and helps manage all manner of civilian and military risks that come with a variable environment. It matters. While these are still relatively early days for AI applications in this field, and much still needs to be worked out, as in other sectors, AI-driven forecasting may displace skilled labour, since neural networks don't require knowledge of dynamical meteorology (the authors of the *Nature* paper are engineers with no such background). But the implications hardly stop there.

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Writing about the problem of statistical forecasting in the 1950s, Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, pointed out that if we already know the history of a system that exhibits certain properties, adding knowledge of the equations that govern its dynamics will not necessarily improve our predictions. Wiener was making a largely theoretical point, because limitations in observations, data, computing power, and other factors allowed for nothing else at the time. But now, his argument strikes at the heart of the matter, capturing the broader implications of recent advances in AI.

Just in the last few years, we have vastly increased our observational data of Earth. Between 1993 and 2003, just 25 Earth-observing satellites were launched into space; but between 2014 and 2022, the number shot up to 997, bringing the total fleet of Earth-observing and other satellites currently in orbit to some 7,560. With a vast space infrastructure that beams down data on just about anything – from plant growth, water vapour, and infrastructure installations, to infrared radiation, canopy height, and measurements of the state of the atmosphere – we have entered a golden age of Earth observation.

This growing archive of data describes almost everything that both we and nature do on

Earth. When combined with new AI models and our ever-expanding computational infrastructure, it could upend our understanding of the planet and our role on it.

Consider climate change. For the last 40 years, humanity's response to the climate crisis has been guided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a scientific body that is compartmentalized by discipline: the physical sciences use large Earth system models that have much in common with those used in weather forecasting, while, separately, economists and geographers quantify the impact and focus on the role of adaptation and mitigation policies on our societies.

This division of labour – reflected in the IPCC's tripartite working groups – corresponds with a division in methodologies. While physics-based Earth system models follow from first-principles equations, economists and impact modellers use a portfolio of empirical methods and irreducible theories.

AI could disrupt all of this. While it is unlikely to supplant traditional climate modelling completely – our observational record is not long enough to offer a statistically abundant picture of climate phenomena over the centuries – it is already playing an important role in the field.

More to the point, what matters most to us is not how the climate system behaves but how it affects the world we and other creatures live in. AI models – agnostic to any current scientific theories or disciplinary paradigms – could help us infer and possibly predict how biomass on the landscape changes over time. That, in turn, could improve how we manage forests and agriculture, construct diagnostic tools and early-warning systems for fire or flood risk, understand how energy economics connects to these changes, or predict their effects on the broader economy and even on climate negotiations. And all of this would come on top of how AI can accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Of course, AI is no substitute for scientific understanding. Science will remain a quintessentially human pursuit, where the value lies more in asking the right question rather than just extracting an answer from data. Nonetheless, we should try to make the most of the epistemological shift that the rise of AI heralds. It can help us identify new observable phenomena that have thus far escaped disciplinary lenses. It can assist us in managing landscape-scale systems that are too complex to be susceptible to theorization. It is the ultimate exploratory instrument to break down disciplinary boundaries.

This shift also poses a profound policy challenge. The infrastructure driving it – Earth-observing satellites and computation – is increasingly controlled by the private sector. The single largest owner of Earth-observing satellites is a company called Planet Labs. High-tech companies – from IBM and Nvidia to DeepMind and Huawei (whose employees wrote the July Nature paper) – are at the frontier of machine learning. With access to unparalleled capital and resources, these companies can easily outcompete most public research centres. Some can be quite philanthropic, but they ultimately have no obligation to deliver public goods or to worry about equitable access to their infrastructure.

As we grapple with the implications of the digital revolution and a natural environment that is changing before our eyes, AI may hold the key to unravelling some of the complexity that has exceeded our comprehension. But with the means of research firmly in private hands, policymakers will need to be vigilant to ensure that these new tools provide public goods, rather than just private benefits, and that the questions being asked of them produce answers that inform countries' legitimate policy aims. — Project Syndicate

https://www.khaleejtimes.com/opinion/the-ai-revolution-in-climate-science#google_vignette

Ram Mandir — an ill portent

By: **Pervez Hoodbhoy**



WHERE the five-centuries-old Babri Mosque once stood, there now stands Ram Mandir. Around it, a new Vatican-like city is coming up. A staggering \$4.2 billion have been collected as donations, both official and private. Though the temple's completion is years away, consecration ceremonies began days ago. RSS has distributed 50 million small food packets and the first seven tonnes of halwa have arrived. The government is



arranging train and helicopter services for 100,000 sadhus and devotees, contracts for new five-star hotels have been awarded, and schools are holding daily prayers. Muslims have been advised to limit their travel by bus and train. On Monday,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive in Ayodhya. His recent message: "The whole world is waiting for the historic moment. With folded hands, I am requesting 140 crore people of the country that on Jan 22, when the consecration of Ramlalla's idol takes place, light the Ram Jyoti in your house and celebrate Deepawali." Hospitals in Uttar Pradesh report that dozens of pregnant women have requested C-sections so their child is born on this auspicious date.

The purpose of these celebrations — and the PM's lead role — is ostensibly religious, but some senior priests dispute that. They will boycott the event because Modi is technically unqualified for performing the 'pran-pratishtha' (putting soul inside an idol) ritual. This scarcely matters, because Modi wants to signal once again that under him a new India has arrived, one bearing little or no resemblance to the India born in 1947.

Hindutva's message targets two audiences. The first is India's Muslims: reincarnated India is for Hindus, not for them. Just as Pakistan treats its Hindu population as inferior citizens with fewer rights, so too Muslims in India must never forget they are the unwanted progeny of invaders who despoiled a pristine land and robbed it of its glories.

Revenge — exemplified by destroying ancient structures — is Hindutva's guiding principle. In March 2023, when a mob shouting 'Jai Shri Ram' burned down a century-old madressah and library containing ancient manuscripts, it was tit-for-tat for the sacking of Nalanda University by the 12th-century Muslim invader, Bakhtiyar Khilji. To avoid adverse consequences during the Ram Mandir consecration, RSS has recommended that Muslims chant "Shri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram" in mosques, dargahs and madressahs.

The second message is to BJP's political opposition, principally Congress. Change your discourse from secular to religious and play on our turf. Else, be seen as anti-Hindu and lose out

in the April 2024 elections, when Modi will seek his third term. Ram Mandir's inauguration has left Congress dazed. Just days earlier, its top leaders had scorned this 'political event' and refused to attend. But those below could not take the pressure and broke rank. They visited Ayodhya, took a holy dip in the river, and vowed they too want "Ram Rajya" — albeit a better one than BJP's.

Mixing religion with politics — whether in the Hindu or Muslim way — won't surprise those who know Pakistan's history. Soon after the All India Muslim League suffered a crushing defeat in the 1937 elections, its leadership successfully weaponised religion and wove it into politics. It was reinjected with a double dose by Gen Ziaul Haq in the 1980s.

Today, in every Pakistani political party's arsenal, religion is the weapon of choice for demolishing opponents. When in power, PTI used it repeatedly against PML-N and PPP. In retaliation, Maryam Nawaz's media team has recently returned the favour — with markup — in attacking Imran Khan.

Still, to me, an infrequent visitor to India, secularism's rapid retreat comes as a surprise. Twenty years ago, while visiting the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute for Advanced Research in Bangalore, I was intrigued by Nehru's words inscribed on the foundation stone: "I too have worshipped at the shrine of science." But I don't see 'worship' and 'shrine' tallying well with modern science or the scientific temper associated with Nehru.

My hosts rushed to explain. Shrine of science, they said, was actually a metaphorical allusion to labs and research centres. Nehru, they proudly asserted, was an atheist and never went to temples. Later, I found he actually did visit temples as well as mosques. Further, as in his prison diary *The Discovery of India*, his view of religion is fairly nuanced.

Mani Shankar Aiyar recently argued that Nehru would have fought tooth and nail against making Hinduism India's official religion. In December 1947, his cabinet decided to rebuild — at state expense — the Somnath temple plundered in the 11th century by Mahmud Ghazni. When Nehru found out, he was furious and had the minutes secretly altered. But so long as the state was not involved, he said, any private initiative was fine. In 1951, when president Rajendra Prasad sought to officially visit the restored temple, Nehru refused permission.

India's other founder, Mahatma Gandhi, would also have roundly rejected making the grand new Ayodhya temple. Ramachandra Guha, his biographer, notes that whereas Gandhi called himself a devout Hindu, yet in the many years he lived in Ahmedabad, he did not visit any of the city's temples. Why, said Gandhi, does God need a building or idol to be worshipped?

Gandhi's eclecticism is evident from his prayer meeting of Nov 21, 1947: "As per the information I have received, about 137 mosques of Delhi have been virtually destroyed in the recent riots. Some of them have been turned into temples. In my opinion, this goes against every tenet of religion ... The magnitude of this act cannot be mitigated by saying that Muslims in Pakistan have also despoiled Hindu temples or turned them into mosques."

India's descent into a Hindu rashtra generates a kind of smug satisfaction in Pakistan, a vindication of the two-nation theory that Hindus and Muslims cannot ever live together. But then, how shall the Muslims of India, and the few Hindus remaining in Pakistan, fare in times to come? Whether India can ever revert to its earlier, more accommodative and secular self, is an open question. For Pakistan, whose flirtation with liberal values ended in the 1970s, it appears even more difficult.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1807273/ram-mandir-an-ill-portent>

Mongolia's new snow and ice festival sets **Guinness World Record**

By: Karla Cripps

(CNN) — Famed for its beautiful open spaces, lush green valleys and traditional nomadic culture, Mongolia has long been considered a destination best visited in the summer months. However a new event has been launched to lure international travelers in search of an authentic Mongolian winter experience. The inaugural Mazaalai International Snow and Ice Festival, which kicked off on January 14, takes place till January 28 at Sky Resort, a golf and ski resort on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. The free event “marks a major milestone in the development of Mongolia’s winter tourism sector,” Mongolia Culture Minister Nomin Chinbat said in a statement. “Over the next two weeks, visitors will be captivated by our winter landscapes and the beauty of the sculptures on display, and I hope many more from around the world will be inspired to visit our country during the winter season.”



Though it's only been open for a few days, the event reportedly already set a Guinness World Record – most people to descend an ice slide in one hour. As part of the opening festivities, 408 attendees helped secure the win by whooshing down the festival's 16.4-meter-long ice slide, one after the other. Photos of the event show a Guinness official on hand to witness the successful attempt.

Other attractions at the festival include a five-meter-high snow and ice sculpture of the country's protected Gobi bear (Mazaalai in Mongolian) and her cubs, aimed at raising awareness of the critically endangered animal. A further 52 ice Mazaalai statues were erected at the festival to represent the 52 Gobi bears that remain in the wild. There's also a 56.4-meter-long snow and ice sculpture with a large ice skating rink.

On January 17, the festival hosted the Mazaalai International Ice Competition, featuring 24 artists from six countries including China, Thailand, France, Russia, the US and Mongolia.

Mongolia: A destination for all seasons?

There's a reason visiting Mongolia in winter might not appeal to everyone – capital Ulaanbaatar is widely considered one of the world's coldest cities, with temperatures in January averaging anywhere from minus 15 to minus 30 degrees Celsius (5 to -22F). Temperatures can get much colder in the country's northern region. Meanwhile, flights to some remote areas of the country don't operate in the winter months.

But visiting this time of year has its advantages, including cheaper hotel/tour rates and those dramatic snow-covered landscapes. The country hosts a variety of unique winter

events, including the annual Khuvsgul Lake Ice Festival, which takes place on Mongolia's largest lake in early March.

Culture Minister Chinbat said the new Mazaalai International Snow and Ice Festival is part of the government's goal to welcome one million international tourists per year to Mongolia. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, Mongolia received 637,000 international travelers according to the World Bank.

The country has already taken several measures as part of its goal to hit that seven-figure digit, including expanding its list of countries from which citizens can visit Mongolia without a visa, a policy that will be in place through the end of 2025.

Meanwhile, talks to launch direct flights between Mongolia and the United States this year are reportedly underway.

<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/mongolias-snow-and-ice-festival-world-record/index.html>

Japan's 'Moon Sniper' finally lands on lunar surface after series of setbacks

Japan's space agency said on Saturday that it was reviewing the communication with its probe following its successful moon landing in an effort to revive the space programme that had recently faced setbacks and become the fifth nation in history to accomplish a moonshot. The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (Slim) touched down on the moon's surface at approximately 12:20am (1520 GMT Friday), according to the Japan



Aerospace Exploration Agency (Jaxa), but it was still verifying connectivity with the probe, according to Reuters. Dubbed the "moon sniper," Slim aimed to land at a distance of only 100 metres (328 feet) instead of the usual several kilometres. According to Jaxa, this landing technology will be an effective instrument in the exploration of hilly moon poles in the future, which are thought to be possible sources of oxygen, fuel, and water—elements required for life. Jaxa could take up to a month to confirm if Slim had met the high-precision targets. Japan is attempting to fight China by collaborating with its ally, the United States, to take a more active role in space. A number of private space firms are based in Japan, and in the coming years, Jaxa hopes to launch an astronaut to the moon as part of Nasa's Artemis programme. Nevertheless, the Japanese space agency has recently seen a number of setbacks in the construction of rockets, such as the March launch failure of its new flagship rocket, the H3, which was intended to equal SpaceX's and other private rocket providers' cost-competitiveness.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/amp/1149414-japans-moon-sniper-finally-lands-on-lunar-surface-after-series-of-setbacks>

Biden administration tells Congress it intends to sell Turkey F-16s after Erdogan approved Sweden's NATO membership

By: Jennifer Hansler



The Biden administration told Congress it intends to sell F-16 fighter jets to Turkey after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed off on Sweden's accession to NATO on Thursday – a development that caps off more than a year of quiet, complicated negotiations. The State Department sent the formal notification about the proposed \$23 billion sale to Congress on Friday after Turkey's instruments of ratification were formally deposited at the department. The State Department also sent Congress a formal notification of its intent to sell \$8.6 billion worth of F-35s to Greece. Congress is expected to approve both sales. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was extensively engaged for months with Turkish officials and US lawmakers to reach the deal to stop Erdogan's obstruction of Sweden's NATO bid that would see Turkey receive the fighter jets – one of its top requests of the US. When Sweden, along with Finland, first applied to join the defensive alliance in May 2022, Turkey sought to pull the US directly into the negotiations – a move the US rebuffed, according to a US official. However, the administration was cognizant the US had a key point of leverage – the F-16s – if that became necessary. Once Turkey approved Finland's accession in March 2023, Blinken worked intensely behind the scenes to try to get Sweden's approval done by last summer's NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. During a trip to Turkey in February 2023, Blinken met with Erdogan, who stressed the need for the US to give Turkey the F-16s before he would approve Sweden's membership into the alliance. Blinken, in turn, told the Turkish president multiple times that members of Congress would not approve the sale of jets until Turkey allowed Sweden to join NATO. It was at this point, the US official said, that the administration decided to leverage the jets more directly. The process moved forward more quickly with the appointment of Hakan Fidan as Turkey's foreign minister. Fidan was seen as having a closer relationship to Erdogan than his predecessor. Blinken and Fidan met on the margins of a conference in London in late June 2023 to hash out details of a potential deal.

Following that meeting, Blinken discussed the matter with then-Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Robert Menendez – who had long opposed the sale of the jets to Turkey – and other members of Congress. The New Jersey senator and others made clear that they wanted to ensure Greece's support. Blinken engaged extensively with Greek Prime Minister

Kyriakos Mitsotakis to discuss what Greece would need to feel comfortable with neighboring Turkey receiving the jets. Turkey and Greece have an incredibly tense relationship. After those initial months of negotiations, the first hurdle was cleared at Vilnius, when Erdogan publicly committed to move forward on Sweden's accession. The intensive effort shifted to ensuring that the Turkish parliament would vote in favor of accession. As the US worked to solidify the deal, Blinken and Fidan spoke weekly over the autumn and winter, the US official said. The top US diplomat spoke with Greek Prime Minister half a dozen times. He spoke extensively with Menendez and his successor, Sen. Ben Cardin, and the leadership of the House Foreign Affairs Committee to try to assuage their concerns about the F-16 sale.

The Turkish Parliament finally voted in favor of Sweden's NATO accession Tuesday, and Erdogan signed off on the instruments of ratification Thursday. The documents were then sent from Turkey to the US to be physically deposited in a vault at the State Department, which serves as the treaty depository for NATO, on Friday. This was the final step needed before the agency sent the formal notifications about the F-16 sales to Congress. The US official said this was to assure Congress there was no way for Turkey to back out of the deal. Hungary still must approve Sweden's NATO bid for the nation to finally become a member.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/26/politics/turkey-f-16s-sweden-nato-biden/index.html>

India, France agree on joint defence production

India and France have agreed to work together on the joint production of defence equipment including helicopters and submarines for the Indian armed forces and production for friendly countries, New Delhi said. The deal was reached during a visit by French President Emmanuel Macron, who met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended a state banquet hosted by President Draupadi Murmu, the government said in a statement late on Friday. Macron and Modi agreed to expand bilateral ties in defence production, nuclear energy, space research and the use of artificial intelligence for public services like climate change, health and agriculture, the statement said. It did not specify the value of any deals. After Russia, France is the largest arms supplier to India, which has relied on its fighter jets for four decades. The leaders welcomed the setting up of maintenance, repair and overhaul services by France's Safran for leading-edge aviation propulsion (LEAP) engines in India and adding such services for Rafale engines, and a helicopter partnership. The bilateral summit during Macron's 40-hour visit, was the fifth Macron-Modi meeting since May. India's Tata Group and France's Airbus have signed an agreement to manufacture civilian helicopters together, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said. French jet engine maker CFM International also announced an agreement with India's Akasa Air to buy more than 300 of its LEAP-1B engines to power 150 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft. Akasa Air previously ordered 76 aircraft powered by the engine, of which 22 are in use. India and France agreed to intensify cooperation in the southwest Indian Ocean, building on joint surveillance missions carried out from the French island territory of La Reunion in 2020 and 2022, the government statement said. Macron also said France would create conditions to attract up to 30,000 Indian students a year for higher education.



<https://www.dawn.com/news/1809072/india-france-agree-on-joint-defence-production>

ICJ Israel decision: A new world order in the making



By: Haidar Eid

Now that we have heard the interim judgement the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered in South Africa's genocide case against Israel, we can confidently say a new world order is in the making. The World Court confirmed today that South Africa's charge under the Genocide Convention that "Israel has engaged in, is engaging in and risks further engaging in genocidal acts against the Palestinian people in Gaza" is "plausible". It has further ruled that Israel must "take all measures" to avoid acts of genocide in Gaza.



The court has stopped short of calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which has already been demanded by an absolute majority of world nations. Still, most of the "provisional measures" called for by the Republic of South Africa have been endorsed by the court. It is difficult to see how Israel can implement these measures and fulfil its obligations under the Genocide Convention, without agreeing to a ceasefire.

There is no indication, of course, that Israel has any intention of heeding the Court's provisions. In fact, since the ICJ heard South Africa's case two weeks ago, Israel has doubled down on its genocidal acts in Gaza. In the past 24 hours alone, it carried out 21 mass killings, murdering 200 and injuring 370 civilians. So Israel's message to the Court, and the world at large, is clear: It does not care for the opinion, demands or "measures" of any international institution – legal or political. It will do as it pleases. All in all, more than 1 percent of the population of Gaza has been killed and another 2.2 percent has been injured in the past three months. Most of the enclave has been destroyed, and almost all of its more than two million residents have been displaced. The relentless siege, coupled with the deliberate targeting of hospitals, led to the collapse of the healthcare system. Medical services are all but non-existent and people are dying of famine and disease, including hepatitis A and Leishmania. Even the smallest of injuries can prove to be a death sentence, as it is extremely difficult to maintain hygiene and prevent infections. Hundreds of women had miscarriages and many others died in childbirth due to lack of medical care. In this context, it is no surprise that the World Court has found it "plausible" that Israel may be committing a genocide in Gaza. But, given its lack of interest in complying with international law – and the unconditional support it enjoys from the West – there is little reason to expect it to alter its conduct due to the court's damning interim ruling. So why did South Africa take Israel to the ICJ, and why does today's ruling really matter?

As affirmed by South Africa, "Israel's genocidal acts" must be understood "within the broader context of Israel's 75-year apartheid". Israel has committed many violations of international law since 1948, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Its apartheid regime

and illegal occupation denied the most basic human rights of the Palestinians for nearly a century. It passed a racist “nation-state law” that states that “the right to exercise national self-determination” in Israel is “unique to the Jewish people”, establishes Hebrew as Israel’s official language, and establishes “Jewish settlement as a national value” and mandates that the state “will labor to encourage and promote its establishment and development.” After ethnically cleansing most of historical Palestine of its indigenous population through massacres and theft in 1948, it went on to imprison the population of Gaza within the Strip, committing what brave Israeli historian Ilan Pappé defined in his latest book,

The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of Gaza and the Occupied Territories, as “ethnic cleansing by other means”. “[Palestinians in Gaza] are contained inside their own areas, but do not have to be counted in the overall national demographics since they cannot freely move, develop or expand, nor do they have any basic civil and human rights,” explained Pappé. Since the moment of its very inception, Israel worked to eliminate the indigenous population of Palestine through ethnic cleansing, apartheid, ghettoisation and segregation. And now, it is committing the very first livestreamed and globally watched genocide in human history. How could South Africa, a nation that itself experienced the worst of settler-colonialism, ethnic cleansing and racial segregation, a nation that has successfully destroyed a vicious apartheid regime and replaced it with a multi-racial, multicultural, progressive democracy remain silent in the face of Israel’s crimes? It could not. South Africans recognised that taking no action on Israel’s continuing genocide in Gaza would have meant no lesson had been learned from the Sharpeville and Soweto massacres, from everything they endured under settler-colonial rule, from years of apartheid.

They realised that now that Israel’s occupation and oppression reached their genocidal climax, the international community no longer has the luxury of waiting, issuing statements and hoping for the best. Every single minute of inaction brings more loss, more death and more despair to Palestinians. So they took action – they took Israel to the highest court of the world, and accused it of committing the world’s most heinous crime: genocide. Israel may not heed the court’s rulings and provisions, but South Africa’s historic stance will still have consequences. As stated by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa after the ICJ’s interim decision: “Third States are now on notice of the existence of a serious risk of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. They must, therefore, also act independently and immediately to prevent genocide by Israel and to ensure that they are not themselves in violation of the Genocide Convention, including by aiding or assisting in the commission of genocide. This necessarily imposes an obligation on all States to cease funding and facilitating Israel’s military actions, which are plausibly genocidal.”

With this case, South Africa has put not only Israel, but the entirety of the global justice system on trial. This case is a major turning point for humanity, because it marks the first time in history when a Global South country bravely crossed a red line drawn by the colonial West and demanded its favourite settler colony, Israel, be held to account for the crimes it has long been committing against an Indigenous people. Today, thanks to South Africa, the entire colonial West, and its centuries-long history of theft, dispossession, and injustice is on trial at the World Court. Future generations will remember January 26, 2024, as the day on which the world has finally decided to hold a genocide state, and its powerful backers, accountable for repeated, longstanding violations of international law. Yes, a new world order is in the making.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/26/icj-israel-decision-a-new-world-order-in-the-making>



Imbalance from birth

By: Riaz Riazuddin

WHY are there significantly more men than women in our population? While the gender-wise population has not yet been released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics for the latest digital census of 2023, we can use the sex ratio (number of males per 100 females) of 105 men per 100 women reported in the 2017 census to estimate the population of men and women in 2023. Pakistan's population in 2023 is 241.5 million, of which 123.7m are estimated to be males and 117.8m females, implying that there are 5.9m more men than women. This seems perplexing because women's life expectancy



is higher than men's in Pakistan and elsewhere. Yet, men also outnumber women in the total global population. According to the UN Demographic Yearbook 2020, there are 101.7 men per 100 women in the global population. There were 65m more men than women in the 2020 world population figure of 7.8 billion. Even a slightly unequal global sex ratio results in a large absolute number. Demographic researchers cite three reasons why the sex ratio in populations varies and is seldom equal. The first is the difference between male and female life expectancy and mortality rates. Second is the difference in the sex ratio at birth, ie, the ratio between the number of newborn males and females.

The third reason is the migration of male labour. These are the reasons why there are more males than females in some countries while the reverse is true for others. All the three reasons depend, in turn, on a complex mix of biological, cultural, anthropological, public health, technological, wars, pandemics, and economic forces. Life expectancy, and especially, the difference between female and male life expectancy of a country is an important determinant of the sex ratio. For example, in Russia, male life expectancy was only 64.2 years compared to 74.8 years for women in 2021 — a gap of 10.6 years. Like Russia, male life expectancy in several East European countries is much lower, with higher gaps compared to other developed countries in the West. The reason for this: high consumption of vodka and other forms of alcohol. According to research in The Lancet, death rates for men in Russia are higher than for women due to high vodka consumption by the former.

There were 65m more men than women in the 2020 world population figure of 7.8bn.

The public policy of restricting alcohol consumption by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 resulted in a 25 per cent drop in drinking and death rates for men, increasing their life expectancy in later years, but the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was followed by a surge in alcohol consumption and reduction in male life expectancy. This indicates that public policies,

including economic policies, if formulated and implemented appropriately, have the power to change habits and culture. Russia had a sex ratio of 86 men for 100 women in its population in 2021, one of the lowest in the world. This also shows that the sex ratio does not correlate well with the extent of human and other development in a country.

Even more surprising and shocking are the reasons for high sex ratios (more men than women) in some other countries, as in China and India whose combined population accounts for over a third of the world population. The main reasons are high sex ratios at birth. The introduction of the one-child policy in China in 1979 was followed by a rise in the sex ratio at birth from 107 to as high as 117.8 in 2004. While this policy was credited with containing 400m births it resulted in many negative consequences, including the abandonment of infant girls, some of whom died, creating a generation of 'missing women'. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen pointed out in 1990: "The numbers of 'missing women' in relation to the numbers that could be expected if men and women received similar care in health, medicine, and nutrition, are remarkably large. A great many more than 100m women are simply not there because women are neglected compared with men."

In India, the sex ratio at birth rose from 105.5 in 1970 to 109.6 in 2010. According to the WHO, the 'expected' sex ratio at birth should be close to 105 boys per 100 girls in the absence of gender discrimination. Because of this biological reason, in all countries there are more male than female births, including in Russia and Eastern Europe. Higher ratios may indicate the presence of gender discrimination.

Sex ratios at birth higher than 107 indicates the presence of prenatal or postnatal sex selection. The former can occur on ascertaining the gender of the unborn child and aborting the female foetus. The latter occurs due to the premature death of girls because of maltreatment, neglect, or unequal treatment. This can happen in countries that have a strong culture of preferring sons over daughters.

Researchers in India and South Korea have noticed some perplexing facts in correlating sex ratio with income and education. For example, in north India, the higher castes (who tend to be richer) had more skewed sex ratios than the lower castes. Further research in India and South Korea suggested that richer families show greater discrimination: higher-income households are more aware and have access to sex identification technology, which they make use of for prenatal gender determination. Poor households cannot afford access to this medical technology. Higher-income households usually have higher education. This is one of the reasons that the sex ratio does not correlate well with human development.

Pakistan's sex ratio at birth, according to UN demographic statistics, was at 105.6, close to the level explained by biological reasons. The sex ratio at birth rose from 106.1 in 1970 to 108.1 in 2001, indicating the presence of the same kind of gender discrimination as in India, though of lesser intensity.

Sex ratio at birth later declined to 105.5 in 2021, lower than that of India at 107.7. The history of sex ratio at birth sadly shows that the seeds of gender discrimination may be sown even before the birth of girls in countries and regions with an entrenched culture of son preference.

Although these regions mainly include East and South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, the preference for a son and gender discrimination can, unfortunately, be seen globally.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1809043/imbalance-from-birth>