

Conflict Weekly

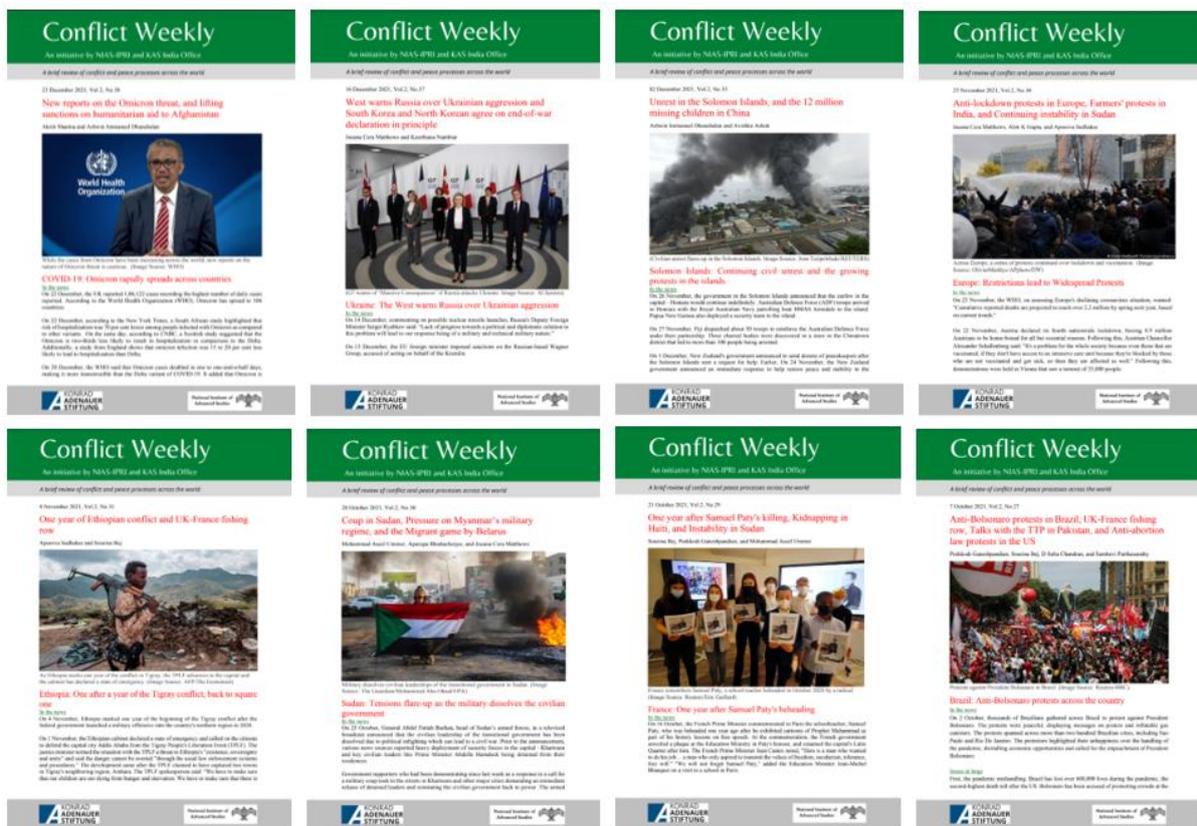
An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

26 December 2021, Vol.2, No.39

From unrest in the Solomon Islands to anti-abortion law protests in the US

15 major issues of conflict and peace during 2021



An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS-India Office

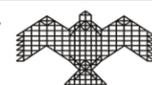
02 December 2021

Solomon Islands: Continuing civil unrest and the growing protests in the islands

Ashwin Immanuel Dhanabalan

In the news

On 26 November, the government in the Solomon Islands announced that the curfew in the capital - Honiara would continue indefinitely. Australian Defence Force (ADF) troops arrived



in Honiara with the Royal Australian Navy patrolling boat HMAS Armidale to the island. Papua New Guinea also deployed a security team to the island.

On 27 November, Fiji dispatched about 50 troops to reinforce the Australian Defence Force under their partnership. Three charred bodies were discovered in a store in the Chinatown district that led to more than 100 people being arrested.

On 1 December, New Zealand's government announced to send dozens of peacekeepers after the Solomon Islands sent a request for help. Earlier, On 24 November, the New Zealand government announced an immediate response to help restore peace and stability in the Solomon Islands. The announcement came after the government in the Solomon Islands requested assistance from New Zealand to maintain security in the capital.

Issues at large

First, the internal divide within the Solomon Islands. In the 1990s, Malaitans were being intimidated, and a campaign of violence was perpetrated against them by the Guales or the Guadalcanal islanders. This led to Australia and New Zealand intervening during 2003-2017. These ethnic, geographical divides have been further accelerated by a perceived unequal distribution of resources that renewed discontentment between the islands. Malaita is one of the least developed provinces due to the lack of economic support. The discontent grew after the central government decided to shift the country's allegiance in 2019 from Taipei to Beijing.

Second, the external shift in allegiance. Taiwan accuses China of bribing politicians in the islands to vote in favour of China. China has been one of the largest investors in the islands and had even offered to lease Tulagi island. But, the attorney general of the Solomon Islands ruled the proceedings illegal. China signed five MoU's including an agreement to the Belt and Road initiative after the 36-year relationship with Taiwan. The shift away from Taiwan left the people angry, especially those on the Malaita island. Malaita's premier continued to maintain relations with Taiwan and receive support, while the central government reiterated its support to China. Manasseh Sogavare's election in 2019 opened up Chinese investments to the country, while till then, the people predominantly in Malaita had benefited from the Taiwanese projects.

Third, Australia's intervention. Australia and the Solomon Islands have signed a security treaty in 2017 and had received a request for assistance under it. This treaty allows Australian police, civilian personal, and defence to intervene in the Solomon Islands in an emergency. This is not the first time Australia intervened in the Solomon Islands; the last was in 2003-2017, which was authorized by the Pacific Island Forum declaration.

In perspective

First, the issues between the two islands need to be resolved systematically, implementing policies to bring equal resource-sharing support and mediation between the ethnic communities.

Second, Beijing and Taipei will continue to be contentious issues until the political parties on the island stop using it as an opportunity to win votes. This historical discontentment can only

be partially resolved with structural changes in the administration of both islands.

Third, the Prime Minister blames foreign influences to be the cause of unrest and protests but, he reiterated his support for Beijing over Taiwan. This would likely further complicate the situation as Taiwan had integrated itself with a visible development program with the people of Malaita. Fourth, Australia's swift intervention has brought a sense of temporary order to the islands, but they hope that this would be a short intervention as the last time they spent more than a decade.

02 December 2021

China: 12 million missing children

Avishka Ashok

In the news

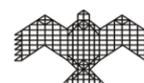
On 24 November, the Strait Times reported that the Chinese census failed to account for at least 11.6 million children born between 2000 and 2010. The gap in the number of births came to the forefront after the government released its latest statistical yearbook, which accounted for 172.5 million births in that decade. However, the 2010 census accounted for only 160.9 million births. The Politburo had earlier said: "Allowing every couple to have three children and implementing related support policies will help improve the population's structure."

Issues at large

First, the case of 12 million missing children. The sudden increase in the birth rate in the 2010 census comes to light after parents enrolled their children in schools for primary education. Due to the one-child policy, that was in place from 1979 and lasted until 2015, most parents in the country refrained from documenting their children in the national registry for fear of persecution and punishment. Often, the second child would be left in rural villages with the grandparents for lack of facilities from the government.

Second, shifts in China's demographic policies. 12 million births went unnoticed in 2010 when Politburo continued to believe that the growth rate must be controlled. In 2016, the government realized the steady drop in population growth and raised the limit to two children per couple. In 2021, the government started providing many subsidies and assistance such as cash benefits, longer maternity and paternity leaves, child-rearing leaves from work and providing subsidies for the second and third child. Yet, these provisions are not attractive enough for the people at the moment.

Third, the impact of the one-child policy. The government implemented the policy as it feared that a population explosion would result in slower economic development and put a strain on the existing resources. However, the policy led to massive gender imbalance in Chinese society as most families with a patriarchal leaning opted to abort or abandon the female child. Another impact that will be apparent in the future is the shortage in the labour force.



In perspective

First, China's failure to account for the 12 million children in the 2010 census is a big blow to the detail-oriented image of the Communist Party of China. The figure is not a minor and negligible number that can be pushed aside as human error. It will also raise questions on China's statistical capabilities.

Second, the additional 12 million children prove that the administration may only have a limited amount of control over policies such as childbirth. Despite the numerous subsidies and benefits, the country may face problems as it tries to raise its population growth in the 21st century.

25 November 2021

Farmers' protests in India: Electoral calculations prevail over farmers' concerns

Alok K Gupta

In the news

On 19 November, on the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the three farm laws would be repealed. The decision came after one year of massive protests by different farmers' organizations (especially from Punjab and Haryana) in and around Delhi, under the umbrella of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), since 26 November 2020, calling for the repeal of those laws. Modi claimed that though the farm laws were meant to strengthen the small farmers, all efforts of the government to convince them about the benefits had failed.

On the same day, the SKM welcomed the repeal but indicated that it would raise the other pending demands like legalization of Minimum Support Price (MSP). Meanwhile, those who supported laws called it an 'unfortunate decision' influenced by political considerations.

Issues at large

First, repeal as a tactical retreat. The announcement was a complete surprise as the government did not take any initiative over the recent past months. Eleven rounds of negotiations were held between the 29 representatives of farmer's unions and government ministers, in the initial stages of the protests; however, a stalemate continued after the last round in January 2021. Therefore, the government's announcement of annulment after nearly ten months, smacks of political compulsions and a strategic move rather than concerns for farmers' interests.

Second, confusing signals from and within the government. Especially when all the satraps of government were steadfastly insisting that the laws were good for farmers and would never be rolled back. How could government intentions melt from a tough stand? It means the government also knew that the laws were tuned more to protect interest of agri-businesses rather than farmers. Hence, they stand to lose before the farmers.

Third, protests and the political cost. The roll-back has been announced amidst impending elections in five States over next year. Elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh are already heating up which may have forced the government to take a U-turn. Punjab and UP are states with huge base of farmers, with the former being the core driving force of the agitation. Farmers from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, also participated in the protests, and those from other states lent their support. Guru Nanak Jayanti was chosen to underline concessions to Sikh communities. Hence, roll-back is motivated by escalating political costs.

Fourth, the government's efforts to decimate the protest. The government roped in police to remove the protestors unsuccessfully from Delhi-UP borders. Farmers, too, went on the back foot when internal dissensions erupted owing to the storming of Red Fort on 26 January 26. All divisive political efforts were made to liquidate the protests. However, the farmers galvanized themselves with fresh energy to sustain the protest further. Roll-back of laws thus is more on account of electoral imperatives than concerns for farmers.

Fifth, the suspension of the laws. The Supreme Court had placed a stay on the implementation of the three laws on 12 January, which were promulgated as an ordinance on 5 June 2020. Hence these were in force for only 221 days. The government then imposed a stock limit under the Essential Commodities Act 1955. Hence, the announcement is immaterial as the laws were under suspension; yet a U-turn will help the government towards smooth conduct of the winter session of Parliament; and ensure mitigation of calculated electoral loss in the immediate future.

In perspective

Repeals seem to be a huge jolt to the government and cudgels into the hands of the opposition. First, agricultural marketing reforms have been pending for a long to facilitate farmers their due. The central government legislated on a state subject. Erstwhile attempts at reforming Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Acts of the state had failed, which prompted the Centre to enact. Once again, the laws have been rolled back. Second, this is the second roll-back of this government, the first being the Land Acquisition Reforms of 2015. Both were related to farmers. It may motivate CAA and Asset monetization. Third, these laws were the third tranche under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan to support ailing economy during COVID 19, according to the government. Hence, a big jolt to Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan too. Congress-I, Trinamool, AAP, and others who lent their support were being castigated as against national interest will now use their narratives of the ruling party being anti-farmer to capitalize on popular sentiments.

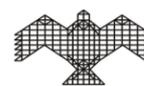
25 November 2021

Anti-lock down protests in Europe

Joeana Cera Mathews

In the news

On 23 November, the WHO, on assessing Europe's declining coronavirus situation, warned: "Cumulative reported deaths are projected to reach over 2.2 million by spring next year, based on current trends."



On 22 November, Austria declared its fourth nationwide lockdown, forcing 8.9 million Austrians to be home-bound for all but essential reasons. Following this, Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said: "It's a problem for the whole society because even those that are vaccinated, if they don't have access to an intensive care unit because they're blocked by those who are not vaccinated and got sick, so then they are affected as well." Following this, demonstrations were held in Vienna that saw a turnout of 35,000 people.

On 22 November, the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte condemned the rioters in Rotterdam who pelted stones and set fire to vehicles, saying: "There is a lot of unrest in society because we have been dealing with misery of corona for so long. But I will never accept idiots using pure violence just because they are unhappy."

On 21 November, Belgium's Home Affairs Minister Annelies Verlinden responded to the violent protests in Brussels, saying: "A mature democracy respects the opinion of a minority but does not accept that a few abuse their protest vote by force. Vaccinated or not: it is important that we continue to follow the measures."

Issues at large

First, a regional mapping of protests within Europe. The pandemic's fourth wave has led to the imposition of tighter restrictions across Europe. These have been followed by large-scale protests. In terms of the surge in infections and the protests, the hardest-hit countries include Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. Countries such as France, Italy, Romania, and others have seen an increase in cases. However, they are yet to witness widespread violent protests.

Second, the multiple 'waves.' Similar to the pandemic waves, the protests seem to be occurring in waves. The initial waves of unrest due to the pandemic were seen in Spain, and Italy followed by the UK. The latest wave of opposition is primarily being witnessed in Western Europe where quiet periods are ensued by chaos.

Third, the multiple actors. The protesters are a mixed bag with members from far-right groups, anti-vaccine and anti-mask parties, and apolitical people refusing vaccinations. The Netherlands also saw antisemitism supporters comparing the government to a "Nazi regime", while the Austrian government was called a "coronavirus dictatorship." The diverse crowd is united by their "common mistrust in the system and politics, especially in the area of coronavirus." Further, there is a demographic divide in participation as the vulnerable groups of society, such as senior citizens and children, largely refrain from protesting.

Fourth, the multiple reasons. The freedom of choice is another reason for the opposition. Countering the argument of 'my body, my choice' is complicated. On 19 November, Austria declared vaccinations to be a legal requirement from February 2022. Propagated primarily by anti-vaccine groups, mandatory vaccinations are termed as a "restriction of human rights." The restrictions are set to severely impact the economy with small businesses bound to run into financial difficulties as their livelihoods, based on shoestring budgets, will leave them unable to repay loans. Many others' grounds for protesting relate to their frustration on being restricted from free movement. A general dissatisfaction regarding the government's ineffective measures has sabotaged the citizens' trust. In line with this sentiment, protesters in

Belgium condemned the officials of acting in desperation as declining immunity meant they "no longer knew what to do."

In perspective

First, the immunity test. After more than a year of vaccination efforts, Europe's move to attain herd immunity has failed. The forthcoming winter only provides an enabling ground for the already rampant virus to spread. It seems the worst is yet to come.

Second, coercion is detrimental in the long term. According to scientists, mandatory vaccinations could be a 'double-edged sword' as it could trigger hostility to future vaccination campaigns. Vaccine skeptics may end up completely rejecting it. Dabbling on consent will undermine the people's trust in their governments.

04 November 2021

Ethiopia: One after a year of the Tigray conflict, back to square one

Apoorva Sudhakar

In the news

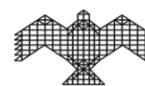
On 4 November, Ethiopia marked one year of the beginning of the Tigray conflict after the federal government launched a military offensive into the country's northern region in 2020.

On 1 November, the Ethiopian cabinet declared a state of emergency and called on the citizens to defend the capital city Addis Ababa from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The justice minister termed the situation with the TPLF a threat to Ethiopia's "existence, sovereignty and unity" and said the danger cannot be averted "through the usual law enforcement systems and procedures." The development came after the TPLF claimed to have captured two towns in Tigray's neighboring region, Amhara. The TPLF spokesperson said: "We have to make sure that our children are not dying from hunger and starvation. We have to make sure that there is access to food, so we'll do what it takes to make sure that the siege is broken. If marching to Addis is what it takes to break the siege, we will."

On 2 November, the head of Addis Ababa's Peace and Security Administration Bureau directed residents to register their firearms within two days. The chief also said that the youth would be recruited and organized to coordinate with the security force.

Issues at large

First, a brief recap of the conflict. The ongoing conflict flared up on 4 November 2020, when the federal government ordered a military offensive into Tigray, alleging that the TPLF had attacked some federal military bases. The TPLF justified its attacks claiming that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had plans to send soldiers into the region as it defied federal orders not to conduct elections; despite the orders, the Tigray region held elections in September 2020. On 28 November, PM Abiy declared an end to the offensive and announced the capture of Tigray's capital, Mekelle. However, after a brief retreat, Tigrayan forces returned to fight, and in June 2021, Tigrayan forces recaptured Mekelle; since October 2021, Ethiopia has been carrying out a series of airstrikes on Tigray.



Second, the unraveling of ethnic fault lines. Following the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, different ethnic groups have exploited the situation leading to massacres of rival communities in other regions like Afar, Amhara, and Oromia. Some of the incidents include the Mai Kadra massacre and repeated clashes between the Oromos and Amharas. Ethnic violence is also cropping up across other regions in Ethiopia, like in the country's west, where the Gumuz has targeted both Amharas and Oromos.

Third, the role of regional actors. The tensions between Eritrea and the TPLF can be traced back to the 1990s when the TPLF led the ruling coalition in Ethiopia. Following the military offensive in November 2020, the TPLF accused Eritrea, Ethiopia's neighboring country, which borders Tigray, of siding with the Ethiopian troops. After dismissing these claims several times, PM Abiy confirmed the presence of Eritrean troops in March 2021. Despite these developments, regional organizations like the African Union have not come down on Ethiopia or Eritrea. In August, professionals including former chief justices, authors, academicians from across Africa wrote an open letter criticizing the AU for the "lack of effective engagement" in the conflict.

Fourth, mounting international pressure. The United Nations, United States, and European Union have repeatedly called for an end to hostilities, reiterating that there is no military solution to the conflict. The US had also placed sanctions on the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defence Forces for the alleged role in abuses against Tigrayans. Further, rights organizations like Amnesty International have released several reports on the rights abuses in the region and have called for international action. However, PM Abiy has brushed aside such developments and termed them conspiracies of the West.

Fifth, the worsening humanitarian conditions. The actual number of casualties over the last one year remains unknown; meanwhile thousands have fled to Sudan. Media outlets like The New York Times have reported on mass rapes at the hands of security forces in Tigray; Eritrean troops have also been accused of systematic rape in the region. In another development, the UN has issued several warnings of famine in Tigray, the risk of malnourishment among pregnant women, and acute malnutrition in children under five years. In short, the humanitarian conditions seem to deteriorate over the days.

In perspective

One year since the beginning of the conflict, the situation seems to be spiralling down for Ethiopia. Despite having declared a victory within three weeks of the conflict, with the airstrikes in October, Ethiopia and Tigray are back to square one. Though PM Abiy won the long-delayed elections held in July; however, the situation in Tigray seems to be going out of his control. Once the West's hero, Abiy Ahmed seems to have fallen out with the international community. Meanwhile, the TPLF finds it difficult to sustain its fight without support; reports suggest that the TPLF and the Oromo fighters had joined forces during the conflict. The situation is not suitable for either side.

On the humanitarian front, the international community is rightfully concerned; however, calling for an end to hostilities and imposing sanctions will not convince the two sides to give up their fight.

04 November 2021

UK-France Fishing row

Sourina Bej

In the news

On 3 November, France released the British trawlers that were detained amid the ongoing conflict over fishing rights. The Scottish-registered scallop dredger *Cornelis Gert Jan* left the northern French port of Le Havre, and the trawler's owner said, "the boat was detained last week, saying it did not have a license." Since October, the conflict over boat licenses to fish across the English Channel escalated, propelling France to threaten to block the UK goods.

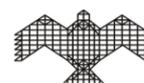
On 1 November, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that talks over equitable fishing rights would continue as he stepped back from the threat to impose complete customs checks on the UK goods and ban the UK boats from entering some French ports. Even though the French transport minister called their position in the talks "a constructive one," the UK government spokesperson said the Brexit minister would "reaffirm our existing position" when they meet France on 4 November.

Additionally, on 3 November, tensions also eased when a French court ruled that a British scallop dredger seized by French authorities could leave immediately with no requirement to pay the EUR 150,000 deposit.

Issues at large

First, the geo-economic tussle over the Channel. France and the UK have been at loggerheads over fishing permits in the English Channel Islands for several months. The French fishers have protested against the UK system, requiring the EU fishermen to prove prior fishing activities to gain permits. Britain had countered these protests on the ground that the terms agreed in Brexit trade talks support limited access to the Channel. In this, the Jersey port became a recent flashpoint when the post-BREXIT regulations were implemented. France had responded, saying no to any new conditions affecting all boats that had been agreed during the Brexit transition talks. Currently, France threatened a series of measures against the UK unless more licenses were granted by 2 November. On 6 October, the French fishing fleet owners threatened the Jersey administration with a two-week license deadline.

Second, post-Brexit conflict expansion. With conflict escalating over fishing rights, the UK now confronts tensions surrounding both its land and water borders. While the UK sees the English Channel as its bilateral conflict with France, the latter sees the right to fish as part of the Brexit agreement. Similarly, another fallout of the Brexit transition talks has been over the Northern Ireland protocol. The UK and EU are deadlocked over revising the Northern Irish protocol, the Brexit agreement that kept the region in the EU single market, and the customs union to prevent a land border. The UK's Brexit minister is due to meet the European Commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič for further talks on 5 November, as both sides try to settle the issue before the end of 2021. With both fishing rights and trade rights in its water and land borders respectively in question, the UK will steadily hurdle to holding its end of the agreement.



Third, talks return to ease post-Brexit tensions. After three years of talks with the EU, the UK exited the union in 2020, however, in over a year, the two sides have now returned to the negotiating table to ease the tensions over the implementation of the Brexit agreement. Furthermore, the difference in the letter and spirit of the agreement for both the UK and the EU have challenged constructive talks. The French spokesperson said technical talks would continue on, including with some officials from Guernsey but cautioned against expecting any big breakthrough. While not ruling out progress, they said they did not anticipate resolving the issues at the Paris meeting.

In perspective

First, the current tensions are a rerun of the Jersey island conflict and an expansion of similar sentiments across the coastline. It involves boats from Boulogne and other northern French ports, which are much better placed to create a real crisis in Franco-British relations.

Second, the leader's approach to conflict resolution has been insufficient. There is a danger that the French government, who is seven months from an election and angered by the submarine dispute, could be seen relishing a confrontation with Britain. French fishermen's leaders – even pro-Macron members of the National Assembly – are talking about blockades of Calais and the Channel Tunnel. Similarly, Johnson's populist approach to conflict resolutions risks equal escalation as well.

28 October 2021

Myanmar: Regional and domestic pressure on the military regime

Aparupa Bhattacharjee

In the news

On 26 October, the first of the three-day annual ASEAN summit witnessed a collective expression of concern regarding the internal situation in Myanmar. The ASEAN invitee from Myanmar, a veteran diplomat, did not attend the summit as Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was not invited. Hun Sen, the Cambodian Prime Minister, said: "... ASEAN did not expel Myanmar from [the] ASEAN framework. Myanmar abandoned its right." Indonesian President Joko Widodo said, "ASEAN's decision to invite Myanmar's representatives on a non-political level to the summit was a tough decision, but one that had to be done." The ASEAN chair's statement called the regime to accomplish its commitment to the five-point consensus that the regime agreed to implement previously.

President Joe Biden, who virtually attended the summit joint the others in the expression of concern requesting to end the violence. He promised support to ASEAN in any of their efforts to hold the regime accountable to the five-point consensus.

Internally, on 27 October, 25 were arrested in the Mandalay region following a bomb attack on 25 October. On the same day, a regime appointed administrator was killed in Naypyitaw, which could be a revenge attack for a man's death in detention. The bombardments and shellings have forced more than 8000 people to flee their homes in the Sagaing region, Shan and Chin state.

Issues at large

First, the ASEAN stand against Myanmar. The regional group has been blamed previously for inaction in several issues such as the Rohingya crisis or the South China Sea feud. Hence, this decision is uncommon. It is a result of continuous pressure from members such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. This decision has been vehemently opposed by the Myanmar regime as expressed in several official statements. Apart from foreign intervention, Myanmar's Foreign Minister blamed that the decision "was done without consensus and against the objectives of ASEAN." Myanmar also went ahead with the release of 5600 detainees, which was seen as appeasement; however, most of them were later re-arrested.

Second, ASEAN's decision on the debate over the policy of non-interference. Malaysian Foreign Minister on 21 October has requested ASEAN to do "soul-searching" regarding the need for this policy given the current situation of Myanmar. However, some members may not be on the same page, as evident from Joko Widodo's statement on 26 October, stating, "It is important for us to honour the principle of non-interference."

Third, the implications of internal conflicts within Myanmar. They are aggravating two larger problems within Myanmar. The fight against the regime and protests are happening during a pandemic situation. This has increased the numbers affected with COVID-19 and the situation has worsened due to lack of medical aid and strong governmental policy. The regime has claimed an effective vaccination drive which is impossible given the clashes and as citizens are fleeing the situation. The other problem is the depleting economy leading to fuel price hikes and forcing factories to shut including the Chinese invested ones.

In perspective

First, although celebrated, the ASEAN strict stand against Myanmar will lead to an expectation of action in every conflict affecting the member countries which is marred with several internal conflicts. Also, such action will further push Myanmar, closer to its allies, China and Russia.

Second, the economic condition and fuel price hike will soon push the country into a food crisis. This will be catastrophic given the internal conflict and lack of good governance. But this could also trigger a change, similar to cyclone Nargis in 2008 leading to the road to democracy in 2010.

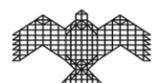
07 October 2021

Anti-abortion law protests in the US

Sambavi Parthasarathy

In the news

On 1 October, the most restrictive abortion law, which had come into effect since 1 September 2021 that prohibits women from terminating fetuses only after six weeks of pregnancy was evaluated again through a virtual hearing before Judge Robert Pitman of the



US District Court. The federal judge questioned the State of Texas on why they had to go to such great lengths with this bill if they believed in constitutionality as they claimed.

However, a nationwide women's march from 600 cities in a total of 50 states was witnessed the very next day implored more than ten thousand people to participate in the clamorous rally for abortion justice.

Issues at large

First, the difficulties in challenging the bill. Activists and lawyers in opposition to this bill have been finding the long-drafted law difficult to challenge, especially because of the way it is written and its immunity to be challenged as 'unconstitutional' since its enforcement is vested upon people and not officials of its State. The problematic law makes a rather narrow exception by only allowing termination of those pregnancies that endanger the mother's life while leaving those resulting from rape or incest to seek abortion elsewhere.

Second, the refusal of the Supreme Court. The stunning silence, followed by the refusal of the very Court that had legalized abortion with its landmark judgement in Roe Vs Wade case, has led to numerous protestors voicing out for their rights. Around a thousand protestors walked in a clamorous procession to the Supreme Court, imploring Americans to engage in a nationwide protest, not only in Washington but also in Chicago, San Francisco, New York and other forty-six states.

Third, the virtual hearing. The Justice Department had sued the State for its restrictive law, also known as SB 8, the hearing of which took place on 1 October between The State of Texas represented by Will Thompson and The Justice department by Brian Netter. Robert Pitman, the federal judge, deliberately weighed both sides of the argument. The Justice Department emphasized the extent of difficulties and forced motherhood the bill promotes. He also criticized the enforcement scheme as an unconstitutional sidestep that impairs the fundamental rights of women and prevents them from challenging it. The State, however, argued that the entire law was constitutional and the department lacked the legal threshold for an injunction and that its lawsuit lacks merit. Pitman, however, has offered no timetable for the decision but assured the inclusion of their arguments.

In perspective

First, the probable imitation of SB 8. The 1973 landmark judgement did reshape American politics into those in favour of it and those against it. The Republicans pushed for the Texas abortion law does not to ban the practice itself but to bring out an imperative control of the State with its cleverly schemed 'constitutionality' factor; the implementation of which encourages other states to go ahead with strict measures. While the significant judgement of 1973 had made abortion every woman's right, the six-week ban refuses to see the fact that the realization of pregnancy itself might take six weeks. Second, the impact on women. This bill largely affects coloured, poor and even minors who might not have enough financial aid to apply for abortion since it's not covered as a part of health insurance making the women's march a significant event in exercising their willingness. Victims of rape or incest who are not exempted from this law might be forced to carry the child to term. It poses an imperative to the very guaranteed fundamental right imploring women around the globe to voice out their support.

22 September 2021

Pride Marches in Europe

Joeana Cera Mathews

In the news

On 18 September, hundreds joined Serbia's annual Pride parade in Belgrade. Celebrating 20 years since their first parade, organization committee member Marko Mihajlovic said: "In the past 20 years the situation has improved LGBT noticeably but not decisively... (The participants of) this year's Pride demanded a law on same-sex unions. We want this to be the last Pride that we don't have this law."

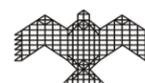
On 19 September, over 7000 people attended Ukraine's annual March in Kyiv for Equality, supporting the rights of the LGBTQ community. Ukraine ombudswoman Lyudmyla Denisova asked radical groups to refrain from violence and wrote on Facebook: "(the Constitution recognizes all people) equal in their rights from birth, regardless of any characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity."

Issues at large

First, the pride rallies. Kyiv's tenth Pride rally saw marchers calling for substantial changes to be made concerning how they were treated. Banners referencing eight demands made to the Ukrainian authorities, including the legalization of LGBT civil partnerships and other laws against LGBT hate crimes, were seen. A similar scene was witnessed at Belgrade; marchers were heavily policed and demanded the adoption of a law on same-sex unions. The slogan of this year's parade was 'Love is the law'. Last year, due to the pandemic, Kyiv cancelled its rally while Belgrade held it online.

Second, the opposition to LGBTQ. Concerns of violence loomed during Ukraine's Pride rally; around 100 far-right activists counter-demonstrated in a nearby park. Despite recent progress, homophobia and opposition to same-sex partnerships are prevalent in Kyiv. LGBTQ rights groups claim police were downplaying homophobic or transphobic motives of attacks as 'hooliganism', which further contribute to the problem. LGBTQ associated groups and events are regularly attacked by conservative groups and members of far-right organizations. In Serbia, consistent with past marches, police avoided clashes between far-right protesters who burnt the rainbow flag and pelted stones and eggs at the marchers. According to polls conducted in Serbia, homosexuality is widely considered to be a 'disorder.'

Third, the government response. The Serbian and Ukrainian governments largely support the rights of the LGBTQ community and actively work towards substantive measures. Ever since pro-West leaders came to power, the Ukrainian government has increased support for LGBTQ rights. Amendment banning LGBTQ discrimination at workplaces was also a long stride in ensuring the rights of the community. Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, who is openly gay and has attended previous marches, is said to have been unable to join this year's rally. However, the Serbian law on same-sex unions remains stalled since President Alexander Vucic refuses to ratify the law without which it won't come into force.



Fourth, Europe's LGBTQ stance. Widespread criticism against bloc members who promote state-sanctioned homophobia is becoming increasingly common. Poland and Hungary, which have been reprimanded through legal and financial actions, are prime examples. The European Commission – responsible for approving and handing out the bloc's pandemic recovery fund – has yet to approve Hungary's reconstruction funds. This delay is due to Budapest's failure to repeal its anti-paedophilia law, which is a disguised anti-LGBTQ law.

In perspective

Over the past decade, support for the LGBTQ community and their rights has significantly grown globally, especially in Europe. This could be due to the increased presence of Pride parades, which call for safeguarding the community's rights and ability to live peacefully without being victims of hate crimes. Meanwhile, providing leadership in the global arena, the EU has reiterated it will not tolerate undemocratic and inhumane acts committed against any community by member states. It has since discovered ways to discipline those states which fail to comply with its measures.

22 September 2021

The Houthi-led violence in Yemen

Jeshil Samuel J

In the news

On 16 September, nearly 50 pro-government troops and rebels were killed after clashes in the Al-Bayda province. According to military sources, a colonel and 19 other loyalists were killed in the clashes, and the Houthis had seized a few key areas from the government forces. The Sawma'ah district and the Mukayras District in Al-Bayda have come under Houthi control as per reports. The Houthis had launched the offensive at Al-Bayda weeks in advance to assert their dominance in Central Yemen.

On 18 September, nine people involved in the killing of Al-Sammad were publicly executed in broad daylight by the Houthis. Al-Sammad was the President of a Houthi-backed political party and was killed by a Saudi-led airstrike in 2018. After a rebel-controlled court found the 9 Yemenis guilty of spying for the Saudi-led coalition forces, the public executions were carried out with hundreds of onlookers in the capital city of Sanaa.

On 20 September, more than 30 rebels were killed in Marib after Saudi-led airstrikes hit Houthi reinforcements. The Marib region has been coveted by the Houthis for more than a year now. Despite the heavy casualties they suffer, the Houthis have continuously attacked Marib in successive waves. The rebels are also notorious for using young boys in their frontlines to soak up the enemy fire.

Issues at large

First, the incapable Yemeni government. Despite being backed by Saudi Arabia, the government under President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi has done very little to gain control over territories or mending ties with the Houthis. President Hadi's apathetic nature towards numerous issues since his time as Vice-President in 1994 has often raised concerns about his

leadership. The lack of a transparent system had allowed corruption to fester within the government even before the conflict began in 2014. The unchecked corruption has impacted the management of essential resources and foreign aid within the country.

Second, the declining morale amongst government troops. Till 2020, the Yemeni military did a commendable job in deterring Houthi advances on multiple fronts. Even if they lost control over territory, the military (with the help of the local tribes) would immediately regain control over the territory. However, this will to fight has seen a decline in recent times, mainly due to the lack of funding and proper leadership in the military. The military has also adopted reactionary strategies over proactive strategies, thereby reducing the number of offensive operations.

Third, the US withdrawal of support to the Saudi-led coalition. From the time Tim Leaderking was appointed as the US Special Envoy for Yemen (in February), the US strategy towards the war in Yemen has changed significantly. To end the dire humanitarian condition plaguing Yemen, the US decided to stop supporting the Saudi-led coalition logistically and financially. In early September, the US started removing its Patriot missile defence batteries from Saudi Arabia, despite the kingdom facing numerous Houthi ariel (missile, mortar and drone) attacks in recent times. The US deciding to take a diplomatic route to solve the conflict has emboldened the Houthis.

In perspective

The distressing humanitarian conditions of the Yemeni public and the grave human rights violations committed by the Houthis have made the conflict in Yemen one of the worst the world has seen in recent years. With no sense of accountability to the Yemeni public or the international community, the Houthis have imposed their reign of terror through local courts. The tribes who oppose the Houthi rule are suppressed with an iron fist, and the public who show dissent are tortured and killed. To make matters worse, the Yemeni government still plays second fiddle to external powers and has no true voice or power of its own.

18 August 2021

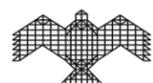
Return of Taliban and the fall of Afghanistan

D. Suba Chandran

In the news

On 15 August 2021, the Taliban captured Kabul, entered the Presidential palace. Ashraf Ghani, who was then the President of Afghanistan, fled the country earlier. He was quoted to have said in a social media posting: "The Taliban have won with the judgement of their swords and guns, and are now responsible for the honour, property and self-preservation of their countrymen...They are now facing a new historical test. Either they will preserve the name and honour of Afghanistan, or they will give priority to other places and networks."

On 17 August, in a news conference in Kabul, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's spokesperson, said: "We don't want Afghanistan to be a battlefield anymore - from today onward, war is over...I would like to assure the international community, including the



United States, that nobody will be harmed... We don't want any internal or external enemies." He was also quoted to have committed to the rights of women. Enamullah Samangani, another leader of the Taliban's cultural commission, was quoted to have stated: "The Islamic Emirate doesn't want women to be victims... They should be in government structure according to Shariah law."

On 16 August, US President Biden made a lengthy statement on the current situation in Afghanistan. He said: "Our mission in Afghanistan was never supposed to have been nation building. It was never supposed to be creating a unified, centralized democracy. Our only vital national interest in Afghanistan remains today what it has always been: preventing a terrorist attack on American homeland... When I came into office, I inherited a deal that President Trump negotiated with the Taliban. Under his agreement, US forces would be out of Afghanistan by 1 May, 2021 — just a little over three months after I took office." He also stated: "I stand squarely behind my decision... I am President of the United States of America, and the buck stops with me." He also seems to be placing the responsibility on the Afghan leadership, when he said: "After 20 years, I've learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw US forces... Afghanistan political leaders gave up and fled the country. The Afghan military collapsed, sometimes without trying to fight. If anything, the developments of the past week reinforced that ending US military involvement in Afghanistan now was the right decision."

On 16 August, Dmitry Zhirnov, Russia's Ambassador to Afghanistan, was quoted to have stated: "I judge by the first day of their control over Kabul. The impressions are good. The situation in Kabul is better now (under Taliban) than it was under Ashraf Ghani." Also on the same day, a spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "China respects Afghan people's right to decide their own destiny and future, and is willing to continue to develop friendship and cooperation with Afghanistan."

Issues at large

First, Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan. It all started on 6 August in Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz province in southwest Afghanistan. In the next one week, all the major provincial capitals fell one by one – Herat, Kunduz, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar. On 15 August, they captured Jalalabad and Kabul. The surprising element of the rapid takeover was not just the speed but the lack of opposition; the provinces and their capitals fell to the Taliban without any fight. For the Taliban, it was a walkover, contrary to what happened in the 1990s. Between November 1994 and September 1996, it had to fight hard for almost two years to capture Afghanistan. In 2021, it could do it in a week.

Second, the leadership crisis and the fleeing of the President. Ashraf Ghani made a bold statement on 14 August about not surrendering to the Taliban and not allowing the achievements of the previous decades to fall down. However, his fleeing the following day underlines the resolve of his leadership. On 11 August, following the fall of other major cities, Ghani flew to Mazar-e-Sharif to meet with Abdul Rashid Dostum. In retrospect, it appears, Ghani could not build a political consensus amongst the Afghan leaders. Nor he could lead the Afghan security forces effectively. During the middle of the Taliban's rapid advance, he fired the Afghan army chief. While talking about the Taliban's advances, one has

to analyze why the Afghan political leadership failed to rise when the country demanded them the most.

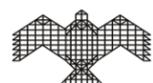
Third, the melting of Afghan security forces. The US and its allies, over the last two decades, have spent billions of dollars on building a modern Afghan security force, which is believed to be more than 300,000. They were trained, equipped and provided with modern weapons and vehicles. Unfortunately, the Afghan security forces disappeared without putting up a fight when the Taliban entered the provincial capitals. Early reports indicate that there were multiple deals between the local commanders of the Afghan security forces and the Taliban. Others report the morale was down ever since US President Biden announced the withdrawal. A comparison with how Ahmad Shah Massoud fought the Taliban during 1994-96, with less external support should be useful. Massoud also finally gave up Kabul, but after putting up a fight.

Fourth, the melting of the militias. Besides the Afghan security forces, there were numerous militias led by warlords in the north, west and east of Afghanistan. Ismail Khan in Herat, and Abdul Rashid Dostum and Atta Muhammad Noor in Mazar-e-Sharif are a few to name, who were known for their military acumen, militia support, and the anti-Taliban sentiment. Ismail Khan was captured by the Taliban in Herat; Abdul Rashid Dostum and Atta Muhammad Noor were reported to have fled Mazar-e-Sharif into Uzbekistan. According to early reports, the Taliban have agreed to Ismail Khan to continue to govern Herat. It appears that the militias that were pro-government until a week earlier, also have entered into tactical deals with the Taliban.

Fifth, the chaos and calm in Afghanistan, following the Taliban takeover. The international media focussed on what happened in the Kabul airport following the takeover, with multiple videos showing people wanting to get out of Afghanistan by clinging into aircrafts that are leaving Kabul. In few cities, there were reports about protests against the Taliban. For example, the protests in Jalalabad. The Taliban came down ruthlessly on these protestors. On the other hand, there are also reports on how the cities including Kabul, are getting ready for the Taliban rule.

Sixth, the Taliban promises. While it has promised women's rights and even asked them to get back to work, there are suspicions. According to initial reports and statements, there is a difference between how the senior Taliban leaders have made statements on women rights and how reports and interviews of the Taliban commanders on the ground reflect a different position. The majority responses to the Taliban's promises so far has been cynical, keeping the old record, and the differences between the Taliban leaders and its commanders.

Seventh, local opposition to the Taliban. When the Taliban was capturing city after city without any resistance, the citizens mobilized in Kabul to vent out their anger against it. As could be seen from what happened in Jalalabad, there was a protest against the Taliban's return. However, as of now, they seem to be isolated events, than a common sentiment against the Taliban amongst the population. Will they come to the streets to protest against the Taliban remains to be seen.



Eighth, Biden's resolve to complete the withdrawal. His statement on 16 August underlines the following: taking responsibility for the decision to withdraw; its finality; his decision as a follow up to the previous administration's deal with the Taliban in 2020; the objectives of the US in Afghanistan having met, following the disruption of al Qaeda; and the inability of the Afghan leadership to come together and build a new Afghanistan.

Ninth, the Chinese and Russian resolve to stay in Afghanistan, along with Pakistan and Iran. While all other embassies in Kabul are either leaving the city or reducing their footprints, China and Russia are doing the opposite. During the recent months/years, Moscow and Beijing, along with Islamabad, have engaged with the Taliban. In recent months, perhaps, both China and Russia were also getting ready for the Taliban's return in Afghanistan.

In perspective

First, the facts. Taliban has returned to Kabul after two decades. The Afghan government has failed to respond. The Afghan security forces have melted without a fight. The much-famed militias have decided to strike deals. Clearly, the Taliban has recaptured Afghanistan without any resistance. Second, the US and the other countries that have invested billions of dollars and sacrificed hundreds of their soldiers have decided to cut their losses and get out of Afghanistan. Third, both the above mean that the Afghans have been left to fend for themselves after so many promises. Two generations of Afghans would be facing the wrath of the Taliban now. Fourth, the nation-building process, and the idea of a liberal, moderate, democratic and inclusive Afghanistan are in tatters, as the Islamic Emirate returns.

The Taliban should pick up from where it left two decades ago; the rest of the world should hang its heads in shame of what it had failed to build in Afghanistan during the last two decades. Still, there are lessons to learn, if there is a willingness. Else, one could go along with the narrative of the Taliban's old and new international friends, that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan would be different this time. It would be wishful thinking. Taliban would not change its colours.

28 July 2021

Anti-extremism bill in France

Sourina Bej

In the news

On 23 July, the French Parliament passed the bill strengthening the government's role to check mosques and other religious organizations as part of its fight to prevent Islamic radicalism and defend the republic. The 'Law Reinforcing Respect of the Principles of the Republic' was passed by the National Assembly with 49 votes in favour, against 19. Also known as the anti-separatism bill, it was first approved by the lower house on 16 February 2021.

Issues at large

First, the bill in brief. The passed bill empowers the government to permanently close houses of worship, dissolve religious organizations without a court order, if their members are found

to be inciting hatred. Religious organizations will now have to get government permits every five years to continue operating; also, they would need annual certification of their accounts if they receive foreign funding. The bill makes it a criminal offense for anyone, in the name of religious ideology, pressures civil servants, and other public-service providers to deviate from French secular values. Unauthorized posting of someone's personal details to expose them to harm is punishable with EUR 45,000 and up to three years in jail. The passed bill also mandates parents who home-school their children to obtain government authorization to ensure their children are taught the right French secular values.

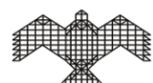
Second, France's struggle with Islamic extremism. The new law comes in the immediate background of strings of terrorist attacks. In October 2020, a middle-school teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded after the father of one of his students posted a video online complaining about the teacher's decision to display cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad to his class. The attacker, an 18-year-old Chechen refugee, acted after seeing the video. Two weeks later, a Tunisian man killed three with a knife at a church in Nice. The attacks remain those incidents where the French *laïcité* (secularism) was seen by the larger French society to be in direct conflict with one's religious norms, especially Islam. Macron has since politicized the attacks and called Islam to be in crisis. The law attempts to legalize and uphold Paty as a symbol of free-thinking French who has been under attack from the Islamic radicals.

Third, Macron's attempt at reinterpreting French *laïcité*. The bill framed by Macron at the outset aims to respond to the spread of Islamist extremism. But at its core, it is a State's exceptional attempt at solving the problem of extremism with another extreme of creating parallel societies where civic laws will take precedence over personal freedom to practice ones' own religion. Called *laïcité*, it is a strict separation of religion and State wherein to be a French secular means absence of religious symbol in public space. The law re-enforces *laïcité* as political and social anxiety towards Islam.

Fourth, public support for the law. Macron's course correction of illiberal elements in the French society through security and legal means has public support. The anguish and exclusionary remarks favouring the burkhini or headscarves ban is a larger public expression of how Muslims remain alienated in French society. Passing the bill, further provides a social space to the project of homogenizing the republic where being French cannot coexist with simultaneous religious identities.

In perspective

Macron, in passing the bill, formalized the ground for the popularity of conservative politics with favouritism of one's national historicity. The right-wing opposition Republicans (LR) party and the far-right National Rally have both called for more restrictions on Islamism. However, the new law is the first attempt by a Western liberal democratic republic at legalizing the socio-political alienation of its minority by its ethnic majority.



28 July 2021

Canada's burning churches

Wonchibeni Tsopoe

In the news

On 19 July, a Coptic Orthodox church burned to the ground in British Columbia, as the burning of churches continues in Canada following the recent discovery of graves of indigenous children. According to Toronto Sun reports, more than 50 churches were vandalized, and five Catholic churches were razed during the last few weeks.

On 3 July, the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, denounced the burning and vandalism of Catholic churches. On 6 July, Mary Simon the first indigenous Canadian governor-general made an address in her first language, Inuktitut and promised to work towards healing the nation at what she described as an 'especially reflective time.'

Issues at large

First, the historical linkages to the current unrest. The fabric of Canada's nation-building has come at the expense of its indigenous people. The government's "National Policy" is believed to have given the authorization to establish residential schools to assimilate indigenous communities and to suppress their dissent. The schools were designed to isolate indigenous children from their families and cut all ties to their culture. The indigenous community needs better representation of their culture which the State fails to address.

Second, the recent revelation of the unmarked graves. Thousands of unmarked gravesites were uncovered, out of which 215 were graves of children. The children are believed to be students of Kamloops Residential School as the graves were found near the city of Kamloops in Southern British Columbia. Also, in June the Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan announced the finding of estimated 751 unmark graves. Followed by 160 undocumented and unmarked graves near the Kuper Island Industrial School. The unravelling of more unmarked graves is leading to further unrest and uproar in the State.

Third, the indigenous uprising. Not only in Canada but also in other North American countries, there have been similar uprisings related to indigenous communities and their demands. Although these movements organize themselves to approach and tackle these issues may differ, the objective in all of these movements are similar; the right to preserve their culture and traditions and certain and other such rights.

In perspective

For years, the indigenous community has faced oppression. Canada, from its pre-colonial past until today, had aimed to undermine indigenous people identity. Discrimination against the indigenous community is deep-rooted, and the role of the State is very minimal in addressing these issues. Systemic racism has been continuing for decades, and the emotional baggage attached to it is rather hard to reconcile. The Canadian government has to take a proactive step to meet the demands of the indigenous community. Furthermore, reconciliation will be best served only if the government works to implement and practice the laws that cater to the indigenous community.

12 May 2021

Israel-Palestine violence

Jeshil Samuel J

In the news

On 07 May, a series of skirmishes started between the worshippers and the Israeli police in the Al Aqsa mosque compound, with an exchange of stones, stun grenades and rubber bullets. The Palestinians had been protesting against any possible eviction in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem that would follow a Court verdict and the Israeli government's settlement policies.

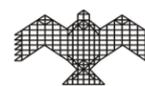
On 10 May, riots broke out in the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount as Israelis celebrated Jerusalem Day. On the same day, rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip by Hamas, targeting Israeli settlements in Jerusalem. A spokesperson for the Hamas said that they had launched "a rocket strike against the enemy in the occupied Jerusalem in response to their crimes and aggression against the holy city and its aggression against our people in Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa mosque." In an immediate response to the attack, the Israeli military attacked the Gaza Strip with airstrikes, killing nearly twenty. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also made a stern statement after the attacks saying: "Israel will respond very forcefully. We will not tolerate attacks on our territory, our capital, our citizens and our soldiers. Whoever strikes us will pay a heavy price."

During 11-12 May, the rocket attacks by Hamas and Israel continued, targeting each other, with casualties increasing. According to a BBC report, violence is being witnessed in many parts, with Benjamin Netanyahu, stating his plan to send in "military forces to help police maintain order in cities ruptured by violence."

Issues at large

First, the immediate trigger behind the violent clash. Minor confrontations between Israeli security forces and Palestinians had started a month ago when the Israeli police erected barriers to stop people from sitting in the Damascus Gate Plaza and after the Israeli government imposed a 10,000-person limit for the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The attempt to evict Palestinians in East Jerusalem to expand Israeli settlements has also been a primary trigger. Palestinian residents of the Sheikh Jarrah area had been ordered by a district court earlier to vacate their homes which in turn fuelled protests. The simmering tension erupted into uncontrollable violence after Israeli forces entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque and began using stun grenades and rubber bullets to suppress protests. On 9 May, despite the Israeli Supreme Court's decision to delay the order for eviction, clashes between protestors and Israeli forces have only intensified.

Second, the long-term issues plaguing East Jerusalem. Since the 1990s, the Israeli settlement plans have allowed the government to build settlement blocs within Palestinian majority areas of Jerusalem pushing nearly 1,40,000 Palestinians out of the city. In 2020, 170 Palestinian structures were demolished, and 385 people were displaced by the Israeli government to accommodate Israeli settlements. This increase in Israeli settlements have left Palestinians



vulnerable and threatened despite international law stating that an occupying power cannot confiscate private property in the occupied territory. Israeli citizens, on the other hand, are pushed into confrontations with Palestinians despite being legally entitled by Israeli law to own land in the East Jerusalem region.

Third, the Israeli and Palestinian position and politics on the matter. Prime Minister Netanyahu clearly stated that Israel would firmly resist the pressure put on it not to build or expand in Jerusalem. He went on to say that "just as every nation builds in its capital and builds up its capital, we also have the right to build in Jerusalem". Conversely, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has vehemently opposed the Israeli government's crackdown on the Palestinian population and has urged the UN Security Council to have a session on the ongoing issue. Due to the recent attacks carried out by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, President Abbas had to cancel celebrations for Eid al-Fitr.

Fourth, the sudden escalation with the Hamas intervening with the rocket attacks and Israel responding with a larger force. What was a local issue, related to a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem has now expanded into a full-scale conflict between Hamas and Israel.

In perspective

The recent escalation in violence has increased international support for the Palestinians living in Jerusalem. Countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Germany and France have shown concerns over Israel's policies towards Palestinians.

On a national level, the recent events could garner more support for PM Netanyahu, who needs public and political support to retain his position. PM Netanyahu could use the attacks by Hamas as an opportunity to increase Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip. On the local level, the confrontation between Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem would continue even after the large-scale clashes in the city subside.

14 April 2021

Riots in Northern Ireland

Sourina Bej

In the news

On 7 April, rioters hijacked and torched a bus and hurled petrol bombs at police in Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland. This marks the seventh night of continuous rioting on the streets of the Northern Irish capital that has currently left 90 police officers injured, according to a news report in the BBC. In the sporadic rioting that began in March, violence has spread from the loyalist areas of West Belfast, as hundreds gathered on each side of the 'peace wall' separating the loyalist Shankill Road and the nationalist Springfield Road. Clashes between the two communities and police occurred near the wall, built to prevent further violence between the two groups after three decades of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland.

Issues at large

First, the post-Brexit tensions. Since the start of 2021, tension was brewing when post-Brexit

trade barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK came into effect. Preserving peace in Northern Ireland without allowing the UK a back door into the EU's markets through the 500km UK-Irish land border was one of the BREXIT talks' challenges. The arrangement eventually designed to retain Northern Ireland and Ireland as an open land border, saving the peace process built on the 1998 Good Friday accord. However, the BREXIT divorce deal did lead to a few customs and border checks on some goods, a remainder on the consequence of a violation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. This created a sense among both the unionists and loyalists of an unequal arrangement as against the rest of the UK.

Second, the hardening of the Irish sea border as larger discontent. As land border remained open, control and check were imposed on the Irish sea that led the unionist group to distrust the UK government. Posters and graffiti have marred the walls in Belfast, calling for "No Irish Sea Border. Ian Paisley, Jr, a senior MP of Democratic Unionist Party, which supports BREXIT but opposes the Irish sea border, said in late January that discontent over the new arrangements was so great that some sections of the unionist community were "starting to sense they are sitting on a powder keg." While the causes for the violence are multifaceted, "there has been this brewing fear on the Unionist side that they are not as British as people in Birmingham," writes Feargal Cochrane, author of Northern Ireland: The Fragile Peace.

Third, intra-sectarian political differences. The riot comes against the immediate backdrop of worsening relations between the leading parties representing the unionist, loyalists and the nationalist groups. The seven nights of violence were sparked by a decision from Northern Ireland's Public Prosecution Service not to prosecute 24 high-ranking members of Sinn Fein, the party, who had breached COVID-19 regulations by attending a funeral for Bobby Storey, a prominent member of the Irish Republican Army. However, it is noteworthy that the violence has unfolded around working-class Unionist areas of Belfast close to the coast, indicating this riot is still not a uniform sentiment across Northern Ireland.

Fourth, distrust against the UK and return of old rivalries. The introduction of the Internal Market Bill during the Brexit transition period and its subsequent dropping has resulted in a deep trust deficit between the British government and groups in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland's population is divided between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists. More than two decades after the Good Friday Agreement peace deal brought the sectarian "Troubles" to an end, old rivalries and the question of political equality amongst the groups are ensuing in post Brexit scenario.

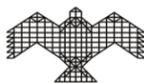
[In perspective](#)

A change in the Northern Ireland protocol could probably be the next challenge for the Johnson government. At the beginning of March, Northern Irish loyalist paramilitary groups informed the British Prime Minister that they would not back the Belfast Agreement again until the Northern Ireland Protocol was amended to ensure uninterrupted trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. If the riot continues, it remains to be seen whether historical precedents repeat themselves to spiral the violence throughout the North.





National Institute of
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The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI research are published as briefs, reports and commentary.



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The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible

About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.



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