

THE FUTURE

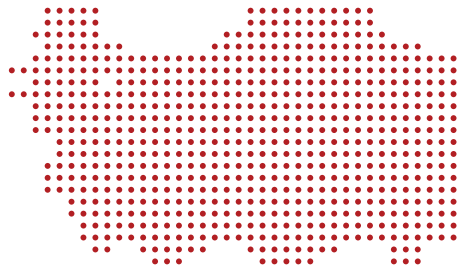
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THE FUTURE INSTITUTE

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The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute. This newsletter aims to chronicle the significant events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.



Economic disparity during a pandemic

how is the Covid-19 vaccination going?

In response to a pandemic that has taken around 3 million lives to date, nations have poured billions of dollars into developing vaccine technologies. While about 23 coronavirus vaccines have at least moved to the phase three efficacy trial status, only a total of eight approved coronavirus vaccines are currently available to the public globally.

In many countries, vaccines are coming to market initially under emergency measures that let them bypass standard regulatory requirements. Some of these vaccines, such as the Chinese Sinopharm and the Russian Gamaleya, were rolled out in early approval programs even before completing their clinical trials.

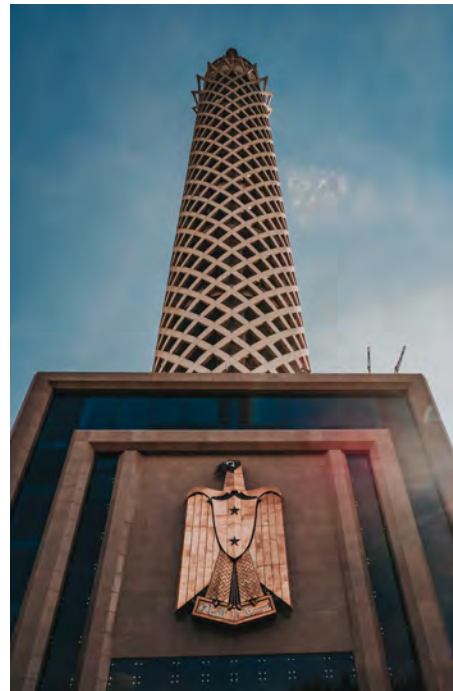
A vaccinated person is the one who has received at least one dose of the vaccine, while a fully vaccinated person has received all required doses of the vaccine. Widely used vaccines such as Oxford Astra-Zeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna need at least two doses for a person to be 'fully vaccinated'.

Although more than 910 million vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, there is a stark gap in vaccination programs between countries, and even more so among continents. 40 per cent of the covid vaccines administered globally have gone to people in 27 wealthy economies representing 11 per cent of the world population, while the least wealthy 11 per cent have received just 1.6 per cent of the vaccines. Analysis has recently shown that the countries with the highest incomes are vaccinating 25 times faster.

Africa has the lowest vaccination rate while global vaccination is calculated continent-wise, with just 1.1 doses administered per 100 population, while North America is the highest with 40 doses per 100 population.

In light of such discrepancies and disparities, more than 170 former world leaders and Nobel laureates have recently called on US President Joe Biden to make Covid vaccines more readily available by waiving US intellectual property rules. They have asked him to support a global South-led proposal demanding the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to waive the Covid vaccine patents temporarily. Earlier last month, leaders of the "Quad" countries announced plans to work with the WHO to develop and distribute Covid vaccines to 1 billion people in the Indo-Pacific region.

Reference: <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>> (Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations Around the World by Josh Holder, The New York Times), <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/14/world-leaders-call-on-biden-authorise-covid-vaccine-patent-waiver>> (Former world leaders urge Biden to waive COVID vaccine patents, Al Jazeera), <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-09/when-will-world-be-fully-vaccinated-pace-is-2-400-faster-in-wealthy-countries>> (The World's Wealthiest Countries Are Getting Vaccinated 25 Times Faster by Tom Randall, Bloomberg Equality).



General Sisi: a local despot causing global damage

For an eventful six days in March 2021, traffic came to a standstill in the Suez Canal, the world's busiest trade and shipping route, as a 400-metre long container ship, the Ever Given, became grounded in the canal, ending up wedged across the waterway blocking all traffic. While most observers on social media were engrossed in closely following the events of the dislodging of the ship, making memes of the iconic photos emanating on a daily basis, and ended up celebrating the official refloating of the ship, David Hearst, Middle East Eye editor, was not like most of them. He pinpointed the real elephant in the room; the gross incompetence of the Egyptian regime in handling a crisis, at its head President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and the threat his regime posed to international trade and stability.

After the initial 26-hour media blackout and regime silence in the aftermath of the incident, the regime initiated a propaganda phase, "lying in earnest" to conceal the truth from the public domain and downplay the magnanimity of the incident.

To anyone asking why, Hearst notes, "The Egyptian government is a practised liar. It lies to its own people every day, but, in times of crisis, it also lies to the international community." This, says Hearst, brings to the limelight the incompetence of Sisi's dictatorship on issues of human rights and the rule of law, but also the danger this incompetence poses to a major international waterway, and through it, global trade and stability.

This is part of a larger pattern of decline and disaster to Sisi's rule, messing up in Libya, the crackdown on the opposition Muslim Brotherhood at home and abroad, the recent Suez Canal fiasco, and the Nile Dam dispute with Sudan and Ethiopia, which threatens water levels of the Nile in Egypt. Instead of concentrating his meagre resources on dealing responsibly with these issues, the dictator has spent all his time obsessed with revamping his image, stifling dissenting voices at home and abroad, and spending millions in employing expensive lobby groups at the US Capitol to whitewash his image and conceal his crimes. Hearst concludes his article hoping that the world would wake up to this reality in light of the 2021 Suez Canal obstruction incident.

Reference: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/suez-canal-sisi-danger-not-only-egypt-world> (*Suez Canal: Sisi is a danger not only to Egypt, but to the world* by David Hearst, Middle East Eye).



Seventeen protesters killed by Bangladeshi police during Modi's visit

On the eve of the golden jubilee of independence of Bangladesh in March 2021, the country was rocked by widespread protests on the occasion of the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In a similar protest last year, the mass people demanded that the Hasina government rescind its invitation to Modi, saying that the two countries have too many unresolved disputes. At the same time, the protesters also accused Modi's BJP government of anti-Muslim policies such as the National Citizenship Register (NRC) based on the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019.

While the popular protests were initially spearheaded by the non-political Islamic group Hefazat-e-Islam, there was the notable presence of various left-leaning parties, and a host of youth and student organisations led by the former President of Dhaka University Student Union (DUCSU) Nurul Haq. The initially peaceful protests turned violent rapidly on account of violent police reaction in several corners of the country, such as the Baitul Mokarram National Mosque in the capital Dhaka and the districts of Brahmanbaria and Hathazar.

The clashes resulted in seventeen deaths and several hundred severely injured. However, unofficial deaths are purported to be much higher. A group of human rights organisations have condemned the death of peaceful protestors and the government's crackdown on the right to peaceful assembly. Moreover, additional government measures during the Indian Prime Minister's visit included high-security restrictions, a social media and internet blackout, arrests of many opposition leaders and the placement of several individuals under house arrest.

While the two-day visit by Modi focused on attending Bangladesh's anniversary celebrations, his visit also had a strong political agenda at home. His visit to a remote village in Gopalganj district to worship at a Motua temple was apparently aimed at galvanising Hindu support ahead of several state-level elections in India, key among them the West Bengal. Little appeared to have been achieved on the bilateral front, however, as none of the issues of contention appeared to have been dealt with officially; among them are the Farakka Dam issue, river water sharing agreement, illegal immigration, terrorism, and border killings by the Indian Border Security Force, to name a few.

The visit also came at a time when the Modi government is under pressure from the current US administration to improve relations with its neighbours, especially in the aftermath of divisive measures such as the CAA and NRC. While the staunchly pro-India Hasina government has hailed the visit as historic, it is interesting to note that distrust and latent resentment amongst the general Bangladeshi population towards India have perhaps never been greater.

Reference: <<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/03/30/indian-pm-modi-visited-bangladesh-under-high-security/>> (Indian PM Modi Visited Bangladesh under high security by Zamir Ahmed Awan, Modern Diplomacy), <<https://www.newagebd.net/article/133880/17-killed-500-injured-in-anti-modi-protests-hefazat>> (17 killed, 500 injured in anti-Modi protests: Hefazat announces countrywide demo the 2nd of April, New Age), <<https://apnews.com/article/dhaka-bangladesh-india-coronavirus-pandemic-sheikh-hasina-1ec1268062ef645e918e8a4fc981aa37>> (India's Modi ends Bangladesh visit that sparked violence by Julhas Alam, AP News), <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/bangladesh-protests-statement/>> (Bangladesh authorities must conduct prompt, thorough, impartial, and independent investigations into the death of protesters and respect people's right to peaceful assembly, Amnesty International).



CENTCOM's increasing influence on the US and regional politics

To many, the upcoming unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan is a signal of the end of decades-long “war on terror” by the US in the Middle East. It also signals to change priorities. The imminent rise of China on the global horizon is not something the US can afford to ignore any longer at the expense of costly wars on other fronts.

Two decades of military action in the Middle East has meant that the US Department of Defense's combatant Command CENTCOM has grown quite influential within the US military and political establishment, especially due to focus on areas under CENTCOM throughout the “war on terror” era. The latest sign of this growing influence was manifested in choosing the 28th Secretary of Defense was from the CENTCOM.

In lieu of the above, CENTCOM occupies the unique position of influencing decision-makers by providing information that suits their position and using its leverage and prestige in Washington DC, one which it has pursued rather aggressively. During the Syrian war, while CENTCOM fought Daesh, it also consciously armed and shielded the Kurdish separatist YPG group, which is a Washington designated terror group. In Iraq, CENTCOM supported sectarian Shia politicians over Sunni Arabs and eventually strengthened Iran's influence in the region. Working outside its field of control, CENTCOM actively undermined the efforts of EUCOM to mediate a joint solution with Turkey regarding east of the Euphrates in Syria.

However, in light of changing priorities, a greater focus on power politics vis-a-vis China will reduce CENTCOM's importance and lead to re-allocation of resources away from CENTCOM to the benefit of EUCOM and PACOM; even major war in the ME might not going to change this. This is a major political shift, especially in light of the recent US-China standoff on the scale of the Cold War.

So what is the best move for the US and CENTCOM? It is to rely on regional partners, increase cooperation with allies instead of antagonising them; in fact, this could be an opportunity rather than a crisis for CENTCOM, since any vacuum left by the US in the ME can be filled through enhanced cooperation with regional allies like Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. By relying on its allies, the US can pursue its goals in the region while focusing on China.

Reference:

<https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/focus-on-china-can-diminish-centcom-s-outsized-influence-on-us-politics-45280> (Focus on China can diminish CENTCOM's outsized influence on US politics by Omer Ozkizilcik, TRT World).



Four stages of Bosnian genocide denial

Since the 1990s genocide, denial as an effort to minimise the heinous crimes committed against Bosnian Muslims has situated itself comfortably into the mainstream discourse. The article traces four identifiable stages of Bosnian genocide denial over the past three decades as follows,

Stage 1: Denial through euphemism

The relegation of genocide committed by the Bosnian Serb forces against Bosnian Muslims to a mere “civil war,” alongside the term “ethnic cleansing” to forestall use of the term genocide to prevent the mobilisation of international community in support of Bosnians.

Stage 2: Denial through localisation

While establishing the judicial truth through handing down genocide verdicts, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) narrowed the scale and scope of the three and a half year genocide to simply a few days in July in Srebrenica in 1995, thus allowing for a discourse of “a highly localised genocide in Srebrenica only,” and providing an opening for genocide deniers to whitewash all crimes before 1995.

Stage 3: Denial through post-modernist discourse

Reduction of the genocide to a few days in July of 1995, and the high standards for genocide definition established by the international courts, has allowed genocide deniers to question and shift the goalposts of definition, engage in sceptical whitewashing through taking the court standards as the minimum, questioning and denying them. Some of the sophisticated deniers using post-modernist discourse have employed new terms, including “alternative narratives”, “multiple truths”, “multiple narratives”, and so on and so forth, which serves to dilute narratives on genocide.

Step 4: Denial through mainstreaming

While the other three stages were more or less seen on the fringes of society, the latest stage kicked off in December 2019, when the Swedish Academy decided to award the Nobel Prize in Literature to a genocide denier, Peter Handke. This move has enabled the migration of otherwise fringe deniers to the mainstream.

Reference: <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/the-four-stages-of-bosnian-genocide-denial-45352> (*The four stages of Bosnian genocide denial by Hamza Karcic, TRT World*).



Turkey to take Saudi boycott to the World Trade Organisation

Turkey raised concerns regarding an unofficial Saudi boycott against Turkish goods since 2019. Turkish exports were seen to drop by 92 per cent in January of this year, from \$221 million to just \$16 million year-on-year, according to data released by the Turkish Exporters Union (TIM). Riyadh's efforts targeting the Turkish economy came after a Turkish court's decision to accept two separate indictments against Saudi officials thought to be involved in the murder of the Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul in 2018.

Since last October, the Saudi government had been systematically pressuring local businesses to stop trade with Turkish companies, which resulted in a 24 per cent decrease of annual Turkish exports to Saudi Arabia in 2020, from \$3.1bn to \$2.3bn.

Turkey raised the boycott issue at a World Trade Organisation Goods Council meeting in Geneva on 31 March-1 April. According to the WTO's website, Saudi Arabia's "restrictive policies and practices concerning Turkey" were discussed and Riyadh responded. It is hoped that the Turkish move could help bring about a settlement to the unofficial boycott issue.

Turkish exporters and traders, on the other hand, have taken measures to bypass the unofficial blockade by re-routing food, clothing and other goods and other measures such as ditching the "Made in Turkey" label. Trade data showed unusual parallel increases of 200-400 per cent in Turkish goods such as textiles, chemical, jewellery and garments arriving in Oman and Lebanon, while others said that manufacturers were sending fabrics to Bulgaria or Serbia for "finishing touches" on Saudi-bound goods; Turkish exports to these two countries had risen to 58% and 44% respectively in March.

Reference:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/black-market-emerges-dodge-unofficial-turkish-saudi-trade-blockade-sources-2021-04-01/> (Turkish exporters re-route goods to dodge unofficial Saudi trade blockade, traders say by Marwa Rashad et al., Reuters), <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-saudi-arabia-boycott-wto-take> (Turkey to take Saudi boycott to the World Trade Organisation by Ragip Soylu, Middle East Eye).



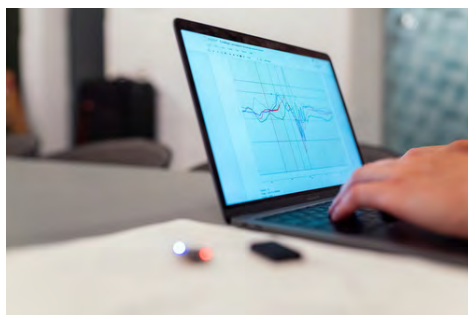
What has happened in Jordan's royal family?

According to state-run news agency Petra, Jordanian officials had claimed to have foiled a plot against the Kingdom involving the half-brother of incumbent King Abdullah II; at least 16 suspects accused of "sedition" and alleged foreign complicity were arrested. The man at the thick of events, the king's half-brother, Hamzah Bin Hussein, a former crown prince who was stripped of his title by the king back in 2004, was placed under house arrest.

Jordan's military denied initial reports of his arrest, and Hamzah himself was able to send a videotaped statement to the BBC on Saturday, the 3rd of April, where he confirmed that he was under house arrest and accused the Kingdom's ruling system of corruption, incompetence, and harassment. He denied being part of any conspiracy and said that he had been informed that he was punished for taking part in meetings where the king had been criticised, although he himself had not been implicated. Jordan's military said that the prince's house arrest was part of a broader security investigation involving the arrest of a former minister, and a junior member of the royal family, among 20 others.

A former US official with knowledge of events in Jordan said that authorities were not as worried about a 'physical coup' as much as they believed that those involved were planning a push for widespread protests with tribal support. Prince Hamzah is known to be popular among the Herak, tribal figures who have been calling for protests in recent weeks against rising corruption in an economy hard-hit by COVID, leading to record levels of unemployment and poverty. Authorities had cracked down on several demonstrations and arrested dozens. Close allies of Jordan, including the US, and several Arab countries and organisations such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, as well as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, iterated their support and said they stood by King Abdullah.

Reference: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/3/jordan-arrests-ex-top-aide-royal-family-member-in-crackdown>
(Jordan prince 'under house arrest' amid security crackdown, Al Jazeera),
<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/jordan-says-former-crown-prince-liased-with-foreign-parties-over-plot-to-destabilise-country>
≥ (Jordan says former crown prince liaised with 'foreign parties' over plot to destabilise country, SBS News).



Dismal research scenario in OIC countries: Iran leads the list!

Considered together as a bloc, the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), consisting of 57 member countries, forms the second largest inter-governmental organisation in the world after the United Nations. However, as per a study by a team of researchers, all OIC members had only 447,465 publications and only 884 patents in the Scopus Database for the year 2020.

In comparison, with a lower population aggregate than the OIC bloc, China had 752,729 publications and 8,562 patents during the same period, double the number of publications and ten times the number of patents.

According to data obtained from the Scopus database, Iran was found to be the country with the highest number of publications (72691), followed by Turkey (57918) and Indonesia (48856). At the same time, Jordan topped the list in terms of patents (410), followed by Lebanon (152) and Qatar (98).

Among the 57 countries, only 22 countries were found to have at least one patent. The major areas of research in which publications were carried out were found to be in the fields of Medicine, Engineering, Computer Science and Agricultural and Biological Sciences. It is mentionable that although there was no separate data on research on social sciences, the scenario regarding the field was found to be dismal in general as compared to areas such as Medicine and Engineering.

Reference:

https://scientificbangladesh.com/publication-scenario-of-oic-countries-in-2020-from-scopus-database/?fbclid=IwAR1jE2dVNy8rsa5Eu7MThb0ElqXFT_IYKSw9fXRmZs-8oB7tuXxgC6HZ8Yo (Publication Scenario of OIC Countries in 2020 from Scopus Database by Dr Monir Uddin Ahmed, Scientific Bangladesh).

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