

THE FUTURE INSTITUTE

# THE FUTURE

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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.

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## Updates on Ukraine-Russia Conflict

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, the Russian advance in Ukraine has significantly slowed down over the past month. The main avenues of Russian advance have been from the Northeast, East and Southeastern sides of Ukraine. While the city of Melitopol in eastern Ukraine was captured early by Russian forces, the nearby city of Mariupol has still managed to hold out, although it has been reported that 90 per cent of the city has been destroyed. Towards the northeast, the city of Kharkiv has been among the deadliest sites of Russo-Ukrainian fighting, leading to a massive evacuation of the city's residents. The Russian offensive to take Kyiv, the capital, has also suffered a setback in light of successful Ukrainian resistance, and the current Russian strategy seems to be limited to siege and bombardment of Kyiv, as has happened throughout Ukraine, leading to fears of protraction of war, increased bombardment and high civilian death counts.

To date, Russia has claimed that it had lost 1,351 soldiers, with 3,825 wounded (the 24th of March), while NATO had earlier claimed that 30,000–40,000 Russian soldiers had been killed, wounded, missing or captured (the 23rd of March). Ukraine, on the other hand, has claimed that 1300 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed and 3,825 wounded (the 12th of March). The most significant impact of the invasion, however, has been the civilian casualty and the refugee exodus – Ukrainian government figures include 6,184–6,511+ civilians killed as of the 30th of March, while the UN has said that the invasion has led to 4 million-plus refugees and 6.5 million internally displaced persons. Russian forces have been accused of using cluster munitions and thermobaric weapons upon civilians in the invasion and bombing civilian targets such as schools and hospitals, which could constitute war crimes and violation of humanitarian law.

Amidst intense fights, attempts at peace negotiations between the two sides have also been ongoing, mainly through the mediation of Turkey in Istanbul. At their latest round of negotiations on the 29th of March, Ukrainian negotiators have proposed adopting a neutral status regarding joining NATO in exchange for security guarantees. Their proposals also included a 15-year consultation period on the status of Russian-annexed Crimea and the return of all Russian forces to pre-invasion positions, subject to a public referendum. Russia, on its part, has announced a “drastic reduction of military activity” on the Kyiv and

Chernihiv fronts, which experts say is more likely a regrouping effort to recover from heavy losses sustained by the Russian troops.

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## Racism, Blue-Eyed Refugees in Western Media and Politics

The media coverage of Ukraine has exposed a relatively long-standing racist bias within Western media outlets and political spheres – it is much worse when White Europeans suffer than when it is Arabs or other non-White people. HA Hellyer notes the numerous examples of such biases aired over the past month in Western media and in political statements by Western diplomats, the commonality being expressions of shock that war, refugees, and destruction, so indigenous to Afghanistan and the Middle East, are actually happening in a modern civilized European nation. While Putin is being vilified, and rightly so, for his murderous actions in Ukraine, Hellyer notes that no visceral reaction of this sort was or is visible regarding Putin's murderous actions in Syria, where Russian war crimes have been many times more lethal and deadly. The same can be said of Western media reporting regarding US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, betraying solidarity that is merely skin-deep and a deep-seated bias against the non-white and non-West.

Ibrahim Karatas, in a similar article looking at double standards in European attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine versus refugees from Africa or the Middle East, notes the prejudiced European policy – the blue-



eyed blonde refugees are always welcome, while black and brown refugees are left to drown in the sea, or left to die in the cold. This seemingly racist compassion also has another dimension; a blue-eyed blonde Ukrainian refugee is also accepted because of their Christian belief, and a blue-eyed blonde Bosnian Muslim refugee is not welcome either because of a differing religious-cultural worldview. Karatas notes that such ideas of attributing skin colour to notions of being civilized are not just a problem in the current refugee crises connected with the Russia-Ukraine war, but also seen within countries themselves, as in the case of Black and Latinos populations in the US, or the secular-minded 'White Turks' in Turkey.

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## 6th IPCC Report Released - Issues Dire Warnings on Climate Crisis

The latest released IPCC report, which is part two of the Sixth Assessment Report, focuses on climate change implications, hazards, and vulnerabilities, as well as adaptation options. The first instalment, which was released in August 2021, focused on the scientific foundations of climate change. According to insiders, the IPCC will release the third and final piece of the report in April of this year. Since the release of the first IPCC Assessment Report in 1990, the extensive studies created by specialists have stood as definitive assessments of the state of the world's climate. The reports from 1995, 2001, 2007, and 2015 have served as the framework for the global response to climate change.



While the IPCC's Sixth Study Report says nothing new about climate change, it does examine regional and sectoral effects for the first time as part of widening the scope of its assessment. The report warned that climate-related hazards to agriculture and food systems within Asia would steadily worsen as the temperature rises by 1-4 degrees Celsius, particularly affecting populations in South Asia's major river basins. Furthermore, high levels of warming could result in a 10-23 per cent drop in global GDP by the end of the century compared to a world without warming. Several major economies could even suffer larger economic drops as a result of climate change, with one study mentioned in the paper forecasting GDP losses of up to 42% in China and 92% in India by the end of the century if emissions continue to remain high.

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Rise in sea level to affect Mumbai, Kolkata may have to brace for storms. What IPCC's new report reveals. (2022, the 1st of March). News18. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/explained-what-the-sixth-assessment-report-of-ipcc-says-and-the-significance-4820936.html>



## Saudi Arabia Considers Accepting Chinese Yuan for Oil - Consequences

In light of changing geopolitical realities and signs of shifting of economic balances in power, the Wall Street Journal reported that Saudi and Chinese officials were recently in talks to price some of the Gulf nation's oil sales in the Chinese currency yuan, rather than dollars. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia was long seen as a staunch ally of the US, but relations have been strained recently with the coming of the new US President Biden, who had promised to seek justice for the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and has also been working towards reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, both issues at odds with the interests of Riyadh in the

region. Moreover, the current US administration is also not keen on supporting the war in Yemen, where regional Gulf states like the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been heavily involved over the past several years.

The recent US debacle in Afghanistan has also projected the impression of a weakening global power, to enemies, and especially allies like Saudi Arabia, who have started exploring other options, among them greater cooperation with fast emerging global players such as China, which is the kingdom's largest trade partner, mainly because it purchases 25 per cent of all of Riyadh's oil exports. Saudi Arabia is also a key nodal point in China's Belt and Road initiative and a top market for Chinese construction firms. While all of Saudi Arabia's oil sales still continue in dollars, a proposal to undertake oil transactions with China in Yuan would represent a significant shift for the oil business, which currently sees 80 per cent of sales in dollars. Apart from signalling a shift from the monopoly of the dollar in the global financial system, the shift away from dollars in oil transactions would also help China persuade additional governments and international investors to use its currency.

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## Hijab Ban and Worsening Plight of Indian Muslims in India's Karnataka

Indian Muslims continue to bear the brunt of anti-Muslim policies by Hindu nationalists in India, both at the central and regional levels, led by PM Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The latest focal point of anti-Muslim policymaking has been the South Indian state of Karnataka, which saw a range of legislative and administrative measures targeting the Muslim minority in socio-economic terms. The measures included a ban on the wearing of hijab by Muslim girls at schools across Karnataka, and the banning of Muslim vendors from setting up shop at Hindu temple fairs has sparked tensions and generated fierce debate within, as well as condemnation from the outside world.

Earlier, when a government-run school in Karnataka's Udupi district barred students wearing hijabs from entering classrooms, it triggered protests by Muslim students who said they were being deprived of their fundamental rights to education and religion. That led to counterprotests by Hindu students wearing Hindu-nationalist saffron shawls. In the meantime, several government-run schools have also followed in the implementation of the ban. In response to petitions filed by Muslim students, the Karnataka high court upheld the government ban on hijabs in schools, opining that the hijab is not an essential religious practice of Islam. The court ruling led to a series of strikes by opposition and Muslim organizations across the state, prompting a backlash from far-right Hindu nationalist groups.

Amidst the tensions stemming from the hijab ban, Hindutva activist calls for a ban on Muslim vendors by temple management fairs at temple fairs have led to such a ban at the Maari Puja in the Udupi district, with several more expected soon. The actions have sparked protests from not only the Muslim community but also from different places across the world, especially the Arab Gulf region, where a lot of Indian expatriates are situated. Along with statements from influential personalities such as Malala Yousufzai and Bella Hadid, protests have also taken place in Kuwait, Iraq, Israel and Turkey against the anti-Muslim policies of the BJP government.

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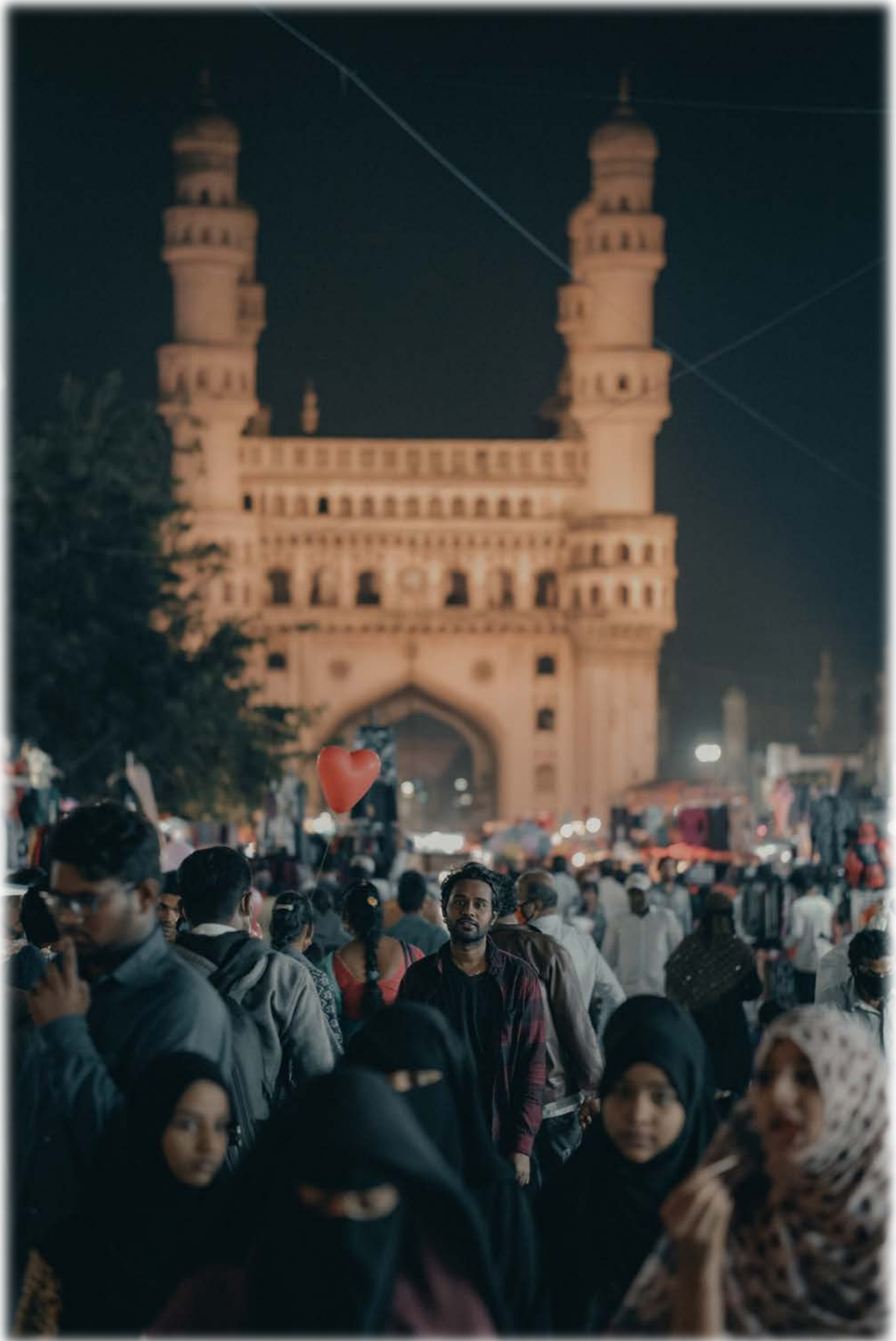
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## 11-year Anniversary of the Syrian Conflict – a Continuing Saga of War and Humanitarian Crises

The Syrian conflict has dragged on for eleven long years and continues with no clear signs of abating anytime soon. It had started with pro-democracy rallies in the southern city of Deraa in March 2011, influenced by Arab Spring protests in neighbouring countries. Protests demanding Bashar al-Assad's resignation erupted across Syria after the Syrian government employed lethal force to suppress opposition. The disturbance grew, and the crackdown became more severe than ever. Opposition supporters took up arms to defend themselves and later to rid their areas of security forces, as Assad vowed to crush what he called "foreign-backed terrorism". The violence quickly spiralled out of control, and the country devolved into civil war. Foreign powers began to take sides, sending money, weapons, and fighters to support one side or the other. The emergence of the Daesh group, alongside Kurdish military groups hostile to Ankara, and the involvement of Iran through Hezbollah and Russia on the side of Assad were major factors in the fragmentation of global responses to the Syrian conflict and its prolongation.

Eleven years of war have inflicted immense suffering on the Syrian people. More than half of Syria's pre-war population of 22 million people have fled the country. 6.9 million people have been internally displaced, with more than two million living in camps, while another 6.8 million are refugees or asylum seekers abroad. Eighty-four per cent of these refugees live in neighbouring host nations such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, which have had to cope with one of the world's greatest refugee exoduses in recent history. According to the UN, 14.6 million people inside Syria required humanitarian aid as of February 2022, with approximately 5 million classed as being in urgent or catastrophic need. More than 12 million people struggle to obtain enough food every day, a 51% increase since 2019, a situation which has been exacerbated in the last two



years by the economic downturn caused by stringent US sanctions, the Lebanese economic crisis, and the Covid-19 outbreak. The poverty rate has hit an all-time high of 90%.

While most stakeholders agree that the solution to the crisis is political and not military, UN-mediated peace talks - known as the Geneva II process – have failed to make any progress, largely because of Assad’s refusal to step down or make any exit and due to the fact that there is no clear winner on the ground – a dictatorial Assad is in charge of a weak state backed by Russia and Iran, the opposition parties are fragmented, divided and their territories much diminished, while the Syrian Kurds are in charge of significant amounts of territory to the north-east, all of which exacerbates the lack of will towards any political solution.

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**SPECIAL  
REPORT  
OF  
THE ISSUE**

## Sixth Fire in Three Months at Rohingya Camp in Bangladesh

A massive fire wreaked havoc on the Kutupalong Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, on the 8th of March, killing one adolescent and leaving nearly 2000 people homeless after 570 shanties burnt down. It was the sixth fire incident in the refugee camps this year. The densely packed Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar are home to more than a million Rohingya population who arrived by the 2017 influx, reportedly the largest in the history followed by the 1992 influx. Mohammed Shamsud Douza, a Bangladeshi government official in charge of refugees, said emergency workers had brought the fire under control after several hours. The cause was not immediately clear, he added.

This recent hazard follows a massive fire incident in January, which destroyed 1200 shelters and left 5000 people homeless and four smaller fires in between. Just a year ago, a fire incident in the same camp caused more than 10,000 people to become homeless. Experts warned that urgent action was needed to address refugee safety and emergency humanitarian access to prevent loss of life and mitigate exposure to extreme risk in the future. Moreover, authorities started fencing the camp with barbed wire in 2020, which imprisoned residents and exacerbated the danger to residents in emergent situations like fire occurrences, blocking exits and getaways. Although the international humanitarian agencies have called for the removal of the barrier several times, there has been no progress in their removal.

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