

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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Aljazeera journalist shot by IDF as western media complicit in distorting plain truth

The killing of the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, 51, on May 11, 2022, by Israeli forces, while she was covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, has spawned worldwide condemnation and outrage at the brutality of the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories. Abu Akleh, a long-standing journalist for Al Jazeera, was wearing a press vest and was standing with other journalists when she was killed with a shot into her head. The Israeli responses in light of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh seemed straight out of the playbook. Initially, it was claimed by the office of the Israeli Prime Minister that Shireen was a victim of Palestinian gunfire. However, in light of testimonies by other journalists present at the scene and surveillance footage which seemed to confirm Israeli gunfire as the culprit, the Israeli government immediately demanded “a joint pathological investigation” with the Palestinian Authority into the killing of the journalist, an offer rejected by the latter.

Later, Israeli police forces were caught on camera attacking and beating funeral attendants who were bearing the coffin of the slain journalist to the point that pallbearers were nearly forced to drop the coffin at one point. Activists and human rights organisations have called for an impartial investigation into the death of the Palestinian-American journalist, opining that Israel should not be allowed to whitewash the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh with yet another sham ‘investigation’.

On the other hand, Western governments and media outlets have been accused of being complicit in the whitewashing of Israeli crimes. White House press secretary Jen Psaki simply described the funeral attack scenes as “deeply disturbing”. The New York Times sufficed with the headline that included “Died at 51”,

making no mention of who was responsible for Shireen’s brutal death, while ABC News reported that the Palestinians “claimed” that Israel had killed the journalist. On the other hand, the New York Post condemned Representative Tlaib’s statement denouncing the Israeli crime on the Senate House floor, calling it an “anti-Israel tirade,” and charging that Tlaib was only interested in “slamming the Middle East’s only true democracy as it defends itself against terrorists.”

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Former dictator’s son returns to power in the Philippines

Fifty years after Philippines leader Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and established a dictatorship in the country, his namesake son Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr secured more than 30 million votes to win the May 9 presidential election. Marcos Jr’s win comes in the wake of support from the outgoing President Duterte, who was also instrumental in widely popular presidential daughter Sara Duterte’s decision to drop out of the presidential race, paving the way for Marcos Jr to emerge as the winner.

The Marcoses’ impending return to the Malacañang Presidential Palace is the result of the family’s decades-long efforts for a “counterrevolution,” specifically overturning the 1986 “People Power” revolt that toppled

their dynastic dictatorship. The process for this “counterrevolution” had begun immediately after their return from exile in 1991. Over the years, the Marcoses rose to various positions of power in the government. They had been instrumental in power politics and skillful manipulation of the shortcomings of the reformist administrations that came after them. This process would culminate in their return to the presidential palace. The winner of the presidential race, Marcos Jr., is a well-known politician; he has served as governor, congressman, and senator throughout his political career. In 2016, he had lost by a razor-thin margin in the vice-presidential election.

The full restoration of the Marcoses to power, however, would not mean that Marcos Jr. Will have free reign anytime soon. In fact, Marcos Jr will have to share power with other major political dynasties, such as the Dutertes. However, unlike the Dutertes, the Marcoses do not harbour lifelong animosities towards the West or an unexplained fascination with authoritarian regime-nations such as that of China or Russia. As a result, analysts believe that the incoming Filipino President is likely to pursue significantly more balanced relations with the Western superpowers. At the same time, together with its friends in the legislature, the future administration will likely oversee the introduction of a new constitution, which may disarm anti-corruption bodies, erode institutional checks and balances, and threaten human rights and civil liberties.

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School shooting in the US: no light at the end of this tunnel

On Tuesday, May 24, 2022, an 18-year-old gunman fatally shot 19 children and two adults at an elementary school in Texas before being taken down by law enforcement agents. The shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, a K-12 school for kids between grades 2-4, was America’s deadliest school shooting incident since 2012. The gunman was identified as 18-year-old Salvador Ramos from Uvalde, and officials confirmed that he had purchased his rifles, one of which was used in the attack, with a debit card. The

shooter also shot his grandmother before crashing a vehicle near the school. Authorities said that she was in critical condition.

Tuesday's shooting is at least the 30th at a K-12 school in 2022. So far in 2022, at least 39 shootings have occurred in K-12 schools, colleges, and universities, resulting in at least 10 deaths and 51 injuries. It is the deadliest bloodiest school shooting since the Sandy Hook massacre in Connecticut in 2012, which killed 26 people, including 20 children aged 6 to 7. Questions have been raised as to why the shooter had managed to remain inside the school for more than an hour before law enforcement shot him dead, and why law officers had delayed taking action, waiting outside school premises for over an hour before going in to act.

The Uvalde school shooting also brought to light the fierce debates around controls of gun ownership in the US, with proponents of gun control demanding stricter laws, while opponents claiming that restricting gun rights was not effective and wouldn't work, opting instead for the "we need more good guys with guns to check bad guys with guns" narrative. American gun debates are all the more exceedingly complicated due to the presence of powerful pro-gun lobbies such as the NRA, which dictate the political agenda on such matters. Moreover, while each state in the United States has the authority to enact its own criminal laws, in order for the same law to apply in all states, it must be approved at the federal level, and there has been limited success in establishing gun laws this way.

As a result, even when it is proved that states with stronger gun laws have lower gun death rates, it was found that illegal guns used in crimes in a state often came from outside the state; i.e. it is quite easy to carry a gun brought in another state with relaxed gun laws into a state where gun laws are stricter. When it comes to international comparisons, numerous countries such as Australia and the UK had seen a decrease in gun crime when statewide restrictions were imposed in the aftermath of horrific shootings. According to the BBC, a look at 130 studies from over 10 countries found that restrictions on guns were followed by a decline in the number of gun deaths.

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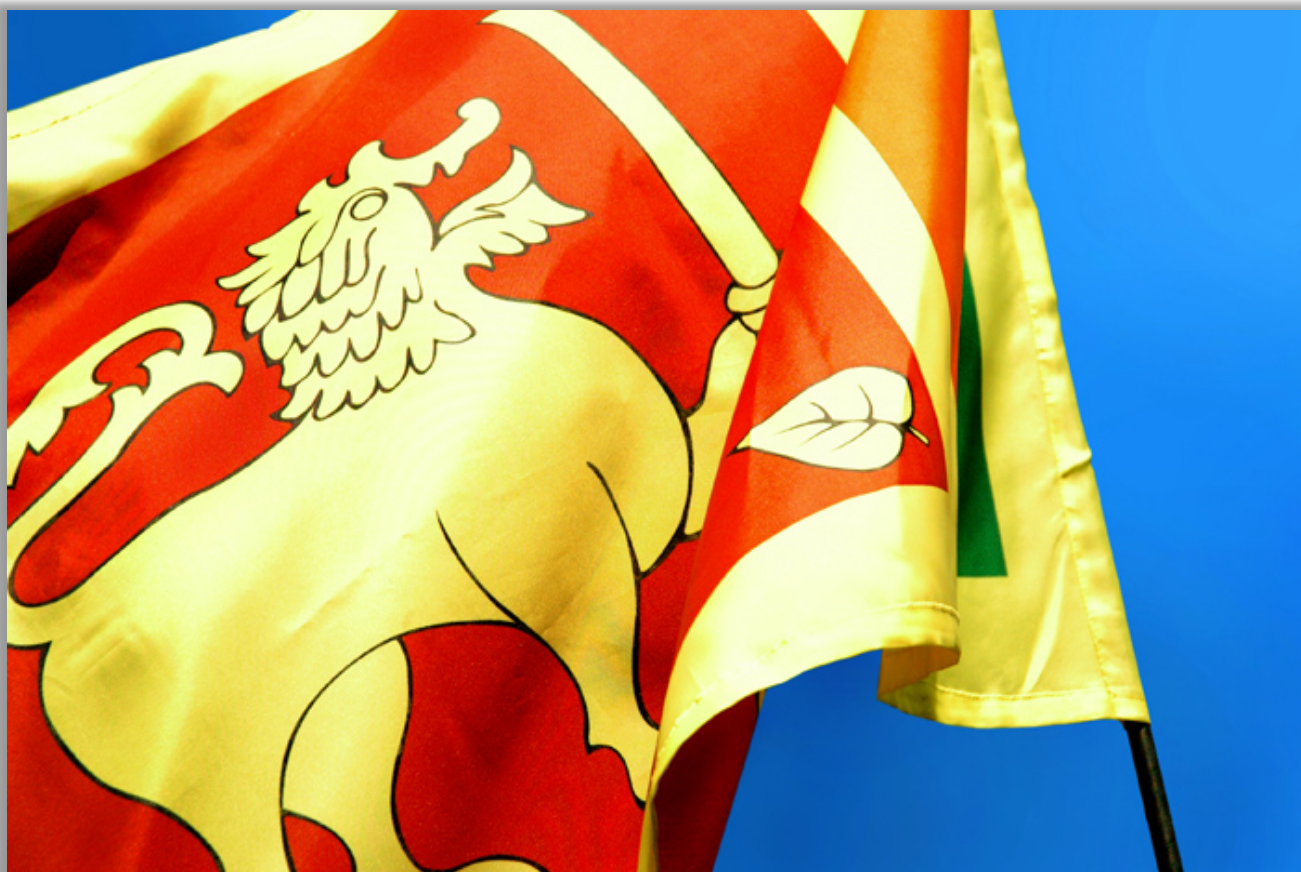
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Amidst resignation of the old PM and election of a new PM, chaos in Sri Lanka continues

Decades of fiscal mismanagement and populist policies by the Rajapaksa family became a cause for their undoing, as COVID-19-related economic hardships - price hikes on fuel, food and medicine, coupled with a shortage of those supplies and long power cuts since mid-March crippled the nation's economy and brought it to the brink of civil unrest and political instability. The unrest reached a point where President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, resigned and had to be evacuated by the Sri Lankan military in the face of violent protests against the government's mishandling of the economic crisis.

The outgoing PM was replaced by United National Party's (UNP) Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has also previously occupied the premiership post on five previous occasions but has never seen out a full term. His appointment as prime minister is widely seen as a move to allow President Gotabaya to continue in his position in the hope that the protests will eventually dissolve. But that is unlikely to happen as long as the economic crisis continues, and a key demand of the protesters, the resignation of incumbent President Gotabaya, is not met.

The Rajapaksas' populist and racist policies, which tried to establish a Sinhalese-Budhese hegemony on the multicultural island nation, are an important aspect of the issue that has received little attention. This involved implementing policies that harmed Tamil and Muslim citizens. From heightened militarisation in Tamil areas to the persecution of Tamil journalists and NGOs to issues like the mandatory cremation of Muslim COVID victims, the Rajapaksa administration firmly enacted policies that intended to cement non-Sinhala groups' status as second-class citizens. However, the persistence of such practises meant that the government made fiscal policy decisions influenced by the desire to preserve the Sinhala-Buddhist ethnocracy rather than the best interests of the country's economy and the welfare of all its residents.



As of now, the future forecast for Sri Lanka remains bleak - the country has defaulted on its external debt, fuel and food crises continue to plague the daily life of the country's citizens, and the new government has vowed to increase taxes to earn a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. The government has accepted some economic help from India and China, but such steps seem too little and too late in the face of the huge debt and economic crises that continue to plague the country's economy and society.

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Did climate change discourse win over the promise of economic security in the Australian election?



Australia's Labor Party leader, Anthony Albanese, declared victory in the 2022 national election after Prime Minister Scott Morrison admitted defeat while ballots were still being counted, effectively ending nearly a decade of conservative rule. Previously, the campaign centred on rising living costs, with Australia experiencing the highest inflation rate in 21 years and the central bank raising interest rates for the first time since 2010. Morrison cited record low unemployment rates as one of the key reasons people should vote for him again. Labor had criticised the government's economic record, claiming that wages were not growing fast enough to keep pace with rising living costs.

However, one subject dominated Australia's election: climate change. Despite the fact that both Labor and the Coalition were conspicuously mute on climate change during the campaign, it was the defining issue of this election. Analysts say that Australian voters chose the opposition Labor Party in response to a succession of environmental and climatic calamities in recent years, with incoming Prime Minister Anthony Albanese vowing to "end the climate conflicts" and transform Australia into a "renewable energy superpower."

Analysts have also noted that, despite Albanese's Labor Party securing a thin majority to form the next government, it was the Greens and so-called teal independents — both of whom campaigned on strong climate action — who gained the most popularity. Indeed, with a sea of teal independents winning seats on climate change and anti-corruption platforms, as well as a Greens rise in some key cities, Australia's enthusiasm for the two major parties appears to be waning.

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The crypto crash



The Bitcoin, Ethereum, and cryptocurrency markets have been dropping steadily over the last six months, collapsing alongside the stock market as the Federal Reserve and other central banks across the world raise interest rates and begin to reduce pandemic-era stimulus policies. The Bitcoin price has fallen to roughly \$27,000 per bitcoin, its lowest level since late 2020, while Ethereum has plummeted to less than \$1,500 per ether. Smaller cryptocurrencies have fared considerably worse, with double-digit percentage drops in the last 24 hours. Alongside Bitcoin and Ethereum, Terra and its sister token, Luna, which were valued at over \$60 billion two months ago, crumbled in a matter of days and became basically worthless in mid-May 2022.

Analysts think fears that the Federal Reserve may “step on the gas” in its campaign to reduce inflation in the US economy prompted the latest bitcoin and cryptocurrency sell-off. On the other hand, this major cryptocurrency sell-off has brought about increasing talk of regulation of the crypto market by various governments such as that of the US and UK. Highlighting the issue at hand, one analyst noted that people’s faith in crypto has wavered. And as the value of the crypto asset is not determined by its real-world utility or its ability to create cash in the future but is instead determined by what people believe it is worth, such a crash was inevitable once that faith wavered.

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Turkey blocks NATO bid of Sweden and Norway over PKK concerns

Turkey is blocking Sweden and Finland's bid to become the newest members of NATO based on concerns that the two countries support Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara says threaten its national security. Although Turkey had hosted consultations with Swedish and Finnish delegations in Ankara in late May on their NATO applications, Turkish President Erdoğan said the meetings had not been "at the desired level." Ankara's major demands are that the Nordic countries end their assistance for the PKK/YPG on their soil and lift their bans on the transfer of certain armaments to Turkey, which had been imposed by EU countries, including Sweden and Finland, following Turkey's military incursion into northern Syria in 2019.

Moreover, it is believed that Erdoğan may potentially seek to exploit Sweden and Finland's membership to extract concessions from the US and other allies. Turkey wishes to rejoin the US-led F-35 fighter jet programme from which it was suspended after purchasing Russian S-400 missile defence systems. Alternatively, Turkey plans to buy a new batch of F-16 fighter jets and update its existing fleet. Other likely requests include concessions from EU member countries regarding Turkey's failed ambition to join the EU, and more assistance to assist the country in supporting 3.7 million Syrian refugees.

Although some analysts have expressed concern that the threat of a Turkish veto could serve to erode the positive reputation earned by Turkey in helping Ukraine against Russia by providing TB2 Bayraktar drones, Ankara has repeatedly highlighted the issue as being essentially connected with the national security of the Turkish state.



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Desertification, Land Degradation now Affects 50% of World's Population and Economy: UN

On Friday, 13 May 2022, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification released a new report, the second edition of its “Global Land Outlook,” warning of the dangers of the climate emergency for more desertification and wildfires, as well as the catastrophic loss of human life. According to the report, the number and duration of droughts have grown by 29 per cent since 2000 when compared to the previous two decades.

Drought and other issues like water scarcity, falling agriculture productivity, sea-level rise, and overpopulation could drive up to 216 million people to move by 2050. According to the Commission, over the next few decades, 129 nations will see an increase in drought vulnerability mainly due to climate change — 23 primarily due to population expansion and 38 primarily due to climate change and population growth.

The report warns of food supply disruptions, forced migration, and rapid biodiversity loss, and notes that a “crisis footing” is required to conserve, restore, and manage land sustainably. Unless countries step up their efforts, there will be an increased risk of zoonotic infections such as Covid-19, worsening human health, and land resource conflicts. The UN Convention to Combat Desertification has identified global food systems as the primary cause of land degradation, blaming them for 80 per cent of deforestation, 70 per cent of freshwater use, and the single greatest cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss.

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Russia captures major Eastern Ukrainian city of Mariupol

Russia declared victory in the Ukraine war on Friday, 20 May 2022, after its troops seized control of Mariupol. According to Russia's military ministry, the final group of Ukrainian forces holed up in Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks surrendered after a nearly three-month siege that killed hundreds and left the port city in the wreckage. The ministry added in a statement that the underground buildings of Azovstal, where militants were sheltering, were now fully under Russian control and that 2,439 Ukrainian fighters had surrendered. Russia declared victory in the city just hours after Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelensky, stated the remaining fighters were told to leave the plant and save themselves. The total takeover of Mariupol provided Putin with a much-needed military triumph in a months-long struggle that was expected to be a breeze for the Kremlin.

Russia seizing complete control of the port city of Mariupol is seen as a major setback to Ukraine, both in terms of territory and morale, and allows Moscow to establish a land bridge to occupied Crimea.

After the fall of the city, the Ukrainian President stated his country's willingness to trade Russian captives for forces who surrendered at the Azovstal steel factory in Mariupol. The Ukrainian military intelligence agency later confirmed that Russia had handed over the bodies of 210 Ukrainian combatants killed in the struggle for Mariupol, a majority of whom were among the final Azovstal steelworks holdouts.

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Abortion debate in the US reaches new heights - Roe v Wade may be overturned. What does it bode?

Roe v. Wade was a landmark 1973 ruling by the US Supreme Court in which the Court ruled that the US Constitution protected a pregnant woman's liberty to choose to have an abortion without excessive government restriction. The ruling invalidated several federal and state abortion laws in the United States prevalent at the time and created the foundation for modern federal protection for the right to access abortions in the US. However, a leaked draft opinion from the Conservative-controlled United States Supreme Court suggests that justices decided to overturn the landmark ruling, which is poised to re-ignite discussion on an issue that has dominated the US political arena for decades. If finalised, it will be viewed as a significant victory for conservative voices in the United States; in fact, three of the last four Supreme Court selections were pushed through the Senate specifically to raise the likelihood of reversing the 1973 judgement protecting a woman's right to have access to legal abortion.

Following the overturning of Roe versus Wade, it is expected that abortion bans will be implemented in more than half of the states, disproportionately affecting young, poor, and minority women. In such a case, women's rights advocates argue that while middle-class and wealthy women will most likely have the resources to go to nearby "sanctuary states" to perform the surgery, less fortunate women will not. While abortion is clearly a complicated medical procedure requiring a high degree of skill and expertise everywhere, the debates on the right to abortion are unique and highly politicised in the context of US politics since they deal with the degree of basic personal freedoms and the right to privacy enshrined in the US constitution, and are firmly split into party lines, which means that a position on the issue is often a definitive marketable stance in the case of a US presidential hopeful or contender.

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