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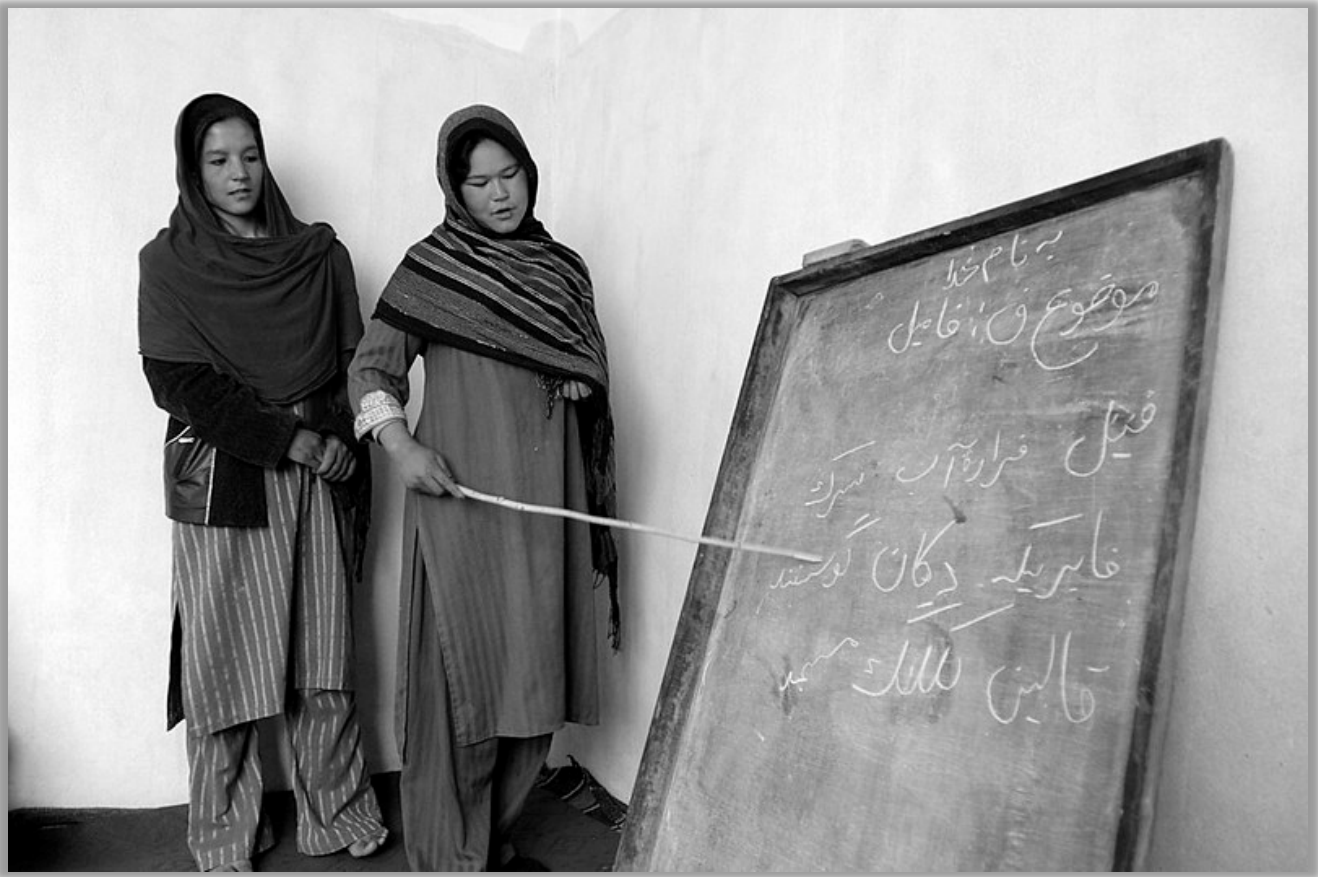


The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute.

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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Palestine a winner amidst western hypocrisy in 2022 FIFA world cup

The 2022 FIFA world cup, held in Qatar from 20 November to 18 December 2022, was the first such an international event held in the Arab and Muslim world. Argentina was crowned the champions, their third such title and first since 1986, after winning a historic final against the title holders France 4–2 on penalties following a 3–3 draw after extra time.

The great surprise of the tournament was the Arab-African nation Morocco, who played all the way to the semifinals, defeating much stronger teams such as Spain and Portugal in the round of 16 and quarterfinals, respectively, before being knocked out by France in the semis, and Croatia in the third-place playoffs. However, the tournament was also more than just an action-packed sports tournament. Two issues surrounding the event, causing much debate and discussion, were Western hypocrisy surrounding the event and the incredible support shown by audiences for the Palestinian cause.

As this year's World Cup host, Qatar has come under intense U.S. and European pressure, name-calling and even ridicule on the issue of gay rights, as well as migrant worker exploitation, alongside others such as not allowing fans to drink beer in the football stadiums. Analysts and experts, while agreeing that some of the above could construe as valid rights concerns, have opined that such concerns often come from a hard-to-forget legacy of Orientalist caricaturing of the Muslim non-Western Other, along with shortsightedness that overlooks the West's own legacy in terms of human rights abuse, and legacy of political and economic imperialism, which far trumps that of Qatar and the Muslim world. This hypocrisy seemed most evident in the final prize-giving ceremony, where many Western commentators and opinionists seemed to lose their minds at the sight of the Emir of Qatar gifting the Argentine team captain Lionel Messi a 'Bisht' garment along with the world cup trophy.

The other issue that was abundant in the event's media coverage was the public show of support for Palestine and its people. The show of support for Palestine, in fact, took centre stage, uniting Arab peoples and reaffirming their commitment to the Palestinian cause, seen by experts as a strong rebuke to the

support for Israel extended by authoritarian and repressive Arab regimes in the region, which had signed normalization deals with Israel over the past couple of years.

The display of support for Palestine was not confined to Arab fans but extended to supporters from other countries as well. This was evident not only in the display of Palestinian flags and the chanting of slogans such as “Free Palestine” during matches but also in the boycott of Israeli journalists and media outlets by football fans, as demonstrated in numerous viral videos and online clips.

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Chinese President Xi's official trip to Saudi Arabia a diplomatic success

Chinese President Xi Jinping's two-day state visit to Saudi Arabia from December 7-9, 2022, came amid high tensions between the United States and the two countries. The visit culminated in a number of agreements and summits and was heralded as a “new era” of Chinese-Arab partnership in the fields of energy, defence and security.

During his two-day visit, Xi Jinping attended a “Saudi-Chinese summit,” a China-Arab summit, and a China-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit, intending to strengthen bilateral ties and cooperation in a variety of fields. Moreover, the Chinese President also pledged to enhance the comprehensive strategic partnership with Riyadh by signing 34 energy and investment deals covering green energy, information technology, infrastructure, and medical industries.

Xi’s long-awaited visit comes amid several disagreements between the U.S., and both Beijing and Riyadh. To Washington’s dismay, two China and Saudi Arabia have only strengthened ties in recent years. Saudi Arabia, a staunch U.S. ally for eight decades, has grown resentful of what it perceives as a waning U.S. security presence in the region, particularly in light of increasing threats from Iran and its armed Yemeni proxies. As American allies in the Arab Gulf accuse Washington of failing to provide adequate security guarantees in the region, China has strengthened ties with Gulf monarchies as well as U.S. adversaries Iran and Russia. Although Saudi Arabia is keen to reject notions of polarisation or “taking sides,” it also demonstrated that it could develop deep partnerships with China without the criticism or “interference” that it has long resented from its Western counterparts.

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Failed elections in Tunisia

Tunisia’s parliamentary elections on 17 December 2022 had one of the lowest electoral turnouts ever recorded in the world, with less than 9% of eligible voters showing up. The vote was, in effect, a referendum on Tunisian President Kais Saied’s vision to reshape Tunisian politics. However, potential voters largely avoided the polling places, resulting in a meagre voter turnout. Most opposition parties also boycotted the election, accusing the President of reversing democratic progress made since 2011. Saied seized power in a coup in 2021, leaving proponents of democracy in the country with few options.

Earlier in 2022, Saied implemented a constitutional referendum that consolidated his autocratic rule after dismissing the prime minister and dissolving parliament in July 2021. However, the low turnout in the recent parliamentary elections, in contrast to the 42% turnout in 2019, raises concerns about Saied’s grip on power, as it suggests that he no longer has significant public support.

With no electoral legitimacy, the incoming parliament will have difficulty holding the President accountable, partly because Saied rigged the system through a new electoral law, which saw the main political parties absent from the elections altogether. Political parties would have had a much smaller role in the election under Saied’s new electoral law anyway, which he passed by decree, even if they had participated. Party affiliation was not printed next to candidate names on ballots.

Furthermore, there is little, if any, international or external pressure on Saied to change course. Saied’s friendly meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 14 December in Washington, followed by a meeting with President Joe Biden, suggests that pressure on Tunisia’s leader to change course remains limited at best.



This is all the more evident with the lukewarm U.S. statement to the Tunisian elections, which, although decrying the low turnout, nonetheless welcomed the elections as “an essential initial step toward restoring the country’s democratic trajectory,” thus indicating in no small way tacit U.S. support for the incumbent Saied, and his continuing assault on Tunisia’s fragile democracy and its institutions.

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Anti-Covid Protests in China herald sweeping policy changes despite state repression

Frustration and grievances over China's zero-COVID policy have sparked large-scale protests in over a dozen cities. On a scale not seen since the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations, these youth-led social protests included outspoken calls for change not only in COVID-19 policies but also in governance and politics. The demonstrations were followed by a rapid reversal of strict "zero covid" policies by the Chinese government, in what appeared to be a softening of stance and even condoning the public protests.

The recent protests erupted after ten people were killed in a fire in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang's far western region. Residents in Urumqi blamed the tragedy on "zero covid" restrictions, despite the city government's denial of any such delays. People took to the streets on Friday to demand an end to all lockdowns in Xinjiang, which has been subjected to some of the strictest controls since 2020. Protests then spread to a dozen of cities in the country.



On college campuses, students held vigils. From eastern Shanghai to southwestern Sichuan, residents gathered in major cities, including Beijing and Shanghai. In addition to commemorating those who had died and venting about lockdowns, their rallies voiced deeper frustrations about political oppression and social malaise; some even demanded the deposition of the Chinese Communist Party and President Xi Jinping.

The Chinese Community Party responded by relaxing some virus restrictions, signalling softened positions in the face of mounting protests, despite high daily case numbers. This was followed by the reversal of 'zero-covid' policies, whereby mass testing, health codes, centralized quarantine and snap lockdowns were scrapped for most of China's 1.4 billion people, according to a 10-point plan by China's National Health

Commission. The new announcement also brings to an end the city-wide lockdowns, reducing the permitted closure zones from entire districts and neighbourhoods down to individual buildings, floors, and residents.

While the measures suggest a willingness to listen to public opinion and increase economic openness in China in the wake of the pandemic, there have been numerous reports of widespread protest crackdown. Protesters in Beijing and Shanghai have reported being subjected to heightened digital surveillance, strip searches, threats against their families, and being subjected to physical duress during lengthy interrogations. These actions reveal a clear intolerance for public dissent and a desire to silence those who challenge the government's authority.

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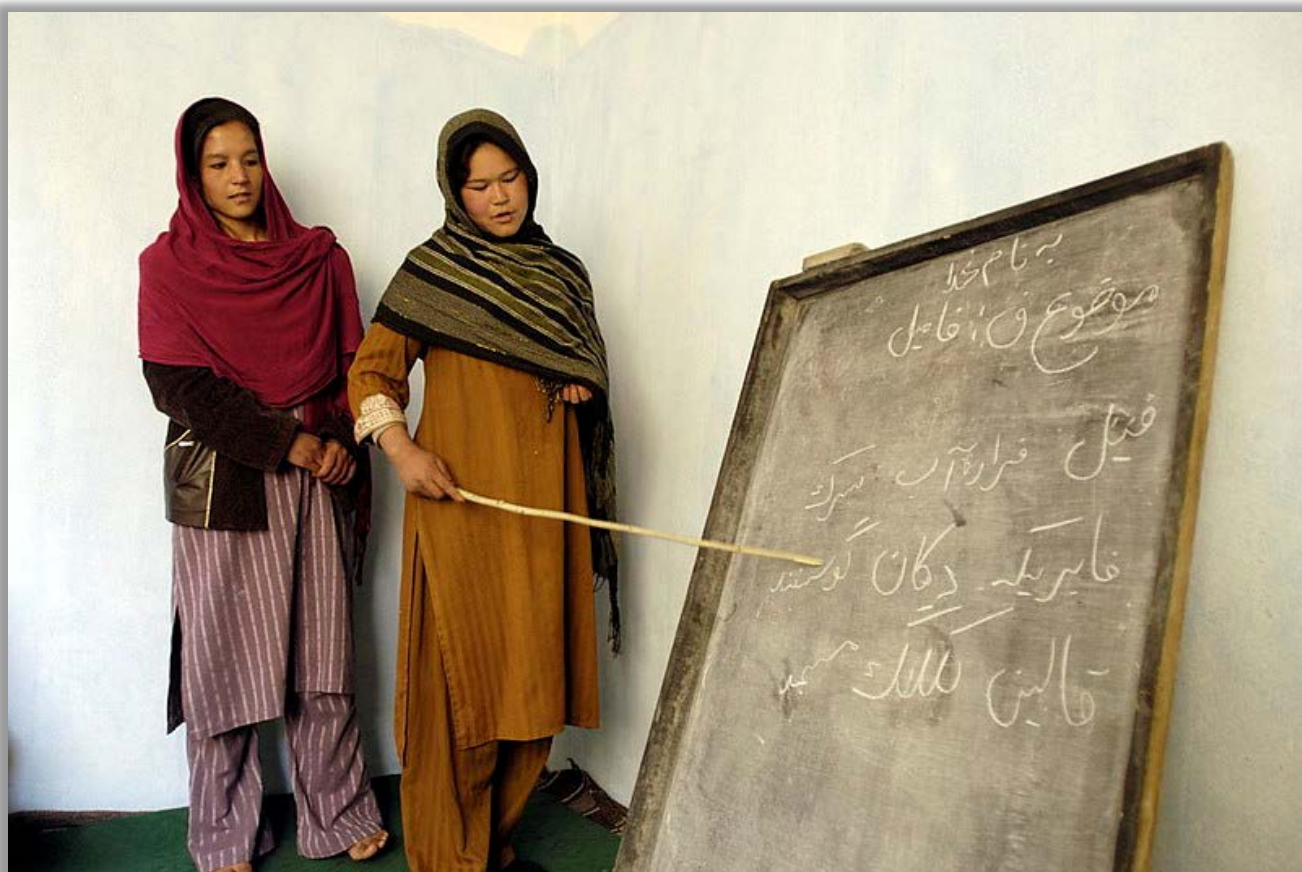
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Taliban issues decrees banning women's university education and NGO participation

In December 2022, the Taliban government of Afghanistan issued two decrees that further restricted the role of women in public spaces while also triggering a global backlash. In the first instance, despite appearing to have promised a more liberal approach to women's education earlier on, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers in mid-December 2022 banned female students from attending universities effective immediately.

This follows in the wake of earlier decrees preventing Afghan girls from attending middle school and high school back in September 2022. Not only does this affect students, but female educators as well, who were not allowed back to their workplaces in light of the ban. In addition to this, the Taliban also published a decree ordering all foreign and domestic non-governmental groups in Afghanistan to suspend employing women. As it stands, Afghan women are currently restricted from most employment and are expected to conform with official directives pertaining to Islamic dress codes for women in public.

The Taliban measures regarding closing avenues for women education triggered a global backlash from international organizations and global leaders, including from Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. The U.N. Security Council decried the increasing restrictions on women's rights in Afghanistan, urging the Taliban to reverse them immediately. A press release stated that it "reiterated its deep concern of the suspension of schools beyond the sixth grade and its call for the full, full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and girls in Afghanistan." Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that the ban was "neither Islamic nor humane," and that Islam encouraged education and science rather than discouraged it.



The Minister of Higher Education in the Taliban government, Nida Mohammad Nadim, defended the decision to ban women's university education, citing the necessity of preventing the mixing of genders in universities and the failure of many women to adhere to official dress codes.

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6th TRT world forum takes place in Istanbul

The TRT World Forum 2022, an annual two-day event held in Istanbul on December 9-10, brought together academics, journalists, intellectuals, politicians, and members of civil society from around the world to discuss a range of critical global issues such as global cooperation, leadership, peace diplomacy, food security, the energy crisis, climate change, migration, media and digitalization, and disinformation. The theme of this year's gathering was "Mapping the Future: Uncertainties, Realities, and Opportunities."

The first day of the forum featured speeches by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who emphasized the importance of Turkish diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine war and a major grain deal, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who thanked Turkey for its efforts and assistance in prisoner swaps with Russia.

On the second day, the keynote speaker, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, emphasized the importance of conflict resolution and mediation in a "chaotic global landscape" where no conflict is local anymore, in a session titled "Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: Shaping the Future of Global Leadership."

Some of the topics on the forum agenda on the first day included: "Feeding the World: Ensuring Global Food Security in Times of Crisis", "Disarming Disinformation: Defending the Truth in the Digital Age" and "The Energy Crisis and Climate Change: Time to Turn Crisis into Opportunity?" On the second day, the discussions continued to revolve around various other topics, including: "Digitalization: A Rewarding Challenge for Public Broadcasting?", "Beyond Humanitarianism: Addressing the Global Migration Crisis", "The Russia-Ukraine War: Lessons Learned", "Reporting from the Front Lines: Journalism in the Shadow of War". The event attracted nearly 100 speakers and over 1,000 participants from 40 different countries worldwide, bringing to a close an eventful year for Türkiye as a hub for major diplomatic events and mediation efforts.

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OpenAI's ChatGPT ushers in a new era of natural language processing with impressive performance and flexibility

On 10 November 2022, OpenAI launched ChatGPT, a revolutionary new language model specifically designed for conversation and chat applications. The launch of ChatGPT has been met with widespread excitement and anticipation, with many experts hailing it as a major milestone in the field of natural language processing. One of the key features of ChatGPT is its ability to generate highly coherent and natural-sounding responses to user input in a wide range of contexts. Unlike previous language models, which were limited to generating responses based on a fixed set of pre-determined topics, ChatGPT is able to adapt to any topic and context, making it ideal for use in chat applications where users may be discussing a wide variety of topics.

In addition to its flexibility, ChatGPT also boasts impressive performance on a variety of benchmarks, including the CommonSenseQA and OpenSubtitles datasets. This has led many experts to predict that ChatGPT could significantly impact the development of conversational A.I. applications in the near future. Another major advantage of ChatGPT is its ability to handle the long-form conversation, a feature that has historically been a challenge for natural language processing models. ChatGPT can maintain coherence and context over a conversation, allowing it to carry on more natural and engaging conversations with users.

The potential applications of ChatGPT are vast, and many companies and organizations are already exploring ways to incorporate it into their products and services. Chatbots that use ChatGPT could be used to provide customer service, assist with online shopping, or even serve as companions for people who are lonely or isolated. Some have also raised concerns about the potential misuse of ChatGPT, such as the generation of fake news or the creation of deepfake videos. However, OpenAI has stated that it is committed to the responsible use of the technology and is working with stakeholders to address potential ethical concerns. Overall, the launch of ChatGPT marks a major step forward in the field of natural language processing and has the potential to revolutionize the way we interact with computers and A.I. As ChatGPT continues to be developed and refined, it will be interesting to see the many ways in which it will be used to improve and enhance our daily lives.

Disclaimer: The entire report and headline above were generated by the ChatGPT bot in response to the question “Generate a 400-word news report on the launch of ChatGPT, detailing its relevance and possible future impact,” via <https://chat.openai.com/chat>

Misrule and economic crises plague Bangladesh’s world image as opposition take to streets

As the upcoming 12th general election in Bangladesh approaches in December 2023, the political climate in the country has become increasingly complex. The Awami League government, led by Sheikh Hasina, has recently seen its public trust decline due to deep economic crises, including high inflation, rising fuel prices, and rapidly declining foreign exchange reserves. This decline in trust has been further exacerbated by the government’s repressive policies against political opponents and ongoing concerns about the government’s human rights record raised by the opposition, human rights organizations, and even the country’s development partners (the United States, Japan, Germany, and the European Union). These parties have called on the government to hold free, fair, and inclusive elections.

In the weeks leading to a major opposition rally held in Dhaka on 9 December, Sheikh Hasina’s government initiated a repressive campaign against the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which held a number of rallies calling for her resignation. In the meantime, police and security forces detained two prominent leaders of BNP, its general secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, and a former minister Mirza Abbas, and later denied them bail amid a brutal crackdown on government opponents that has resulted in at least seven deaths and thousands more arrests.

On 10 December, thousands of Bangladesh National Party (BNP) supporters attended a large rally in Dhaka, calling for the Awami League government to resign and for fair elections to be held under a caretaker government. All seven opposition BNP MPs announced their resignations from parliament at the event, effectively rendering the legislature a rubber stamp for the Hasina government.

Both the 2014 and 2018 general elections in Bangladesh were marred by claims of vote manipulation and political opposition targeting. Since taking power in 2009, Hasina's government has been accused of grave human rights violations and suppression of press freedom, with numerous cases of arbitrary detention for criticism of state policies.



In December 2021, the United States imposed sanctions on Bangladesh's elite security force unit, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), due to its involvement in numerous documented cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. However, recent investigative reports have revealed that the RAB continues to receive mass surveillance training from countries such as the United Kingdom, despite the sanctions.

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