



THE FUTURE

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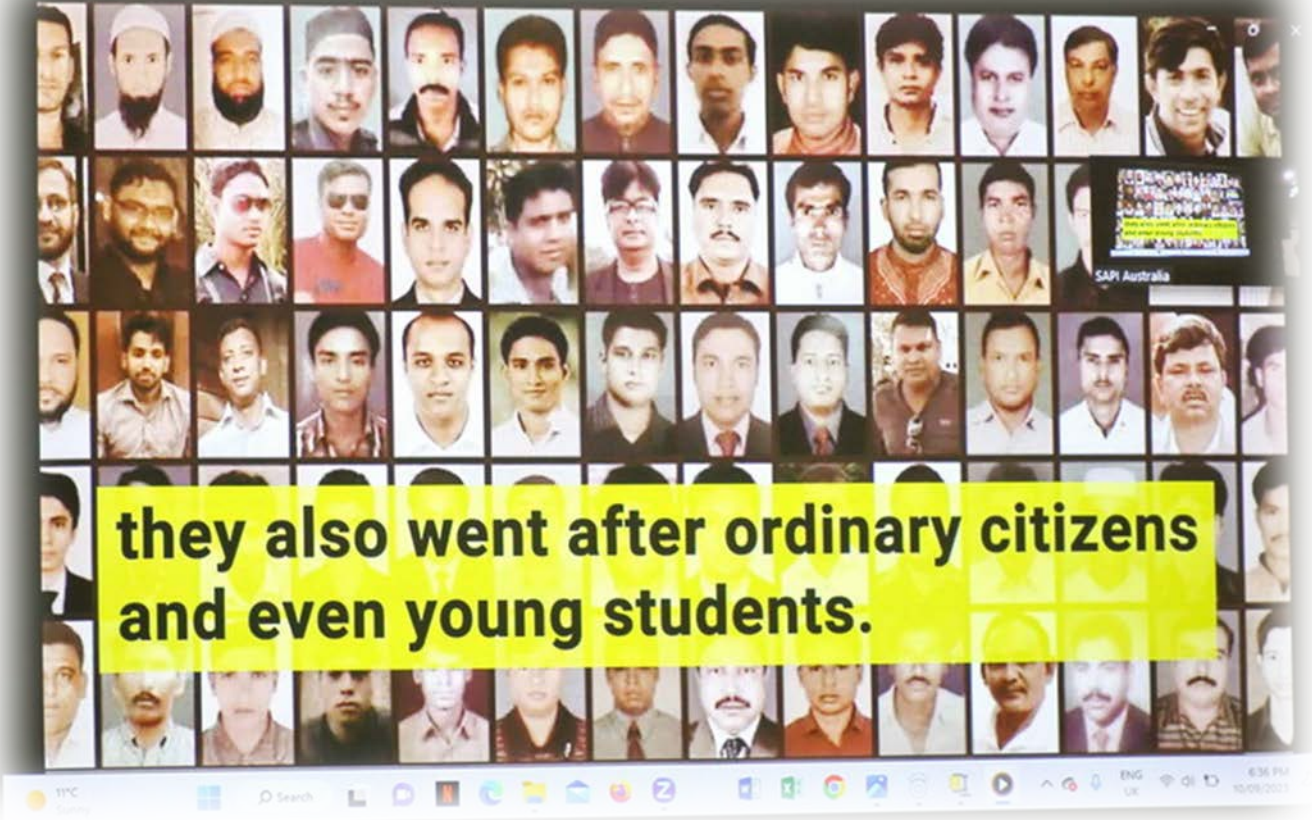
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This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to the academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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Topics in this issue

CLIMATE CHANGE BEHIND HOTTEST SUMMER ON RECORD 3

SIX NEW NATIONS INVITED TO JOIN BLOC AFTER 15TH BRICS SUMMIT 4

DEATH OF MERCENARY GROUP WAGNER’S CHIEF IN PLANE CRASH 5

AUGUST 25 ‘GENOCIDE DAY’ REMEMBERED BY ROHINGYA 6

DEATH OF POPULAR ISLAMIC SCHOLAR ALLAMA DELWAR HOSSAIN SAYEEDI IN BANGLADESH 7

FITCH DOWNGRADES THE US FROM HIGHEST TRIPLE AAA RATING TO AA+ - THE IMPLICATIONS 8

HOW FRENCH NEO-COLONIALISM HELPED CREATE AFRICA’S ‘COUP BELT’ 9

AUGUST 30 CELEBRATED AS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES 10



Climate change behind hottest summer on record

According to the UN's weather agency and the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service, the summer of 2023 was the hottest ever recorded globally by a large margin. The three-month period from June through August surpassed previous records by a large margin, with an average temperature of 16.8 C (62.2F) - 0.66C above average. July 2023 was also the hottest month ever recorded since records began to be kept starting from 1940. At the same time, the world's seas, which cover more than 70% of the earth's surface, were the hottest ever recorded, nearly 21 C (69.8 F). Scientists point to ever-warming human-caused climate change from the usage of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas, with a boost from a natural El Nino event that began earlier this year, which is a brief warming of sections of the Pacific Ocean that affects weather around the world as reasons behind such weather patterns.

Scientists have further estimated that temperatures are now warmer than they have been in around 120,000 years, using methods such as measuring tree rings, ice cores, and other proxies. Though the earth had previously been warmer, this was way before human civilisation, and back then, the poles were not covered in ice. Moreover, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer, daily September temperatures have been following the trend and are higher than previously reported for this time of year. On the other hand, while the world's air and oceans were breaking heat records, Antarctica was breaking sea ice records, according to the World Meteorological Organization. Scientists believe that the coming years will only lead to more such events, and it is pertinent that world governments act right now to prevent catastrophic 3.0 C global warming, which would wreak havoc on ecosystems worldwide.

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Six new nations invited to join bloc after 15th BRICS summit

The aftermath of the 15th BRICS summit, comprising a bloc of top emerging economies, saw a major step in expanding its reach and influence with the announcement that six more nations have been invited to join as new members. Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been invited to join as full members from January 1 next year. Originally formed in 2009 with founding members Brazil, Russia, India and China, the bloc first expanded to admit South Africa in 2010, when it became known as BRICS. The group's expansion is part of its strategy to consolidate power and alter global governance into a "multipolar" world order that prioritises the voices of the Global South in order to steer away from a world that has often benefited the Global North. With the new additions, analysts have opined that while the future of the bloc looks promising with its focus on bringing in energy-rich members, there remains a lack of unity and differing priorities within the bloc.

The admission of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, and Egypt constitutes the first MENA representation in the organisation and shows the bloc's focus on bringing in energy-rich members. On the other hand, Argentina's participation was championed by member Brazil. Expansion was actively pushed by Russia and China, according to observers, as they faced sanctions from Western nations. On the other hand, BRICS members such as India were initially more hesitant to include new members, although BRICS leaders this week expressed their strong support for the proposal. Growing Chinese and Russian influence within the bloc, however, incidentally shows waning Indian influence within it, more so because India is seen as a strong ally of the US and the West in the region, especially as a counterbalance to China's growing hegemony in the South Asian region. The inclusion of members such as Iran, however, signals the transformation of the bloc towards one with an anti-Western stance since Russia, China and Iran suffer from Western sanctions led by the US, and the bloc could provide them with a way to get around those sanctions.

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Death of mercenary group Wagner's chief in plane crash

Two months after heading a short-lived mutiny against Moscow, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the private mercenary group Wagner and nine others, died in a private jet crash outside Moscow that left no survivors. Russian investigators confirmed his death based on results from genetic testing. The authorities, however, offered no explanation as to what had caused the crash that killed several other top lieutenants of the Wagner mercenary group alongside Prigozhin, such as Dmitry Utkin and Valery Chekalov. While seemingly suspicious, his death raises questions about whether Russia will continue to rely on mercenary groups in the future and the fate of Wagner's military-business operations around the globe, especially in African countries. The second question is easier to answer – the Russian state in the recent past has given its support for the continuation of Wagner's operations in African countries, and to date, there does not seem to be any decline in requests for its services in the African countries it operates.

While private mercenary groups continue to be illegal under Russian law, analysts have suggested that this does not mean that the Russian state is ready yet to stop relying on them – mercenary armies are often more efficient than the regular armed Russian forces and help the Kremlin avoid the official involvement and death of regular Russian servicemen in Ukraine. According to analysts, many smaller Russia-based mercenary groups are already poised to fill the vacuum that Prigozhin's death and Wagner's breakup leaves on the scene of private mercenary operations - Molfar, a Ukrainian open-source intelligence group, said that as of March, 25 Russian private military companies operated in Ukraine, with names such as Redoubt, Anti-Terror Eagle, and Yastreb (Hawk), mostly employing ex-military officers. Unsurprisingly, most of these companies are owned and operated by Putin's close allies among the oligarchs and wealthy businessmen, and many of their operations are funded by the Russian state.

Prigozhin, 62, became internationally renowned following Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, where his Wagner mercenaries led the Russian assault on Bakhmut in the war's longest and bloodiest combat. He used social media to celebrate Wagner's accomplishments and later, to accuse Russia's military establishment of incompetence and even treachery. In June, he organised a mutiny in which Wagner fighters took control of the southern city of Rostov-on-Don and shot down a number of military helicopters. President Vladimir Putin termed his mutiny a treachery and promised a strong retaliation. The mutiny was called off after a deal in which the Kremlin agreed that Prigozhin and some of his troops would leave for Belarus and that a criminal case against him for armed mutiny would be withdrawn.

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August 25 'Genocide Day' remembered by Rohingya

On the sixth anniversary of the 'Genocide Day,' the day of terrible violence that forced them from their homes, thousands of Rohingya refugees gathered in camps in Bangladesh to demand their safe return to Myanmar. Bangladesh is home to approximately a million members of the stateless Rohingya minority, although the situation is complicated by the fact that Bangladesh does not consider them as refugees but rather as displaced foreign citizens, despite Myanmar wanting nothing to have to do with them. As the Myanmar military began killing Rohingya men, raping women, and torching their villages in 25 August, 2017, over 750,000 fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, where they took shelter in the southern Cox's Bazar region, which is now de-facto the world's largest refugee camp. However, frustration is rampant among the camp-dwelling refugees over lawlessness in the settlements, which caused dozens of people, including women and children, to get killed in Rohingya camp confrontations, as well as cuts to international humanitarian funding, which caused the UN World Food Programme to drastically restrict humanitarian help to the Rohingya camps, and the failure to make headway on a much-hyped about refugee repatriation agreement.

Despite worries from rights groups that the conditions for their return are unsafe, Bangladesh and Myanmar have tried working on a pilot program to begin returning the Rohingya to their homes, although any lack of progress on that front means that it is on the verge of being shelved. On the other hand, those Rohingya who remain in Myanmar are denied citizenship and access to healthcare and must obtain permission to travel outside their townships. The issue has, in fact, become so politicised that none of the options – repatriation in Myanmar, granting them status in Bangladesh, or resettlement in a third country, seem possible now. Thus, stuck between the Scylla and Charybdis of Bangladesh and Myanmar, many Rohingya choose to make dangerous journeys to faraway countries in search of a better life. But many who venture on such journeys pay with their lives - according to the UN, 2022 was one of the deadliest years at sea for the Rohingya, with around 400 refugees dying while crossing the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal from Myanmar and Bangladesh to places such as Malaysia.

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Death of popular Islamic scholar Allama Delwar Hossain Sayeedi in Bangladesh

Allama Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, 83, a long-time imprisoned Bangladeshi Islamic scholar, former parliamentarian, and the vice president of Bangladesh's opposition Jamaat-e-Islami party, passed away recently after a heart attack. According to his family members, Allama Sayeedi had been suffering from heart complications in the past, and his latest heart attack episode may have arisen out of poor healthcare conditions in prison. Moreover, various reports pointed out the poor medical attention he received afterwards, which many say played a part in his death. Thousands of Jamaat supporters thronged the hospital premises shortly after, chanting slogans against the government for falsely keeping him in prison and demanding that his funeral be allowed in Dhaka Baitul Mukarram mosque. The police refused, firing tear gas and charging batons to disperse crowds. Later, the scholar's body was taken to his hometown in Pirojpur, where his subsequent janazah and burial were attended by huge crowds.

Sayeedi had been in prison since 2014, when an earlier death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by judges at the Bangladesh-based International War Crimes Tribunal (ICT). The ICT, tasked by the Awami League government with trying collaborators of the Pakistani forces during the 1971 War of Independence of Bangladesh, convicted him over alleged war crimes committed under the name of a Delu Sikder in the Barisal region in 1971. Despite the defence argument that this was a case of mistaken identity, that not only were Delu Sikder and Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, not the same person, but that the former had died during the war, the judges went ahead and delivered the death penalty anyway. In the meantime, the Economist and Amar Desh newspapers revealed leaked tapes showing the ICT judges were in deep collusion with the Hasina administration, proving that the trials were politically motivated witch-hunts. Moreover, a key prosecution-turned-defence witness, Sukhoranjan Bali, who had come to testify that Sayeedi had not killed his brother, was abducted from the stairs of the ICT, allegedly by state forces, which deepened the public suspicion behind the reasons for the tribunal trials.

The day of the initial death sentence verdict in 2013 saw huge protests and public demonstrations against it. The government decided to take a hardline stance in response, which culminated in widespread violent crackdowns and left more than 100 people dead throughout the country. Following that, his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Sayeedi's death renewed cracks in Bangladeshi society over questions of Islam and justice and saw an outpouring of international support. Several Awami activists were suspended for showcasing vocal support for the scholar, while activists have accused the government of initiating a crackdown against opposing voices – human rights groups decried the arrest of a mother after her son, who was living overseas, made a Facebook post condemning the government role in Sayeedi's death.

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Fitch downgrades the US from highest triple AAA rating to AA+ - the implications

On August 1, 2023, credit rating agency Fitch, one of the world's three major credit rating agencies alongside Standard & Poor's (S&P) and Moody's, downgraded the US credit rating from AAA to AA+. While this would mean very little in practical terms of how the US economy functions in meeting its financial commitments, this was the second time that the US lost its AAA rating, after S&P did the same in 2011. In downgrading the ratings, Fitch gave three main reasons - concerns about the US economy's performance and outlook in the next three years, a high and rising national debt level that is projected to exceed 120% of GDP by 2023, which could limit the government's fiscal flexibility and increase its borrowing costs, and finally, a steady deterioration in standards of governance over the last 20 years, including on fiscal and debt matters, as evidenced by repeated political standoffs over managing the country's finances, such as the debt ceiling crisis.

While the downgrading could possibly have negative implications for the US and the global economy, such as lowering confidence in the US dollar as the world's reserve currency and reduced attractiveness of US assets for foreign investors, there is no indication that will happen anytime soon. Fitch noted that the US rating ceiling would remain at AAA despite the downgrading. Market impact has been minimal, and there was no significant movement in the price and yield of US Treasuries, nor in the value of the dollar against other currencies. As analysts note – debt is Washington's golden goose. The reality is that there is ample demand for US debt since it plays a vital role not only in the US financial system but across the globe. US Treasuries account for roughly half of cross-border loans and trade financing arrangements globally. China and Japan are the world's top buyers of US Treasuries, which serve as a source of US dollar holdings for global reserves as well as the primary instrument for financing international trade, thus guaranteeing the US substantial economic and political benefits.

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How French neo-colonialism helped create Africa's 'coup belt'

A military coup by the presidential guard in Niger deposed the democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum on 26 July. In response to calls for a return to civilian rule, economic sanctions and further threats by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to use military force in Niger, the coup leadership, led by General Abdourahmane Tchiani, reacted by authorising troops from neighbouring military-ruled Mali and Burkina Faso to come to its defence in the event of an invasion, as well as ordering the French ambassador to leave the country. With this latest coup, analysts opine that the West African Sahel region has become a true “coup belt” across the girth of Africa, as many Sahel nations, such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad, are now governed by unelected military rulers. Moreover, over the recent years, the region has also seen the proliferation of armed Islamist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), linked to Daesh and Al-Qaeda. As such, Niger, before the coup, was considered to be an important strategic partner for Western states such as France and the US, both of which have military bases in the country.

Of particular interest here is the order to expel the French ambassador from Niger and the strong anti-French sentiment in the region, which helped the military governments come and stay in power. In the Sahel region, the historical memory of French colonialism - cruel military campaigns, forced labour, extensive repression, cultural erasure, racial segregation, and forced displacement- is still alive. France's more recent mishaps, disappointments, and outright failures in Africa, along with colonial-era suspicions, have led Sahel communities to be distrustful of the former colonial power and everything it undertakes in the region, as well as allow putschists to popularly pitch themselves as anti-colonial heroes against a neocolonial France and its corrupt pawns in local governments. Rather than attempting to identify and address the root causes of conflict by strengthening state institutions, encouraging good governance, and working with them as regional partners instead of fixing former colonies, French attempts to resolve security problems solely through military force, which was often ineffective, instead fueled conflicts and quickly turned public opinion against France. In the regional sense, Russia has benefited the most from France's numerous blunders in the Sahel, as evidenced by a rise in demands for the services of private mercenary corps Wagner in these countries.

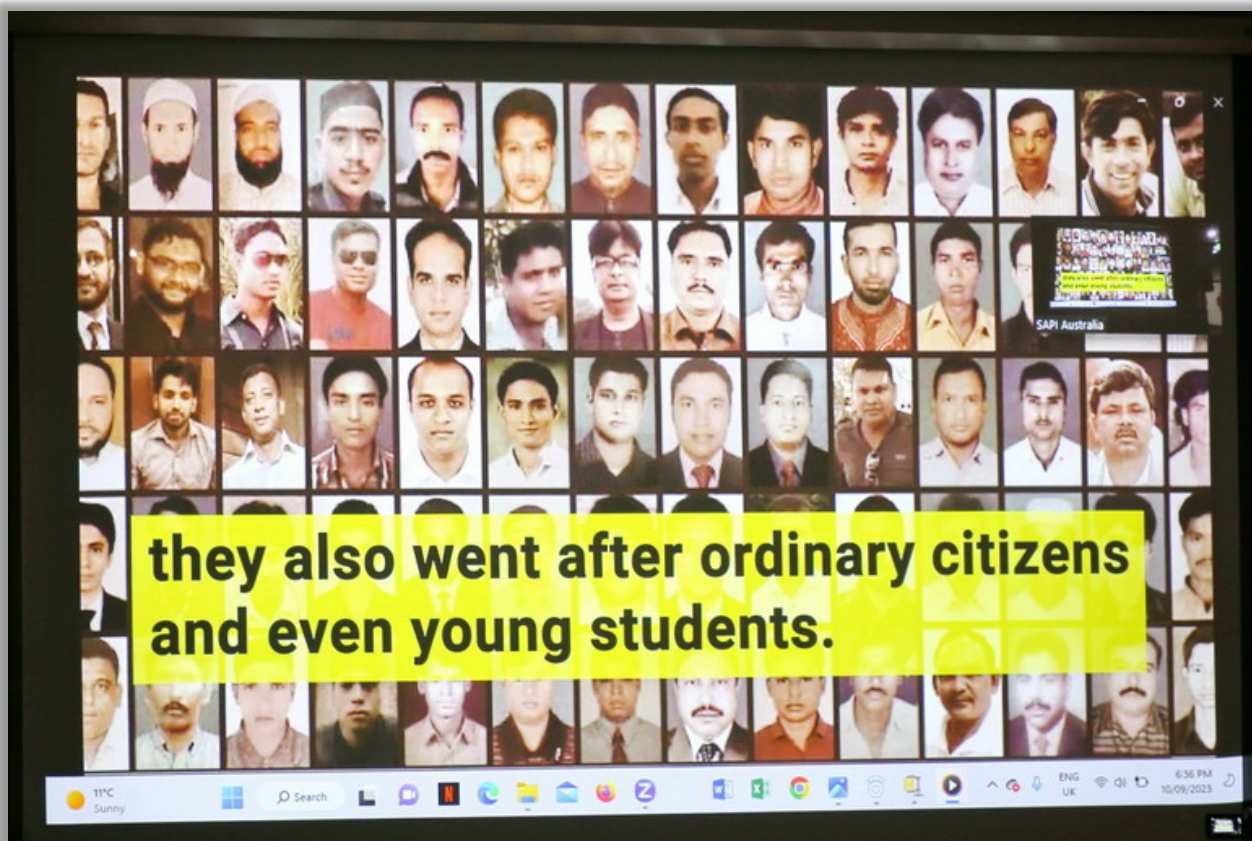
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August 30 celebrated as International Day of Victims of Enforced disappearances

The International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, observed on August 30 every year since 2011, is a UN-declared official day to draw attention to the fate of individuals imprisoned or killed by state authorities or other groups without legal or public acknowledgment. The day aims to raise awareness about the global problem of enforced disappearance, which violates human rights and causes suffering and anguish for the victims and their families. The day also calls for ratifying and implementing the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a legal instrument to prevent and punish this as a crime against humanity, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 December 2006. As of September 2023, 98 states have signed the convention and 72 have ratified it.

Despite being a UN-backed initiative, however, many major states still are neither signatories nor participants of this crucial convention, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which significantly weakens the convention's ability to help prevent enforced disappearances globally. The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, formed to assist families of disappeared persons to ascertain the fate and whereabouts of their disappeared relatives and to monitor the compliance of states with their human rights obligations, works to communicate disappearance cases to states on a regular basis and seek responses. Among the notable states accused of perpetrating enforced disappearances in the 2022 Working Group report are Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and others such as Russia and China. The upcoming 2023 report of the Working group is expected to be delivered in the 54th session of the UN to be held this September.

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