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This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of emerging nations with the potential to impact 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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Special Article

The Unseen and Undying Spirit of Student Protests in Bangladesh

- *Nousheen Sharmila Ritu**

On 5th June this year, the High Court in Bangladesh reinstated a disproportionate quota system in civil service examinations after it was abolished in 2018 in the face of student protests. Students persisted with their peaceful demonstrations until a snide remark from the Prime Minister of the country, Sheikh Hasina erupted public fury and demonstrations. On 14th July midnight, students in Dhaka University brought out mass demonstrations in retaliation to the Prime Minister's labeling of students as razakar. As if that was not enough, the following day student wing of ruling party, Bangladesh Chhatro League (BSL) launches a brutal attack on the students, not even leaving female students out of this violent altercations.

As the violence escalated, BSL and police officials adopted excessive and unlawful use of force and violence to repress the students. On 16th July, a student from Begum Rokeya University namely Abu Sayed was shot dead by police in cold blood as he stood in front of the police with arms flung open and head held high. Abu Sayed's martyrdom gushed open the gates of fervent rebellion and retaliation, as students from all major public and private schools, colleges and universities joined the mass protests against the state endorsed police violence against innocent students. Nonetheless, law enforcement officials persisted in their use of unlawful and excessive use of force as they indiscriminately shot live rounds of bullets, tear gas, and rubber bullets at innocent and unarmed students and civilians.

The government issued curfew with 'shoot-at-sight' orders to quell the erupting rage and rebellion among the mass people. However, the prevailing mayhem only exacerbated as law enforcement officials including police, RAB and BGB shot fires at random individuals including children peeping out of windows, rooftops or innocent pedestrians. This magnitude and nature of state violence have been unprecedented in independent Bangladesh as the death toll rose to more than 266 reported casualties in addition to approximately 10,000 mass arrests and detention as of 31st July, 2024.

As grim and inconceivable as the state repression may seem, the public resistance has been contrarily incredible and remarkable. What started off as a student protest was soon joined by people and professionals from all segments of the society including teachers, lawyers, civilians, human rights activists and even lower socioeconomic demographics like rickshaw-pullers, shop keepers, etc. Even though this student protest is not the first of its kind given in the last decade, a distinct character of this movement has been the collective mobilization and inclusion of virtually all stakeholders of the society.

The resistance as well has been beautifully diverse with people adopting both subtle and raging acts of resistance as suited to their unique contexts and possibilities— people scornfully neglected the curfew by going about their day; social media users persisted in their social media activism using VPN at a time when the government blocked all social media platforms and dissidence was being policed and penalized. Moreover, when the government announced 30th July as national mourning day, the public vehemently rejected government calls and instead depicted red on social media profile pictures and wore red blindfolds signifying all the blood lost in the national crackdown.

Thus, even though the people of Bangladesh have witnessed the most brutal state violence in recent memory, the ensuing public protest has offered a much needed glimmer of hope and unity. Years of injustice and suppression have compelled the people to choose the tougher route towards defiance, dissent and accountability. The future of Bangladesh is still eerie and uncertain, but rest assured, the future is in good hands.

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Israel-Gaza war continues past 300 days of genocide

As the milestone of 300 days of genocide was passed, the death toll has passed 40,188 Palestinians, and famine and disease are rampant inside Gaza, leading to the deaths of many infants and young children either due to malnutrition or disease. Gaza's health ministry has declared a polio epidemic across the Palestinian enclave, blaming Israel's devastating military offensive for the spread of the deadly virus. Israel has shamelessly kept up the bombing of schools and designated safe areas, killing many women and children. In continuation of previous war crimes against journalists, Aljazeera Arabic journalist Ismail al-Ghoul and his cameraman Rami al-Rifi were killed in an Israeli air attack on their car in the Gaza Strip on 31 July. Israel has continued to trade attacks with Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen; the latter surprisingly was able to launch a deadly drone strike in Tel Aviv. Politically speaking, fourteen Palestinian factions, including Hamas and rival Fatah, signed a "national unity" agreement in Beijing on 23 July, to end their divisions and create a platform that they can jointly rule post-war Gaza. But just days later, Israel assassinated the head of the Hamas political bureau Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, highlighting Israeli efforts to escalate regional tensions and prolong a war that has achieved nothing for Israel or its captives, and only endless death and destruction for the people of Gaza.

The number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza as of August 4 is at least 39,583 dead, including more than 15,000 children, while the number of Palestinians wounded has reached more than 91,398. The number of missing people is more than 10,000. In the Occupied West Bank, there have been at least 605 deaths, of whom at least 144 are children, while more than 5,350 are injured. According to the latest data from the UN, WHO and the Palestinian government as of August 4, more than half of Gaza homes have been destroyed or damaged, 80% of commercial facilities, 85% of school buildings, 16 out of 35 hospitals are partially functioning, 65% of road networks are destroyed, while 63% of cropland area has been damaged. Every hour in Gaza, 15 people are killed, of whom 6 are children, while 35 people are injured and 12 buildings are destroyed. As of July 8, more than 100 journalists, predominantly Palestinians, had been killed since October 7. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 117 Palestinian, three Lebanese, and two Israeli journalists were killed.

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Student-led protests rock Bangladesh; unseat decades of Hasina government

Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina was ousted on 6 August 2024 after facing huge pressure to step down from student-led protests that swept Dhaka and all other provinces of the country. A day earlier, the country had witnessed the deaths of around 100 people, mostly at the hands of ruling party goons. Facing pressure from the army to resign, and abandoned by her close associates, Sheikh Hasina had no choice but to flee. As the crowds were jubilantly breaking into the Prime Minister's residence, the former PM flew off to an undisclosed location in India, where she has been waiting to attain asylum since. Following the fall of the government, the army chief met with various political and student leaders, after which President Shahabuddin dissolved the parliament, and announced that an interim government would be headed by Nobel Laureate Dr. Yunus. While there have been instances of targeted violence against Awami League supporters and looting, the students have stepped admirably in, as the country waits for an interim government to take the reign of power and make way for free and fair elections. There are encouraging signs that the country is headed in the right direction – BNP icon Khaleda Zia has been released from custody, as well as scores of political prisoners, and some victims of enforced disappearance. There is also news of arrests of various former political leaders and officials associated with corruption and crimes.

The movement eventually began as a movement against the controversial jobs quota system. Through the quota system, 30 per cent (out of a total 44 per cent quota) of all government jobs were reserved for freedom fighters and their children. This left just 54 per cent of government jobs for general students, although that process too was identified as being full of corruption and nepotism, due to multiple question leak scandals over the past years. Students began protesting after the current government, through the courts, had been trying to reinstate the 30 per cent quota system after it was abolished back in 2018 following similar protests. The protests became viral after Sheikh Hasina's offhand remarks in the initial days that the students were "razakars," referring to them as historical traitors to the country. Initially confined to the public university campuses, the protests have since spread and

escalated into a broader anti-government movement, following harsh government measures that included widespread detentions, killing of protesters, imposition of curfew, and internet shutdowns to control the situation.

Several hundred people were killed in the violence leading up to the moment of the fall of Hasina, including 32 children, with many thousands injured and detained. Despite the government initially withdrawing the quota system, students refused to call off the movement, asking for accountability and justice for the many killed, detained and tortured. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have condemned the excessive use of force by the police and called for independent investigations into the deaths and injuries. The UN has criticised the harsh measures by the government in controlling protests, including using UN-marked vehicles by the army during the imposition of curfew, using helicopters and snipers to shoot at protesters, as well as shutting down communications. The measures have also resulted in protests by expatriate Bangladeshis worldwide, many of whom have boycotted the government by withholding remittance, which has had a severe impact on the Bangladeshi economy. The movement received broad support from all sections of society and was notable for being a leaderless movement led by a group of young student coordinators who have shown fearlessness and resolve despite being arrested, tortured, and threatened multiple times by security forces, and beaten by pro-govt Bangladesh Student League (BCL) armed cadres.

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Far-right resurgence in France foiled for now

There was very real chance of a far-right takeover of France after President Emmanuel Macron announced on June 9 that he was dissolving the National Assembly and calling for new parliamentary elections following Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (NR) landslide victory in the European elections. The elections for the lower house of parliament were held in two rounds on June 30 and July 7. Before the election, Macron's ruling Renaissance party had 169 lawmakers in the National Assembly, the biggest grouping in the 577-seat chamber, while Le Pen's RN was the largest party in opposition, with 88 seats. To win an outright majority in the French lower house, the RN would have needed to see its number of lawmakers rise to 289. In the meantime, news reports indicated that Le Pen was the favoured candidate of the Israeli far-right government due to her anti-immigration and anti-Muslim stance. In fact, Israel's diaspora affairs minister Amichai Chikli, while speaking with Kan Radio, said that it would be "excellent for Israel" if Marine Le Pen and her far-right party were ruling France, adding that he believed Netanyahu had the same opinion.

When the first round of elections was held on June 30, the coming of the far-right seemed imminent. Following the first round of voting, Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party had led with 33% of the vote, with the leftist alliance New Popular Front following in second place at almost 28%. President Macron's ruling coalition was trailing in third place with 20%. The first round seemed to have jolted many voters, who decided it was more important to keep the far right away from power. In the second round of voting, however, the tables turned, and a coalition of the French left, the New Popular Front, surprised everyone by taking the lead with 182 seats. Macron's Ensemble presidential camp won 168 seats while the far-right National Rally, which polls had tipped to win, languished in third place with 143 seats. While outgoing Prime Minister Gabriel Attal had offered to step down after the results, Macron

asked him to remain in his post to “ensure the country’s stability,” signalling that changes would probably occur after the Olympics.

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Chaos in Tehran: Hamas’s Ismail Haniyeh assassinated by Israel while in Iran for oath taking ceremony of newly elected President Pezeshkian

In a shocking and vile assassination incident, Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was targeted and killed in Tehran on July 31, 2024. Reports indicate that at around 2 am local time (22:30 GMT) on Wednesday, Haniyeh was killed by an “airborne guided projectile.” His bodyguard Wasim “Abu Anas” Abu Shaaban was also killed in the incident. Haniyeh’s political bureau was in charge of peace negotiations with mediators Qatar and Egypt. Hamas has blamed Israel for the “cowardly” attack, which occurred hours after Israel struck a building on Tuesday evening in Beirut, killing Fuad Shukr, a top commander from the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah. The two assassinations have significantly heightened regional tensions, risking the region spiralling into a wider conflict, and could severely hurt prospects for a ceasefire deal to end Israel’s war on Gaza. Analysts have noted that these assassinations are a hallmark of policies of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has often undermined ceasefire talks, purely out of selfish reasons; they said he does not want to end the war for fear that it could collapse his far-right coalition government and trigger an early election.

The assassination also puts Iran under the spotlight – it is a huge embarrassment to the Iranian administration and security agencies that they were unable to provide the necessary protection to an important state guest of the stature of Ismail Haniyeh. Haniyeh was killed while attending the inauguration of reformist Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Iran's capital, Tehran. Earlier in July, moderate, reformist-backed candidate Masoud Pezeshkian, also an ethnic Turk, secured 53.7 per cent or 16.3 million votes, defeating hardliner Saeed Jalili's 13.5 million votes, winning the runoff presidential elections after the death of the former President Raisi in a helicopter crash alongside other important Irani state officials last month. Haniyeh's death comes in the wake of repeated killings of his family members by the Israeli military – he lost 60 members of his family, including sons and grandsons, sisters and other relatives, to Israel's killing campaigns.

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As US elections come closer, Biden opts out, Trump survives assassination attempt, and VP Harris set to become new Democratic nominee

There have been at least two major developments in American politics over the past month. The first was an assassination attempt against Donald Trump, while the second was President Joe Biden's announcement that he would not seek re-election, after which he endorsed his VP Kamala Harris for presidential candidate instead. Former President Donald Trump survived an attempted assassination on his life at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania on July 13, 2024. As the assailant, 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks fired several rounds from a rooftop near the stage, Trump was wounded in his upper right ear, while one audience member was killed, and two others critically injured. The assailant was later shot and killed by the Secret Service. The assassination attempt, universally condemned by US politicians, led to the rise of Trump's popularity following the incident. In the days following the incident, Trump was crowned as the Republican nominee for the presidential elections, and chose J.D. Vance, a Republican Senator from Ohio, as his running mate.

On the other hand, in the wake of a disastrous debate performance against Trump, President Joe Biden announced his decision to step down from the 2024 presidential race, expressing that it was in the best interest of the Democratic Party and the country for him to focus solely on his presidential duties for the remainder of his term rather than seeking re-election. In the same message, Biden endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement and Democratic Party nominee for the upcoming elections. While the Democratic convention is scheduled to be held at the beginning of coming August, it is being reported that Kamala Harris has already secured the support of enough Democratic delegates to win the party's nomination for president. While it remains to be seen whether Harris gets the support of voters in coming November, a deciding factor in getting or losing votes will be her stance on the issue of Israel-Palestine. Though Harris did not attend Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech in Congress due to other responsibilities, she met the Israeli Prime minister, saying that she had urged Netanyahu to reach a cease-fire deal soon with Hamas so that dozens of hostages held by the militants in Gaza since Oct. 7 could return home.

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Latest ICJ opinion reiterates Palestinian right to return to 1967 lands

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) recently issued an advisory opinion on Israel's occupation and annexation policies in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The ICJ concluded that Israel's ongoing occupation is unlawful and violates international law. The court said Israel has no right to sovereignty of the territories, is violating international laws against acquiring territory by force and is impeding Palestinians' right to self-determination. It emphasised that Israel's settlement activities, annexation attempts, and denial of Palestinian self-determination are illegal. Consequently, the ICJ stated that Israel must cease all settlement activities, evacuate settlers, and dismantle parts of the separation wall situated within the occupied territories as 'rapidly as possible.' Legal experts are describing the ICJ opinion as a striking and historic initiative that requires taking several legal steps, including allowing for the return of Palestinians who were displaced by Israel when it began its occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967.

The advisory opinion also highlighted the obligations of other states and international organisations. It declared that all states are required not to recognise the legality of the situation created by Israel's occupation and to refrain from aiding or assisting in maintaining the occupation. The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council were urged to take further action to ensure the occupation ends promptly. This advisory opinion adds to the legal and moral pressure on Israel and reinforces the international consensus against its occupation policies. It was issued following a request in December 2022 by the United Nations General Assembly for the court to give its view on Israel's policies and practices towards the Palestinians and on the legal status of the 57-year-long occupation of Palestinian lands. This ICJ case is entirely separate from the other ongoing proceedings at the court concerning Israel: South Africa's complaint that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, which the court has already ruled "plausible". **References:**

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Amnesty condemns discriminatory Hijab ban in Paris Olympics 2024

As various nations of the world gathered at the 2024 Paris Olympics, a ban on hijabs for French athletes at the event has sparked significant international controversy and drawn condemnation. France, which maintains a strict policy of secularism, prohibits its athletes from wearing any religious symbols, including hijabs, during the games. This policy was confirmed by French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera, who emphasised the country's commitment to neutrality in public services. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has clarified that while athletes from other nations can wear hijabs according to their respective sporting federations' rules, French athletes must adhere to their country's secularism laws. This distinction has led to criticism from human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, which argues that the ban is discriminatory and violates international human rights treaties. Amnesty International and other groups have highlighted that such bans prevent Muslim women from participating fully in sports, leading to social exclusion and limiting their athletic opportunities.

Additionally, this policy has brought into question France's commitment to gender equality and inclusivity, principles that are central to the Olympic Charter. Despite the backlash, the IOC has stated that it considers the issue outside its remit, placing the responsibility on the host nation to enforce its own laws. The opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympics also sparked significant controversy due to a performance that many interpreted as a parody of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper," featuring performers, including drag queens, posing behind a long table in a manner reminiscent of Jesus and his Apostles. Deemed offensive by many devout Christians and the Catholic Church, the organisers actually apologised, clarifying that the tableau was intended to depict a pagan feast linked to Greek gods, celebrating diversity and French gastronomy. Many on social media called out the double-faced nature of French authorities apologising for caricaturing Christian motifs, while completely remaining impervious to the discriminatory acts against Muslim women wishing to observe religious beliefs by donning the hijab.

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Despite a weaker Modi, Muslims continue to face persecution in India

In the recently held Indian elections, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to secure a majority and was only able to form a government with support from a number of regional parties that claim to be secular. It was hoped that having a smaller number of MPs in the Parliament of India would chasten the BJP, and its new “secular” allies would help put a stop to the party’s anti-Muslim policies. However, despite the weakening of the BJP in the recently held national elections, anti-Muslim violence and discrimination persist, driven by deep-seated ideological and institutional biases. Apoorvanand, in his opinion piece mulling over this problem, argues that the social and political structures supporting such persecution are actually intact, and all that electoral losses of BJP and its internal power struggles have done is to translate into further violence against Muslims rather than more thoughtful governance. What is even more chilling in this context is the willingness of institutions such as the police and the courts to go along with and even execute these ideological attacks, and for the opposition such as Congress to largely be moot about these issues.

The example the author cites is the latest way to harass Muslims in the largest BJP-controlled state Uttar Pradesh, where the state police issued orders requiring restaurants and even roadside food carts along a route taken each year by thousands of Hindu pilgrims to put the names of their owners and employees on display boards. This created controversy when it started affecting small vendors and daily wagers, especially Muslim-owned businesses, forcing some to close down. While the police claimed the order was given to “help pilgrims,” many have pointed out that it was but a clever way of identifying establishments owned by Muslims and ensuring that Hindus do not give them their business, in effect enabling a state-sponsored instigation to Hindus to boycott Muslim shops or even the Hindu-owned ones that dare to employ Muslim workers. The order was later contested in the Supreme Court, where it was struck down, but by this time, it had already been adopted by administrations in neighbouring states Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Despite being suspended, at least for the time being, the police orders directed at restaurant owners and employees sent a clear message to India’s Muslims that they are not safe under the BJP and will continue to be targeted in the future because of their identity.

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World's hottest day registered in July 2024

On July 22, 2024, global temperatures reached unprecedented highs, marking the hottest day on record. The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) reported that the global average surface air temperature on July 22 rose to 17.15 degrees Celsius (62.9 degrees Fahrenheit) – or 0.06 degrees Celsius higher than the record set just a day earlier, making it the hottest day on record. According to experts, the record had last been set for four consecutive days back in early July 2023. Before that, the hottest day was in August 2016. But this has changed with the latest record-breaking heat measurements clocked on July 22, 2024.

In recent days, cities in Japan, Indonesia and China have registered record heat. Gulf countries have also experienced high temperatures that exceed 60C (140F) when factoring in humidity while some European countries saw temperatures surge to 45C (113F). As the effects of climate change intensify, weather patterns are becoming more extreme with heatwaves, droughts, ramped-up storms and floods affecting much of the globe. The intense heatwaves have led to widespread wildfires, droughts, and other climate-related impacts across various regions. According to climate scientists and experts, this extreme heat is part of a broader pattern of rising temperatures attributed to climate change and a strengthening El Niño. News about heat waves and climate change have been gathering more public interest after leading to the deaths of many people earlier in April in South Asia and Southeast Asian regional countries.

References:

Record-breaking heat: Monday was world's hottest day. (2024, July 24). Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/24/record-breaking-heat-july-22-was-worlds-hottest-day>

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