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The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute from Marlyon Road, Ilford, United Kingdom.

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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Israel-Gaza war continues past 120 days

For the past four months, there was little respite for the besieged Palestinians stranded in the Gaza Strip, as Israel continued its genocide against the Palestinian people with devastating ground and air military operations, killing tens of thousands of innocent Palestinian civilians and exacerbating residents' suffering as they deal with a humanitarian disaster. Despite an ICJ provisional ruling that affirmed what Israel was doing in Gaza was tantamount to genocide, little has materialized from the international community as a result of the Biden administration's unwavering diplomatic and military support for Israeli actions in Gaza. Members of the international community, instead of building upon the ICJ ruling, have set out to further punish the Palestinian people by cutting funds to the aid organisation UNRWA based on uncorroborated Israeli allegations that UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7 attack. Meanwhile, the conflict seems to be taking on a wider regional shape, as the Houthis of Yemen, and Hezbollah of Lebanon have stepped up their attacks in the Gulf of Aden and Northern Israel respectively, and American bases in the Middle East have been target to attacks by militant groups based in Iraq. Israel and the US have also attacked targets in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iran.

The number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza as of February 6 is at least 27,585 dead, including more than 11,500 children and 8,000 women, while the number of Palestinians wounded has reached more than 66,978, including at least 8,663 children and 6,327 women. The number of missing people is more than 8,000. In the Occupied West Bank, there have been at least 383 deaths, of whom more than 100 are children, while more than 4,250 are injured. According to the latest data from the UN, WHO and the Palestinian government, 360,000 residential units (more than half of Gaza homes) have been destroyed or damaged, 390 educational facilities damaged, 13 out of 36 hospitals are partially functioning, 122 ambulances are damaged, while 267 places of worship have 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 January 18, at least 94 journalists, predominantly Palestinians, had been killed since October 7. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 87 Palestinian, three Lebanese, and four Israeli journalists were killed.

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South Africa takes Israel to the ICJ on charges of genocide

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) held its first hearing on South Africa's genocide case against Israel on January 10, after the former filed an 84-page lawsuit with the ICJ on December 29, claiming that Israel violated the 1948 Geneva Convention, which was established in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust. In its submission, South Africa called for a halt to Israel's military operations in Gaza, which have killed over 27,000 Palestinians, including at least 13,000 children. During a joint press conference with South Africa's delegation following the hearing in The Hague, Ammar Hijazi, the State of Palestine's assistant minister for multilateral affairs, stated that South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) represented a "pivotal moment" for the international system to provide hope to humanity. Describing the day as "historic not only for Palestine but for humanity and for the entire international rules-based system," Hijazi stated that Palestine values and appreciates South Africa's "historic" action in requesting the ICJ to intervene to suspend Israel's "genocidal war launched against the Palestinians in Gaza."

After hearing Israel's flimsy defence seeking to throw out the submission, the International Court of Justice made a provisional ruling on January 26, where the court ruled that some allegations of Israel committing genocide in the

Gaza Strip are "plausible" and ordered Israel to take measures to prevent and punish acts of genocide, protect Palestinians, allow in humanitarian aid, and to report back in one month. The court, however, stopped short of calling for an immediate ceasefire and did not require Israel to end its military operation. A majority of 15 of the 17 judges, including the court's president, Joan Donoghue of the United States, voted to impose the provisional measures. Judge Julia Sebutinde of Uganda was the only one who voted against all six measures accepted by the court, a decision later denounced by Ugandan ambassador to the UN, Adonia Ayebare. Aharon Barak, Israel's ad hoc judge, voted against four measures. Israel is obligated to submit a report to the court within one month of the verdict outlining the efforts it has taken to comply with the requirements, after which the court will conduct a thorough examination of the case's merits, which may take years. In the meantime, Israel has shown no pretence of even adhering to the court rulings – it has intensified its military operations, targeted medical facilities, and bombed UNRWA aid convoys, all with a sense of impunity and backing from the US and allies.

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Global UNRWA funding cut amidst unverified Israeli claims of links with Palestinian resistance

In recent days, a number of countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, Estonia, Japan, Austria, and Romania, have cut funding for UNRWA, the agency that provides crucial day-to-day assistance for 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza who are living through a dire humanitarian catastrophe amid the Israeli genocide. This occurred after Israel claimed that a dozen of the agency's personnel were involved in the October 7 attacks on southern Israel, which had resulted in 1139 dead and 240 abducted. UNRWA has pre-emptively dismissed nine of its workers while it investigates the claims, which arose on the same day that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israel to restore key supplies and increase aid to the enclave as part of a series of steps to avert genocide in Gaza. According to Reuters, the Israeli dossier that brought forward the claims alleged that over 190 UNRWA personnel, including instructors, have doubled as Hamas or Islamic Jihad combatants. The Israeli document named 12 persons, including their suspected participation in the October 7 attack, job descriptions, and images. According to Aljazeera, the conclusions presented in the publication could not be independently corroborated.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philip Lazzarini stated that major donors' decision to reduce funds for the organization will further exacerbate the plight of Gazans. Israel's bombardment on Gaza has killed 152 UNRWA Palestinian employees, the biggest number of UN deaths since the organization's inception in 1945. Hundreds have been murdered as a result of Israel's deliberate and repeated airstrikes on UNRWA clinics and schools in Gaza, which house more than 1 million displaced Palestinians. Analysts, Palestinian refugees, and rights groups argued that Israel's attacks on UNRWA workers and infrastructure are part of a larger plan to undermine the agency, and countries that have cut funding are complicit in Israeli genocide. They said Israel also aims to abolish UNRWA to force Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to flee in despair. In December 2023, Israeli media claimed that the government was planning to "push" UNRWA out of the Gaza Strip following the conflict, including attempting to link the agency's work to Hamas.

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Ram Mandir inauguration in India atop demolished Babri masjid

In a victory for the Hindu nationalist BJP and PM Narendra Modi, the Ram Mandir, a Hindu temple built on the site of the Babri mosque demolished in 1992 in Ayodhya, India, was inaugurated and opened for public worship on January 22, 2024. Nearly 7,500 people, including elite industrialists such as the Ambanis, Hindutva politicians, and Bollywood movie stars such as Amitabh Bachan and Rajnikanth, witnessed the ritual on a giant screen outside the temple as a military helicopter showered flower petals on the consecration ceremony. According to Modi, this was the dawn of a new era of 'Ram Rajya,' or the divine rule of the Hindu deity Ram, words that stand in contrast to the secular principles enshrined in the country's constitution. Despite this, the occasion was repeatedly broadcast throughout local and national media as a moment of national pride.

The temple was built on the site of the Mughal-era Babri mosque that was demolished in 1992 by angry crowds of Hindutva supporters. In a 2019 ruling, India's Supreme Court called the demolition of the mosque an "egregious violation of the rule of law." However, it still allowed for a Ram temple to be built where the Babri mosque once stood, signalling to the world the triumph of Hindutva populism over Indian secularism. Experts have noted that what was missing in this brazen display of Hindu supremacy was any acknowledgement of the bloody past that led to this moment, the 1992 riots that led to the deaths of 2000-3000 people throughout India, mostly Indian Muslims.



This action is clearly not the end, as Hindutva organizations have accelerated their drive to destroy Muslim places of worship and build temples in their place, manipulating institutions such as the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) and the various local and national courts. Recently, an Indian court ruled in favour of a petition, saying that Hindus can offer prayers in the 17th-century Gyanvapi mosque in the city of Varanasi, just days after a survey alleged that the mosque was built after the destruction of a temple there. For the Muslims of India, these celebrations are a painful demonstration of majoritarianism and polarisation. Local media are mostly silent about how Muslims have felt or perceived these developments, contributing to the image that Muslims are largely invisible in today's India, both in society and politics. The developments come months ahead of a national election due by May and are expected to guarantee Modi's chances of winning a third term.

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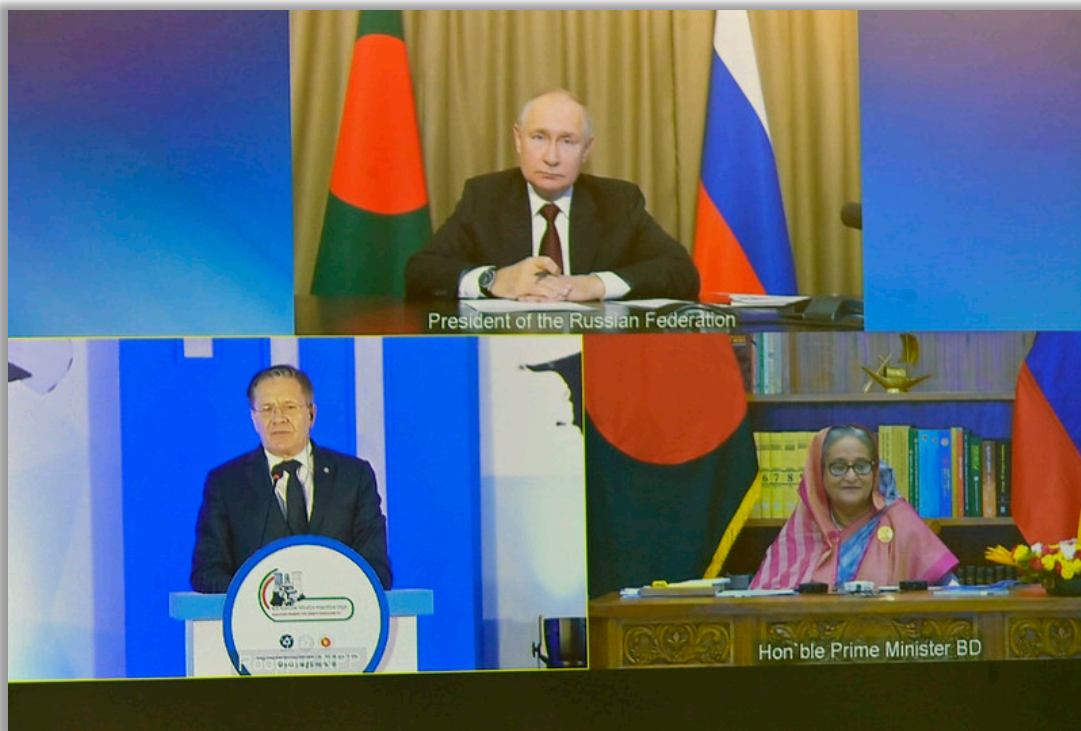
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Bangladesh conducts dummy elections; Hasina clings to power

In the first election of 2024, the re-election of Sheikh Hasina and her party, the Bangladesh Awami League, in the Bangladesh general elections held on January 7, 2024, came as a surprise to no one. The outcome was not in question, considering that the election was boycotted by chief opposition parties Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), among others. In two of the previous elections held in 2014 and 2018, the Awami League was accused of coming to power amidst widespread allegations of vote rigging, voter intimidation, and suppression of opposing candidates. The call for boycotting elections from the BNP and like-minded parties came after the Awami League ignored opposition demands to hold elections under a caretaker

government system, a step that opposition parties say is essential in making the elections a free and fair democratic process for all parties concerned. As a result of this boycott, the continuation of the rule of the Awami League regime that has been in power since 2009 was virtually guaranteed. Public disappointment and disinterest in the political process was clear - the election turnout was among the lowest in years. The election commission had only reported 28 per cent voter attendance with one hour remaining, after which the final attendance count was mysteriously reported as 40 per cent. However, foreign media observers have claimed that attendance appeared nearer to 15 per cent, which seriously puts into question the truth behind official numbers and the legitimacy of these polls.



Regardless of what one might say, however, one thing is clear – Sheikh Hasina did not win this election alone. Rampant politicization of the bureaucracy, weakening of state institutions, widespread corruption, and rising authoritarianism over the past decade have fostered a political culture where the winner takes all. In practical terms, the absence of any opposition meant ruling party candidate nominations was a sure-fire ticket to the parliament - well-known businessmen, media moguls, cricket stars, actors, etc. line up to get party nominations from the Awami League; a handful of them have even ended up as members of parliament. Throughout the day, all national media reported live on election proceedings, with many consistently trying to project a jovial and festive environment at polling stations. The regime even invited foreign election observers to comment on the festivity and “fair” nature of the elections. Though it is clear that such measures were designed to give the regime a veneer of stability and popular legitimacy, few on the global stage were fooled. The US, European Union, UN, Turkiye and others expressed their concern regarding irregularities in the electoral process, contending that the elections had neither been fair nor inclusive. Still, supporters of Hasina regime on the global stage did speak up in support and offer congratulations, notably India, China and Russia, which has bolstered the confidence and standing of regime, and is expected to legitimise its rule for the near future.

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Imran Khan sentenced to years in jail and barred from Pakistan general elections in February

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were recently sentenced to seven years in prison for breaking the country's statutes regarding the mandatory waiting period of three months between two marriages. This follows an earlier sentencing of 14 years in prison for unlawfully selling state gifts, which included a 10-year ban on running for public office. In another case labelled the cipher case, he was sentenced to 10 years in jail in a case in which he was charged with leaking state secrets. In the same case, former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, vice-chairman of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, was also sentenced to ten years in jail by the special court established within Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, where both men are being incarcerated. Khan was removed from his position as Prime Minister by his opponents in parliament in 2022 and is currently serving a three-year prison sentence for corruption. Khan has claimed that all of the allegations brought against him are politically motivated. The convictions come a week before the general election, in which he is barred from participating.

The authorities have been criticized for not giving the PTI a fair chance to campaign in the upcoming 8 February vote. They deny perpetrating a crackdown on the PTI, despite the fact that many of its leaders are being held behind bars or have defected, while its candidates are standing as independents. Moreover, the party has also been stripped of its cricket bat symbol, leaving voters confused. Many question the credibility of the upcoming vote, given that Imran Khan and his party have been effectively sidelined with force. Three-time former PM Nawaz Sharif, who was jailed for corruption before Imran Khan's 2018 election, is tipped to win. He has returned from a self-imposed exile, and his court cases have melted away, leading many to believe he is now preferred by the establishment, while his rival, who used to be seen as close to the military, has fallen out of favour. Despite this, experts say that Khan remains extremely popular in Pakistan, and the convictions have only increased his popularity. He is set to remain an influencing factor in Pakistani politics and has been urging the general people to take a stand against the establishment in the coming elections.

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Turkish parliament approves Sweden's accession bid; waits for US F-16s in return

The Turkish parliament approved Sweden's NATO membership bid in January, pushing the Nordic country closer to joining the military alliance after months of delay. The vote was the second phase in Turkey's ratification procedure, after the bid's approval by the parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission last month. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan then moved to enact the protocol into law. The verdict removed a crucial barrier to the Nordic country's entry into the military alliance, with Hungary now remaining the only member state that has not yet confirmed Sweden's admission.

After confirming Sweden's NATO membership, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Turkey is awaiting the next step from the US over its desire to purchase 40 new F-16 aeroplanes and modernization kits for its existing fleet. US administration officials have stated that they expect reasonably swift action on the F-16 sale with Türkiye's consent. Shortly after the Turkish Parliament's decision, US President Joe Biden wrote to the leaders of key Capitol Hill committees, informing them of his plan to commence the formal notification procedure for the F-16 sale provided Ankara completed Sweden's NATO entrance process. Biden called on Congress to approve the deal "without delay."

Earlier, Türkiye originally opposed Sweden's membership bid on grounds that the Swedish authorities were being too soft toward terrorist organizations, particularly the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Since applying, Sweden has strengthened its anti-terror legislation and pledged to collaborate more closely with Türkiye on security issues. The Turkish backing of Sweden's membership request was also contingent on the United States' commitment, with the Turkish president indicating that he would not sign the protocol into law until the US accepts the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Türkiye.

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It is looking like Donald Trump vs Biden again in upcoming US elections

When he left the White House in 2021, Donald Trump was a pariah. Three years later, Trump is on the cusp of a stunning turnaround. According to the most recent Reuters/Ipsos survey of Republican voters, Trump leads his opponents for the Republican presidential nomination by over 40 percentage points, marking a stunning return for a one-term president who seemed defeated and humiliated three years earlier. Since leaving office, Trump has remained the de facto leader of the Republican Party, although he is mired in a swathe of civil cases. In 2023, a civil trial jury determined that Trump had sexually abused E. Jean Carroll. He was charged with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in New York, 40 felony counts of mishandling classified documents in Florida, four felony counts of conspiracy and obstruction in Washington, D.C., and 13 charges of racketeering and other felonies in Georgia for attempting to overturn the state's 2020 election results. Trump has pleaded not guilty in the criminal allegations against him, claiming they are politically motivated. He is also getting closer to securing the Republican nomination, following a landslide victory in Iowa, the first Republican nominating state, on January 15. That prompted one of his few surviving challengers, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, to withdraw from the campaign, leaving only former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley to face him.

Biden, as an incumbent, is set to be the Democrat presidential candidate for the 2024 elections, making the race appear in all practical sense a rerun of the 2020 elections. But this time, the odds appear more stacked in favour of Trump than Biden. Despite heavy government investments in the economy leading to job creation, nagging inflation has eaten away at most of American household incomes, and their dreams, a point which Trump repeatedly is able to cash on. Moreover, egregious mistakes in Biden's interventionist foreign policy – the Ukraine-Russia war, and the Israeli genocide in Palestine, have contributed to an image of a warmongering Biden who appears both incompetent and reckless, even when compared to Trump. Biden is expected to suffer at the hands of both Muslim and pro-ceasefire young voters, who hold him personally responsible for perpetuating a genocide in Gaza that has already taken 27,000-30,000 Palestinian lives.

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