



# THE FUTURE

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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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## Special Article

### The Political Representation of Palestinians and Their 'Victimhood'

- *Nousheen Sharmila Ritu*

In one of his recent lectures at Columbia University, Tareq Baconi asserts, "If you ask an ordinary person on the street in the US, Gaza is either a site full of terrorists or a site of humanitarian crises– it is seen not as a site of revolution and we have to change that." Baconi's statement well encapsulates the mainstream skewed depiction of the prevailing genocide in Gaza. This is evident as we see mainstream media outlets still being persistent in trivializing and depoliticizing the genocide by propagating it to be a narrative of 'conflict', 'chaotic incident', or 'humanitarian crisis'. Not to mention, our civil societies and academic institutions have adopted an even more diabolical stance by deciding to be hypocritically silent about the genocide.

Furthermore, even when the war in Gaza is mentioned by these hegemonic institutions, there is no recognition of the revolutionary character of Palestinians in this conflict. Palestinians are only recognized as victims of genocidal violence or Israeli occupation. Mainstream reporting is overridden with stories of helpless women and children engulfed in war who have given in to the war. Even though the Palestinians are a nation of individuals who have withstood 75 years of violent occupation, we have only come to know their stories of victimization, loss and destitution. We have never been told how women in Gaza continue to have children and raise them with utmost sincerity despite knowing that these children might not live to see freedom. We have never been told how Palestinian children have not sunk into paralyzing trauma or dysfunctionality despite being submerged in loss and violence for all their lives. Much less we have heard of the Palestinian men and their stories of resistance, sacrifice or fortitude.

This makes us wonder why it is that Palestinians are only known as the most persecuted nation and never as one of the most enduring nations on this Earth. It is here we need to recognize that this narrative of passive victimhood is nothing new– rather, this has been one of the oldest weapons of the colonial and imperial forces of our world. Critical postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak in her seminal work 'Can the Subaltern Speak' argues that third-world subjects have been robbed of the ability to represent themselves or speak for themselves. This right to expression and representation is monopolized by the Global North as they continue to shape the narratives of victimhood of these peripheral countries. As a result, we only know Global South nations and their experiences through the lens of the West, much of which has been misconstrued and ill-represented for their hegemonic interests.

Much similarly, eminent scholar, Edward Said coined the term 'orientalism' to illustrate this abject depiction of the 'Orient' or East for the creation of the 'other'. This oriental representation of the subalterns ultimately allows the West to create an image and narrative of these third-world subjects that facilitates the legitimacy of their authority. For instance, third-world countries have been consistently and systematically synonymized with violence and lawlessness for the longest time– a concocted reality that has created the scope for the West's unqualified intervention (or read intrusion) in the forms of military intervention or policy transfers in these countries. This has not only resulted in the advancement of the Western empire but has also pushed the Global South towards systemic dependency and inferiority.

However, if there's anything that the Palestinian genocide has done for us– it is the exposure of the hypocritical leadership of the West. Now more than ever before, we can see how the Global North has selectively and conveniently used human rights as a tool for cultural and political domination of selected countries. This is the reason why it is important to look beyond the mainstream depiction of Palestinians as victims and try to understand the Palestinian genocide as a revolution instead of a victimization of a lost battle. This is why it is important to perceive the Palestinians as enduring individuals with agency and resistance, instead of passive victims of loss and violence. This is why it is important to recognize the Palestinians as undying victims– because even when they are dead, they continue to draw light on the falsehood and transgression of the imperial forces.

**For those interested to know more about the politics of representation of third-world subjects, see:**

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## Israel-Gaza war continues past 130 days; thousands die in human-induced famine

After more than 150 days of war, Gaza lies in ruins and the people of Palestine are going through unimaginable suffering and lack of food and daily necessities as the Israeli war machine rages on in its quest to perpetrate genocide in Gaza. Despite repeated assurances from the US administration of a ceasefire on the ground, nothing has materialised as Israel refuses to agree to any terms that address Palestinian concerns. Moreover, all US assurances appear hollow considering that it is the sole Security Council member to sabotage all UN resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and the free flow of aid to the beleaguered Palestinians. The active cutting of funds for UNRWA by the Biden administration, as well as its rogue actions on the international stage in support of Israel, have led to a 100 per cent man-induced famine in Gaza, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Palestinian children, elderly, women and men from malnourishment, starvation and a lack of access to drinking water. On the international stage, after proceedings began in mid-February, a record 51 nations presented arguments on controversial Israeli policies in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and occupied East Jerusalem, with just two (the United States and Hungary) defending the legality of the occupation. This is the largest number of parties involved in a single ICJ case since the court was created in 1945.

The number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza as of March 4 is at least 30,534 dead, which is 1 out of every 75 people in Gaza. This included more than 12,300 children and 8,400 women, while the number of Palestinian wounded has reached more than 71,920, 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 420 deaths, of whom more than 110 are children, while more than 4,600 are injured. According to the latest data from the UN, WHO and the Palestinian

government as of February 25, 360,000 residential units (more than half of Gaza homes) have been destroyed or damaged, 392 educational facilities damaged, 11 out of 35 hospitals are partially functioning, 132 groundwater wells 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 February 16, at least 99 journalists, predominantly Palestinians, had been killed since October 7. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 92 Palestinian, three Lebanese, and four Israeli journalists were killed.

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## The ICJ, Israeli genocide and the hope for a just and principled world order

Israel submitted a report to the International Court of Justice on Monday, February 27, outlining steps taken to comply with an emergency interim judgment ordering it to prohibit conduct in its military offensive on the Gaza Strip that might be considered genocide. This comes in light of the January 26 ruling by the UN's top court, which

determined that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and specifically ordered Israel to, among other things, prevent the commission of genocidal acts, prevent and punish public incitement to genocide, and ensure humanitarian aid and services are delivered to Palestinians. However, in the month since the ICJ ruling, the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights noted that Israel has continued its genocidal military campaign on Gaza with intense bombardment and attacks from air, land, and sea, resulting in the killing of 3,524 Palestinians and the injury of 5,266 others, and ongoing mass displacement and destruction.

But many have asked whether the ICJ can act as any deterrent to Israel's actions in Gaza and the US support behind the actions. Professor Erin McCandless argues that despite everything, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling is part of a series of developments fueling a movement for a new world order where the old rules-based system built on asymmetrical and unjust colonial foundations, and selective adherence to international law is slowly becoming obsolete. She argues that in the process, the moral, institutional and legal foundations for a more just and principled rules-based order are being built – one where acts of aggression are not overlooked, and international humanitarian law applies equally to everyone. The author acknowledges the challenges, but believes this movement is gaining traction through social change efforts in courts, protests, and the UN, but believes that if these trends continue, Israel and its allies will eventually be pressured to conform to international law.

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## Pakistan elections held amidst surprises and irregularities

Following months of political turbulence, Pakistan's elections on February 8 were expected to result in a convincing victory for former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who had just returned from four years of exile in London last October. Prior to this election, Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League party (PML-N) was favoured by the military, and the scales had been tipped heavily in its favour; Sharif's numerous political cases seemed to melt away overnight. The odds had been stacked against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and its leader ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, whom the military had backed until he was ousted from office in April 2022; he has been in prison since August 2023 and was disqualified from running for office this term.

A week before the election, Khan was sentenced to decades in jail in three different trials, on accusations ranging from leaking state secrets to illegal marriage. Furthermore, in January, Pakistan's Supreme Court deprived Khan's party, the PTI, of its electoral symbol. The judgment followed an extensive governmental assault on the party over the previous year, with hundreds of party members imprisoned and nearly all of its senior leadership compelled to leave politics. The party also faced a media embargo and campaigning restrictions in the run-up to the election. Thus, on the day before the election, the military's preferred candidate and party were assumed to win.

While draconian measures such as cutting off internet and cellular services under the pretext of security, alongside terrorist attacks killing dozens in Balochistan the previous day were expected to disrupt voter turnout, the election day turnout was a robust 48 per cent. Despite delays in publishing results, and serious complaints and discrepancies regarding the electoral process, the election result was a major upset: candidates backed by Khan's PTI won a plurality of parliamentary seats (93 out of 266), though not an outright majority. Pakistan's two dynastic parties, Sharif's PML-N and the Bhutto family's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), came in second and third place, with 75 and 54 legislative seats respectively. Despite the election day surprise, Pakistan will have a government that looks very similar to the one that came in following Khan's ouster: the second and third-largest parties in parliament, the PML-N and PPP, which were once bitter enemies, have reunited to create a coalition administration. Members of parliament

took their oaths of office on February 29, and on March 3, Shehbaz Sharif was re-elected as Prime Minister of Pakistan for a second term, with 201 votes to 92 for PTI-backed Omar Ayub Khan.

Nonetheless, the results have exposed flaws in the Pakistan military's tried-and-true strategy for influencing the country's politics. This was a vote against the status quo—against the Pakistani military's political intervention and the dominance of dynastic parties—as well as for Imran Khan and his youthful supporters. For the time being, independents backed by the PTI have joined forces with a smaller party to claim reserved seats and become the major opposition in Parliament. At the same time, there is an increasing push for probes into potential electoral fraud. The new government faces hard tasks ahead of it, especially in terms of an increasingly fragile economy and a crushing debt crisis.

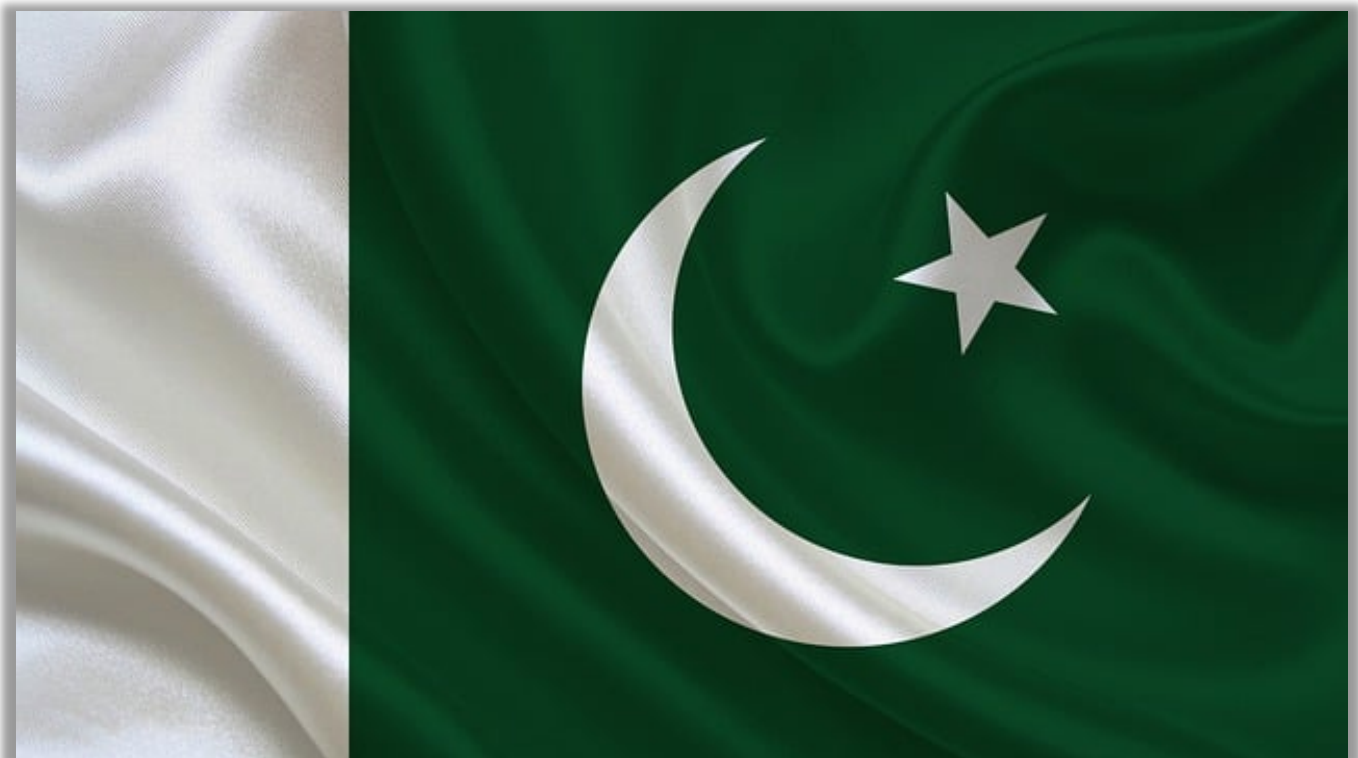
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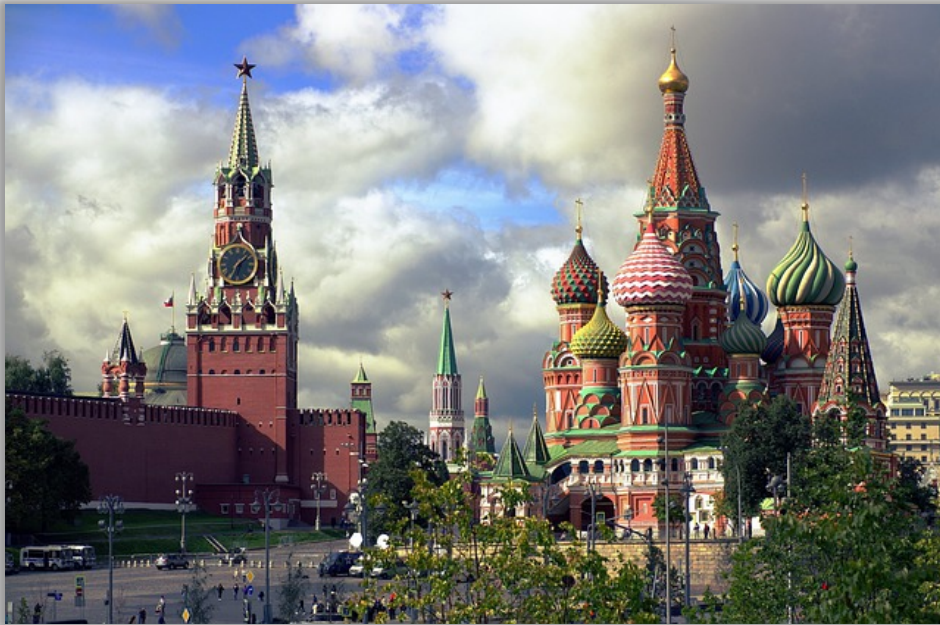
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## Russian opposition leader Navalny dies in prison

In a shocking turn of events, Alexei Navalny, a prominent Russian opposition leader, anti-corruption activist, and political prisoner, died suddenly in an Arctic penal colony where he had been serving a 19-year sentence. Navalny's condition had deteriorated in his three years in prison since his arrest in January 2021, which occurred after his return from Germany where he was taken for treatment and recovery from a nerve agent poisoning incident blamed on the Kremlin. The authorities at the prison where he was held claimed that the opposition leader had died as a result of "sudden death syndrome," although the narrative is being questioned by experts and supporters, especially in light of previous attempts by the Russian government to harm or assassinate Navalny, and the questionable deaths of many Kremlin foes in recent years.

A well-known Putin critic, Alexei Navalny organised anti-government rallies and campaigned for office to fight for changes against Russia's corruption and President Vladimir Putin's administration. Navalny was the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), through which he gained attention by focusing on corruption in Russian politics and the economy. In 2013, Navalny finished second against the Putin-backed incumbent, despite attempts by authorities to entangle him in an embezzlement case. In time, his work broadened from focusing on corruption to criticism of the political system under Putin. He was a galvanizing figure in protests of unprecedented size against dubious national election results and the exclusion of independent candidates. While in jail in 2019 for an election protest, he was hospitalized for what appeared to be a poisoning attempt. A year later, Navalny was again a victim of a nerve agent poisoning while on a flight to Moscow, and was in a two-week-long medically induced coma while under treatment in Germany.

After returning to Moscow in January 2021, Navalny was arrested and convicted of two and a half years in prison, provoking enormous protests in which police detained over 10,000 people. As part of a wide opposition crackdown that followed, a Moscow court in 2021 banned Navalny's anti-corruption foundation from engaging in "extremist" activities. Later, after the Ukraine war began, Navalny was sentenced to an additional nine years in prison for embezzlement and contempt of court in a case he said was concocted. Last August, he was found guilty of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in jail. Following his incarceration in 2021, Navalny earned several honours in recognition of his political activities, including the Sakharov Prize for his work for human rights.

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## Aaron Bushnell's self-immolation for Gaza

Aaron Bushnell, an active-duty US Air Force member, died as a result of setting himself on fire in an act of self-immolation in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, to protest the ongoing genocide of Palestinian civilians perpetuated by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip as well as U.S. support for the military campaign. In a video broadcast onto social media and streaming platform Twitch which Bushnell made while walking in front of the embassy, he was heard saying, "I will no longer be complicit in genocide. I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest, but compared to what people are experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonisers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal. Free Palestine." As elicited from the video, his last words were repeatedly heard to be "Free Palestine".

Aaron Bushnell was transported to a local hospital and pronounced dead a few hours later. His extraordinary protest against Israel's attack on Gaza grabbed international news. Vigils in his honour have been conducted around the United States, including Washington, D.C., New York, San Antonio, Texas, Portland, and other locations. This is not the first time instances of self-immolation to protest against wars have occurred in the United States, and it is the second act of self-immolation since the war in Gaza began in October. The protest seems to have generated a debate in international media as major US media outlets strove to portray Bushnell as being mentally disturbed, while pro-Palestinian voices have decried the blind bias of Western media, as well as the apathy shown by the Biden administration to the protests of its own servicemen against abetting the Gaza genocide.

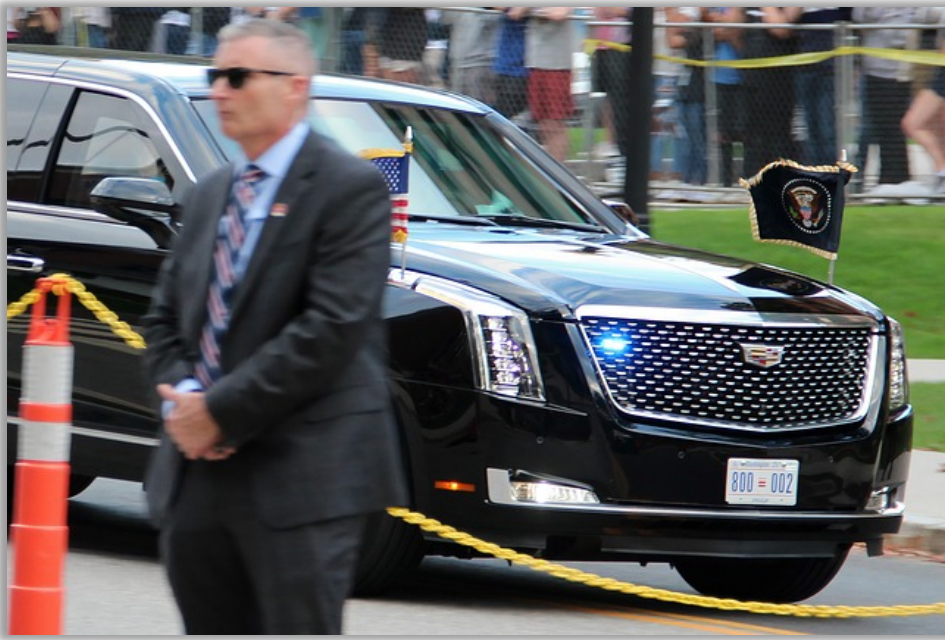
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## Democrat voters in Michigan send warning to Biden over unwavering support for Israel

In Dearborn, a Michigan city with a large Arab and Muslim population, United States President Joe Biden came second in the Democratic primaries, in a vote hailed as “groundbreaking”. As part of an organised effort to denounce his “unwavering” support for Israel’s war on Gaza, many Democrat voters chose “uncommitted” over the incumbent. According to initial results, more than 101,000 individuals across the state voted in support of the protest movement. Advocates said the statistics are a huge rebuke to Washington’s support for Israel, as well as a warning sign for Democrats heading into the general election in November. Huwaida Arraf, a Palestinian-American human rights lawyer, said Tuesday’s 101,000 votes fail to fully represent the rising dissatisfaction with Biden’s policies. Some individuals chose to vote for other candidates in order to express their unhappiness with Biden, while many people opted not to engage in the process at all.

As a swing state, Michigan could be crucial towards determining the outcome of the presidential election coming November. In 2020, Biden defeated Trump by around 150,000 votes in Michigan, which is roughly equivalent to the number of people who did not support Biden in the primary election. Overall, 13.3 per cent of voters submitted “uncommitted” ballots in Tuesday’s state primary, with virtually all votes counted, which far exceeds the Arab American and Muslim populations in the state, indicating rising discontent with the Democrat camp over US mishandling of the Israel-Gaza issue.

Some experts say that this discontent could quickly spread and affect other primaries in the coming weeks and months. Advocates in adjacent Minnesota, which has a sizable Muslim and Somali American community, have already stepped up their efforts to encourage locals to vote “uncommitted” in the state’s Super Tuesday primary.

For his part, Biden avoided any mention of the “uncommitted” movement or the Israel-Gaza war in a statement hailing the more than 618,000 votes cast in his favour in Michigan. Biden’s stance appears to be consistent with the argument made by some Democrat-aligned observers who believe voters will have long forgotten the Gaza war by November. However, Palestinian rights groups argued that the Michigan vote should serve as a caution to Democrats not to presume that voters have short memories. Human rights, they noted, are a major concern for many people, and the severity of the Gaza conflict has prompted warnings of “genocide,” even from United Nations experts. Advocates said that Biden’s clear support for Israel, along with his scepticism of the Gazan death toll, will have left a lasting impression on many Americans. While Biden and his staff may have lately begun to urge Israel to reduce civilian casualties in Gaza and acknowledge Palestinians’ “unimaginable pain and loss,” many will be perceiving this as “doublespeak” because the Biden administration continues to fund and support the Gaza war.

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## Massive farmer protests in India ahead of elections

Since February 13, more than 20,000 farmers have tried to march on towards the capital New Delhi, riding tractors and trucks, in an attempt to pressure Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration to satisfy their demand for guaranteed minimum support prices for crops. The protests have mainly been led by farmers from Punjab as well as from adjacent Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The farmers' march has been held off by security personnel employing tear gas canisters from drones and firing rubber bullets. Four rounds of discussions between the administration and farmers' representatives have failed to yield any results. Protests have escalated after a farmer was killed during skirmishes with police. India's beleaguered opposition parties, looking for a means to oppose Modi and undermine his carefully nurtured strong-man image, have rallied behind the protesting farmers. Farmers and opposition politicians say they anticipate the protest to extend outside Punjab, similar to the 2020/21 movement, and that it will diminish Modi's popularity in the long run.

Two years ago, Indian farmers staged nationwide demonstrations against new contentious agricultural regulations that the government said were intended to loosen restrictions governing the sale, pricing, and storage of farm commodities. The yearlong protest ended when Modi reversed course and vowed to remove the legislation. The administration convened a commission to discuss guaranteed agricultural prices throughout the country. The present demonstrations are the result of the BJP administration not keeping its promises. Farmers are seeking legally binding guarantees for minimum support prices for 23 crops, with floor prices set at 50% above the total cost of production. Farmers are seeking pensions, waivers on farm loans, and compensation for over 700 deaths during the 2020-2021 demonstrations. Although the farmers' protest is currently limited to the breadbasket state of Punjab, their complaints about falling incomes resonate across India's vast rural hinterland, showcasing that Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have done too little to support the farming community and raise living standards. More than 40% of India's 1.4 billion population rely on agriculture, and many claim they have suffered economically under Modi at the cost of their urban counterparts.

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## 'Boycott India' campaign gains ground in Bangladesh

Following last month's elections in Bangladesh, an extensive "India Out" campaign was launched on social media, decrying invasive Indian influence in Bangladeshi politics. In recently held general elections, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth term, while the opposition boycotted the votes. The Bangladeshi diaspora and opposition parties have fueled the anti-India campaign, advocating boycotts of Indian products. This movement has similarities with campaigns in the Maldives, where Mohamed Muizzu used anti-India sentiment to win the presidential elections. In Dhaka, the campaign was launched against the background of India's traditionally intimate ties with Hasina's administration and its troubled relationship with the opposition, leading many to assume India favoured and even actively supported the status quo. The campaign, labelled "India Out," is mainly being driven on social media by Bangladeshi diaspora influencers such as Pinaki Bhattacharya, and hashtags #IndiaOut, #BoycottIndia and #BoycottIndianProducts have been trending on Facebook for several weeks.

The boycott campaign has provided a focus for deep-seated resentment of India in Bangladesh, driven by real issues on the ground such as border killings, trade deficit, and divisive rhetoric from BJP politicians. According to the human rights NGO Odhikar, India's border authorities have killed about 1,276 Bangladeshis and wounded 1,183 others since 2010. The decades-old unsolved water-sharing agreements for 53 transboundary rivers, as well as Bangladesh's large trade deficit with India, have all prompted concerns about the country's sovereignty and economic independence. Analysts, meanwhile, noted that the boycott of Indian goods could have serious consequences for the two nations' economic ties, something that should worry politicians banking on stronger ties between the two neighbours. India is a significant exporter to Bangladesh, with annual trade often topping \$12 billion. Furthermore, Bangladesh is significantly reliant on India for basic commodities, and the two governments are now negotiating an annual allotment of Indian agricultural goods.

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Image attribute: @ Pinaki Bhattacharya, one of the activists organising the India Out campaign on various social media platforms.

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