

Conflict Weekly

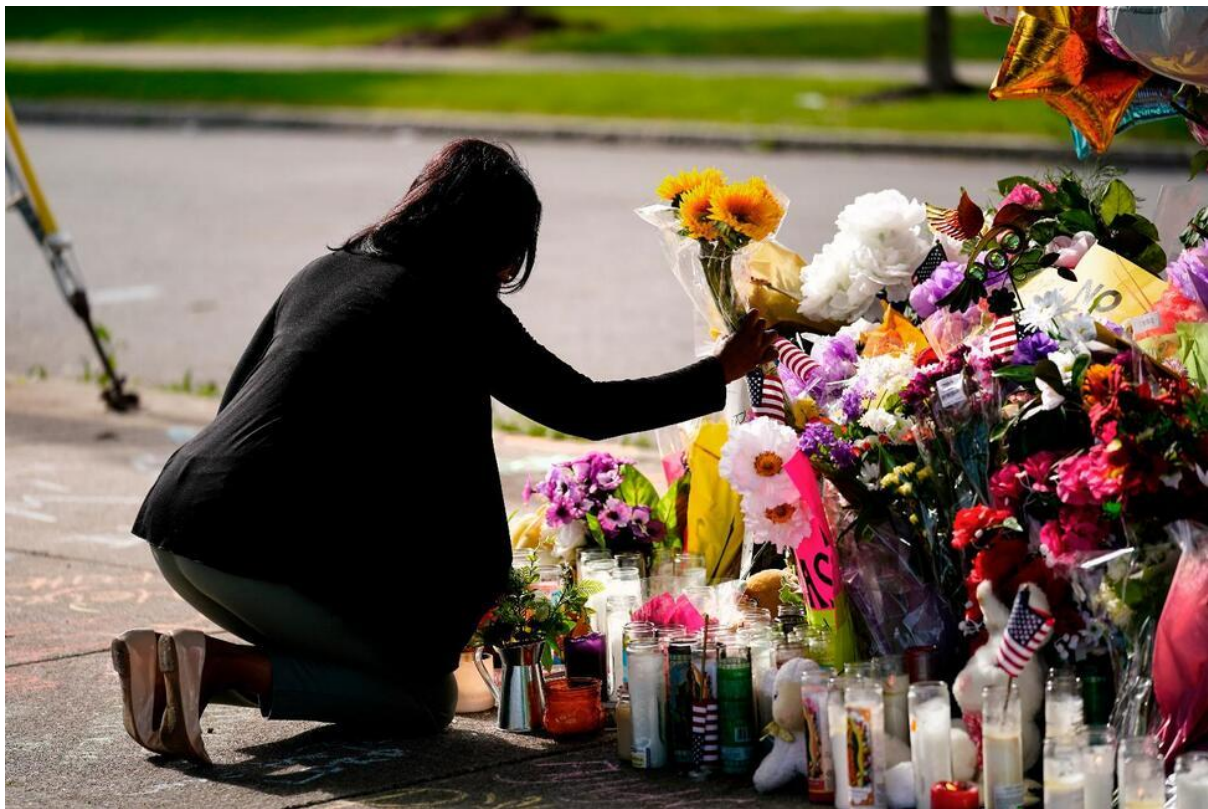
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A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Another racial attack in the US, Divide within the EU over the Russian oil ban, and violence in Israel

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Sri Lanka witnessed violence, complicating the political and economic crises that the country is facing for the last one month. (Image Source: Daily Mirror)

The US: Another racial attack highlights the deep divide within

Hungary: EU's Budapest challenge to pass a united ban on Russian oil

Israel: Al Jazeera Journalist killed in the West Bank

The US: Another racial attack highlights the deep divide within

In the news

On 14 May, in the US, in a racially motivated attack, a young white male opened fire in a supermarket, killing ten people, most of them belonging to the African American community. The shooting took place in Buffalo; a report in the New York Times read: "drove more than 200 miles to mount his attack, which he also livestreamed, the police said, a chilling video feed that appeared designed to promote his sinister agenda."

On 14 May, the US president, in his statement on the shooting, said: "... we don't need anything else to state a clear moral truth: A racially motivated hate crime is abhorrent to the very fabric of this nation. Any act of domestic terrorism, including an act perpetrated in the name of a repugnant white nationalist ideology, is antithetical to everything we stand for in America. Hate must have no safe harbor. We must do everything in our power to end hate-fueled domestic terrorism."

On 18 May, a report in the New York Times read explained how the killer "had posted racist and antisemitic memes and messages and updated his plans on the internet forums. He was able to buy an assault-style weapon despite having been held for a mental health evaluation in 2021 after making a threatening remark at his high school."

Issues at large

First, the continuing violence in the US. A New York Times report, referring to data prepared by the Gun Violence Archive, mentions that in 2021, there were more than 690 shootings in which there were four or more fatalities in 28 incidents. According to the same data, in 2022 until so far, there were more than 200 shootings where more than four or more were either injured or killed. Of those shootings, nine involved four or more fatalities.

Second, the hate crimes in the US. While the above data refer to mass shootings by gunmen, the US has been witnessing hate crimes. The violence against the people of colour in the US has a recent history; the shooting in Buffalo was not the first one. In August 2019, a young white gunman shot 23 people in a supermarket in El Paso, Texas. The victims were mainly from Latin America, and the shooting was considered a hate crime motivated against the migrants.

Third, the racial divide inside the US vis-à-vis the efforts to address them. The recent US history highlights the increasing racial faultlines and violence against minorities. On the other hand, the Black Lives Matter movement also highlights the increasing awareness of the racial divide within and the need to address hate crimes. The recent trial over the murder of George Floyd also underlines the systemic issues within the US state apparatus.

Fourth, the "replacement theory," white radicalization, the internet and lone wolves. The "replacement theory" refers to the threat of replacement of a people by another set of people of different colour/race/ideology. The causes that have motivated the killers in the above incidents are complex and should underline the impending threat and the inadequate responses. From the attack on mosques in New Zealand (2019) to the recent attack in the US, there is a trend linked with the above – a hate literature, its easy availability online, internet radicalization, and lone-wolf attacks. The ready availability of such literature in the open online domain makes it easier for young individuals to get radicalized online and become lone wolves. Social media provides

the space to publish their views/manifesto and even allows them to stream online the hate attacks.

In perspective

First, the warning. What is happening in the US is only the beginning. The hate crimes are likely to expand, given the literature available, violent ideology, new media and access to weapons. There would be more lone wolf attacks as witnessed in New Zealand, the US and elsewhere.

Second, the need to build a narrative countering "the replacement" argument. The idea of "replacement" is gaining across the world; the violence and crimes against the minorities in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Europe and the US can be traced back to this argument, which feeds into a violent ideology and taking action.

Third, the tools of violence – from easy availability of weapons to literature online. Neither is an easy task; so is the task to fight racial crimes and ideology. The fight against the crime has to start with fighting the ideology that feeds the radical individuals.

Hungary: EU's Budapest challenge to pass a united ban on Russian oil

In the news

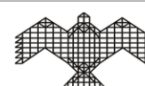
On 16 May, Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, on the EU proposal for an oil embargo on Russia. He said: "Every day Brussels abuses its power and tries to impose things on us that we do not want." Earlier, he mentioned that the decision would affect Hungary as its economy depends on Russian energy imports of more than 50 per cent. On 06 May, he rejected the EU's proposal saying the sanctions on the energy will have an effect equal to "nuclear bomb," on Hungary.

On 16 May, Lithuania's and Ireland's foreign ministers accused Hungary of its decision to veto the EU's oil embargo on Russia. Ireland's foreign minister, Simon Coveney said: "This is about a deterrent to the continuation of war. The sooner the EU can finalize that sixth sanctions package the better."

On 09 May, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen met Orban to discuss Hungary's objection to the EU's oil ban. Post the discussion, she said: "This evening's discussion with PM Viktor Orban was helpful to clarify issues related to sanctions and energy security."

Issues at large

First, the equation between the EU and Hungary. The relations between Hungary and European Union have never been static. Especially under Orban, there have been domestic, regional, and international issues that have maintained the crack in Hungary-EU relations. At the domestic level, the government's misuse of the EU funds, democratic backsliding, manipulation of media, undermining courts, and provisions against LGBT have been the reason behind the rift. Looking at the regional level, the neighbouring countries Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, tagging along with Hungary in misuse of the EU funds and democratic backsliding, had also challenged the EU's operations. At the international, Hungary's disagreement with the



EU's sanctions on China during the crackdown on Hong Kong also created a similar situation where the EU could not step forward to support Hong Kong because of Hungary. Orban, keeping the economic relations with China on the front, denied supporting the EU. The same is repeated with Hungary's dependency on Russia's gas and oil.

Second, Hungary's dependency on Russia. The relations between Hungary and Russia go back to 2010. When Orban was re-elected, Russia, more than the economic ties had more focused on involving Hungary through politics, energy, and its elites. Keeping Hungary being a member of NATO and the EU, Russia has always concentrated on keeping the loop going on with Hungary to block the EU's foreign policy decisions and sanctions against Russia.

Third, the bargain. EU's trump card to bring Hungary under its control have always been through funding adjustment. One, though, promised to send cash and improve infrastructure from the richest EU countries. Two, by cutting down on EU funds keeping the rule of law and democratic backsliding reasons. This situation is reversing back in favour of Orban, as the EU wants his vote to pass the oil embargo. Hungary is currently demanding a five-year exception to phase out Russian oil import and a EUR 750 billion in exchange for a vote against Russia and indirectly to make EU funds flow back into Orban's cronies accounts which was restricted after the recent elections.

In perspective

First, Hungary's bloc to EU's sanctions will impact the EU's proposal to the oil embargo, but this will also sideline Hungary from Europe. There has been a shift in relations with the regional neighbours of Hungary post the Ukraine war. Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic have turned in favour of the EU; the perception has changed positively with the intake of refugees and support to Ukraine. Hence Hungary's rejection of the oil ban might lead the EU countries to opt for the ban individually, which leads to Hungary's isolation for its stance favouring Russia.

Second, Russia has succeeded in breaking European unity. However, it will face the hardship of economic sanctions from the EU countries and a big challenge in diverting its gas and oil supplies from the European market.

Third, there is also another possibility that without a united EU ban on phasing out the Russian energy exports might lead to a more significant split amongst the EU member states in taking an individual stance against Russia, considering the loss to their economies. This will turn in favour of Russia to play its big power politics over the small economy states of the EU.

Israel: Al Jazeera Journalist killed in the West Bank

In the news

On 11 May, Shireen Abu Akleh, an Al Jazeera journalist covering Palestine news, was shot by Israel's forces on the West Bank. Abu Akleh was covering Israel's military operations in the refugee camp of Jenin. She was wearing a vest that said "press", but Israel's snipers did not wait before opening fire. Abu Akleh was shot in the head, while Al Jazeera's other journalist Ali al-Samoudi was shot in the back. Abu Akleh was rushed to the hospital in critical condition and passed away shortly, while al-Samoudi is stable. Abu Akleh was shortly transferred to the Itishari hospital in Ramallah, a city in the central West Bank, for autopsy after public prosecution.

The Palestinian Authority's President Mahmoud Abbas has stated: "it was a cold blooded murder, and it shows the monstrosity of Israeli colonialism and occupation." However, Israel has denied all allegations with the prime minister Naftali Bennet stating: "these are unfounded allegations before Israel could conduct a thorough investigation, Palestinians firing indiscriminately were responsible for the killing of journalists." The Al Jazeera reporters present on scene, including al-Samoudi, deny the presence of any Palestinian fighters in Jenin, and they claim there was no confrontation between Palestinian people and Israel's forces. Al-Samoudi has stated that journalists were directly targeted.

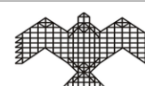
On 13 May, the funeral of Abu Akleh was conducted in East Jerusalem. Israel's police forces attacked the procession and beat the mourners, almost causing them to drop the coffin. Palestinian flags were seized and all patriotic music was shut off. The Jerusalem Red Crescent said 33 people were injured. The US has described the scenes as "deeply disturbing," while the EU said it was "appalled by the violence and the level of unnecessary force exercised by Israeli police." Al Jazeera has strongly condemned the attacks stating the attack "violates all international norms and rights."

Issues at large

First, Israel's target of journalists. The International Federation of Journalists says Israeli forces have killed at least 46 Palestinian journalists since 2000, detaining and imprisoning many more. Abu Akleh was one of the 12 Al Jazeera staff killed on duty. Palestinian journalists face constant harassment and attacks from Israel's forces, especially when trying to cover Israel's brutality. Even though Israel was familiar with Abu Akleh since she's been working for the network for more than two decades, it did not help her from facing attacks. The killing is a testament to the lack of freedom of the press for Palestinian journalists.

Second, the conflict in Jenin. Abu Akleh covered Israel's recent military operations in the Jenin refugee camp. Israel has increased its raids after 19 Jewish Israelis were killed in recent violence. The raids have caused the violence to increase, with 28 Palestinians dead. Abu Akleh's last email read: "Occupation forces storm Jenin and besiege a house in the Jabriyat neighbourhood. On the way there – I will bring you news as soon as the picture becomes clear." Violence in West Bank has increased, especially after the Al Aqsa mosque attacks.

Third, the violence at the funeral. Israel's attacks on the mourners reduce the credibility of its statements. It indicates the use of unnecessary violence and stripping the dead of basic respect and rights. For this reason, Palestine has declined the offer of joint investigation on the killing suggested by Israel. Israel's trigger for indulging in violence in this incident seems trivial and unfounded.



Fourth, the US response. The US has emerged as a strong and vocal advocate for a just and transparent investigation. Further, they have condemned the violence that occurred at the funeral. Abu Akleh was a Palestinian-American journalist who held dual citizenship. The US has risen in solidarity in the killing of one of its citizens, with Washington hosting a vigil for Abu Akleh. However, American based activists have called out the hypocrisy- such statements ignore Washington's complicit involvement in Israel's human rights violation as US politicians give unconditional support to the Israeli government. Joe Biden's aid to Israel currently amounts to USD 3.8 billion annually, provided without calling Israel out on its human rights abuses.

In perspective

First, the lack of Palestinian voices. The number of media outlets for Palestinians to voice out their issues remains limited because of innumerable restrictions. Abu Akleh was one of the most trusted, respected and beloved reporters for the Palestinian people. Incidents like these are likely to discourage journalists from reporting on Palestine because of fear and helplessness.

Second, the lack of repercussions. Israel's target of journalists has existed for more than two decades. However, the international community has been unable to impose consequences on the government. The lack of unchecked aid and the emergence of more pro-Israel policies like the Abraham accords have made the issue complex to tackle. Humanitarian abuses need to receive more international pressure until fair justice is provided to the affected people.

Also, from around the world

By Avishka Ashok, Vijay Anand Panigrahi, Ashwin Dhanabalan, Rishma Banerjee, Apoorva Sudhakar and Padmashree Anandhan

China and East Asia

China: Detained Uighurs in Xinjiang region list leaked

On 13 May, the Strait Times reported that a police list of detained Uighurs had been leaked which estimates that over a million Uighurs and other Muslim minorities were being held in different detention centres and prisons across the Xinjiang region in China. The list was released to Uighur activists outside China. According to the report, the information on the government's anti-terrorism crackdown in the region is closely protected by the authorities. It also explained that most court notices are not available to the public while the police are uncooperative with the people.

Taiwan: China condemns the US for helping Taipei regain WHO observer status

On 16 May, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian stated that China rejects and deplores the United States' insistence on passing the measure into law, which will help Taiwan recover observer status at the World Health Organization (WHO) and urged the US to handle Taiwan-related problems carefully and appropriately. US President Joe Biden has signed a measure directing the Secretary of State to design a strategy to reclaim Taiwan's WHO observer status. Zhao said: "We urge the US to adhere to the one-China principle and the three China-U.S. joint communiques, comply with international law and basic norms governing international relations, prudently and properly handle Taiwan-related issues, and not to use this bill to help Taiwan expand its so-called 'international space', otherwise it will

cause further damage to China-U.S. relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

Japan and the EU: China opposes joint statement on the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Taiwan

On 13 May, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian addressed the daily press briefing opposed the remarks made by Japan and the EU on the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Japan and the EU issued a joint statement, expressing concerns over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands or Diaoyu Islands, the human rights issues in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and the Taiwan Strait and the issues in the China Sea. Zhao accused Japan and the EU of false information and hyping the tensions in the region and said: "China is firmly opposed to such practice, and has lodged stern representation with relevant parties." On the question of the Diaoyu islands, as China calls it, Zhao said that the islands have always been a part of the Chinese territory. Zhao also reiterated China's stand on the maritime issues and said that the country would continue to protect its territories. He said: "China will firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, and at the same time is ready to settle differences with relevant countries via consultations." He further urged the foreign entities to respect China's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in China's internal affairs.

China: Four arrested on Hong Kong on the suspicion of endangering national security

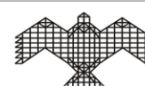
On 12 May, the Asahi Shimbun reported the arrest of a Catholic cardinal Joseph Zen, singer-actress Denise Ho, lawyer Margaret Ng, scholar Hui Po-Keung and former Legislative Council member Cyd Ho Sau-lan on the charges of colluding with foreign entities and endangering the national security. The police statement accused Zen, aged 90, and the others of providing financial relief to the participants of pro-democracy protests in 2019 through the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund. The authorities have demanded the four individuals to submit their travel documents. On the same day, the Commissioner's Office in Hong Kong, which represents mainland China, responded to the criticism voiced by the West on the arrest of four individuals in the city. One amongst the arrested citizens is the 90-year-old Catholic Cardinal Joseph Zen. The officials opposed the criticism and said: "The persons concerned are suspected of conspiracy to collude with foreign countries or foreign forces to endanger national security - an act of severe nature."

South Korea: Locally developed heavyweight torpedo tested amidst concerns

On 17 May, a submarine-launched advanced heavyweight torpedo called "Tiger Shark" was successfully tested by South Korea, as reported by a state-run defence research agency. The launch took place in the East Sea and is being regarded as a strategic move towards strengthening the country's maritime arsenal. The torpedo was assessed for the second time after its initial launch test in March was successfully undertaken. Amidst North Korea's increased interest in developing and testing marine weapons, the South now deems it important to bolster its maritime capabilities.

North Korea: Operations to revive an inactive nuclear reactor is underway in Yongbyon

On 13 May, satellite images surfaced confirming North Korea's ongoing efforts to reconstruct an inactive nuclear reactor in the Yongbyon nuclear complex. This reactor is reportedly ten times larger than the existing one, which, upon completion, would be able to magnify the production of plutonium for nuclear weapons. The US notes North Korea's negligence in hiding this operation and attributes it to its blatant demonstration of nuclear prowess to intimidate the world. The reactor's construction was stopped in 1994 owing to a framework agreement between the US and North Korea.



Southeast Asia

Myanmar: NUG meets Arakan Army leaders online seeking armed collaboration

On 16 May, Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) and the Rakhine State's Arakan Army (AA) discussed a possible union formation to achieve their common goal of dethroning the military junta from power. The leaders from NUG hoped to convince the leaders of the ethnic armed group to join forces through this 2-hour-long online meeting. The NUG constitutes ousted National League for Democracy members who now seek to topple this military regime. Building trust with ethnic armed groups is just another approach of the NUG to reestablish a federal democratic union in the country. Ethnic armed groups like Karen National Liberation Army and Kachin Independence Army have already joined hands with the NUG and fight alongside their armed wings.

Indonesia: Fishermen in distress as company dredges massive areas offshores

On 13 May, fishermen of the Riau province of Indonesia submitted a petition to the president seeking an immediate stop to dredging activities on offshores. The petition has sought revocation of the dredging permits held by PT Logomas Utama. The fishermen claim that dredging in the region has caused their businesses to suffer greatly. Their claim has been backed by Indonesia's biggest environmental NGO, which addresses how the impacts of dredging affect the poor fishers of the region. PT Logomas Utama is currently allowed to dredge sand along 5,030 hectares (12,430 acres), which the fishers seek to get rid of.

Indonesia: Palm oil export ban endangers the livelihood of local farmers

On 16 May, the palm oil and product export ban raised a furore among the local small-scale farmers who urge the government to reverse its decision. Indonesia is the largest producer of palm oil in the world but had to resort to a ban on it in an attempt to manage the price rise fostered due to Ukraine war, disappointing harvests, and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the ban has caused palm prices to plummet which affects the livelihood of the local farmers significantly. Out of the 270 million people in Indonesia, around 16 million are small-scale palm farmers who now urge the government to find a solution.

Laos: Vientiane faces an acute fuel crisis

On 17 May, the government of Laos held an emergency meeting to address the soaring prices of gasoline. Laos relies on Thailand for most of its petroleum supplies. Thailand oil and gas firms PTT Oil and Retail Business Plc clarified that it would be distributing fuel as usual but asked the people to be prepared for "some gaps." The rising gasoline prices have also caused panic buying and forced consumers to queue for hours at gas stations to stock up on fuel.

Singapore: MHA denies entry to an extremist preacher from Indonesia

On 17 May, Singapore's ministry of home affairs (MHA) stated that they had denied entry to an Indonesian preacher due to his history of extremist teachings. As a result, Indonesian preacher Abdul Somad Batubara and six of his companions were denied entry to Singapore's Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal. An MHA spokesperson said Somad had preached about the legitimacy of using suicide bombings in the context of Israel-Palestine and had commented the denigrating members of other faiths.

South Asia

Sri Lanka: In urgent need of forex, left with just one day of petrol

On 18 May, the newly appointed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe cautioned the people during his address that Sri Lanka was down to its last day of petrol as the country had run out of foreign currency to import more fuel. He also indicated the country's urgent need for USD 75 million of foreign currency to import necessary commodities. Privatization of state-owned Sri Lankan Airlines is also probable, according to the Prime Minister. Sri Lankan central bank would also be printing money to pay wages to state-sector employees despite the obvious consequence of the rupee depreciating further.

India: Wheat export ban faces criticism; G7 expected to address the issue

On 17 May, there's an increased probability of the G7 persuading India to reverse their wheat export ban in their upcoming summit in Germany, likely to be attended by Prime Minister Modi. The United Nations Security Council hopes to address the wheat export ban issue and urge the countries opting for it, including India, to reverse their decision owing to its implications in the global market. The upcoming G-7 summit scheduled from 26 June to 28 June is expected to keep food security as an issue at the forefront. India's wheat export ban shocked the world as it comes in times of dire necessity of ensuring global food security.

India: First indigenously developed air-launched anti-ship missile tested successfully

On 18 May, an anti-ship missile was developed and tested successfully by the Indian Navy and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The Indian Navy test-fired its first homemade air-launched anti-ship missile from a Sea King-42B helicopter from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur, Odisha. Incorporated with futuristic technologies, including an advanced navigation system and integrated avionics, the missile test mission was successful at achieving all of its objectives.

India: First 5G testbed inaugurated during TRAI's silver jubilee celebrations.

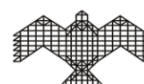
On 17 May, India welcomed its first 5G testbed which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address at the silver jubilee celebrations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). StartUps and industry players would now be able to test and validate their products at five different locations in India. This INR 220 crore project will go a long way in making Indian startups self-reliant, as earlier they had to go abroad to test and validate their products. The testbed was developed as a collaborative effort by a team of eight institutes led by IIT Madras. The Prime Minister further expressed the idea of India rolling out a 6G telecom network by the end of the decade.

Pakistan: One person killed and several injured in blast in Karachi

On 12 May, one person was killed and over 10 people were injured after an improvised explosive device (IED) planted in a motorbike went off in Saddar. While speaking to Dawn, Karachi police chief Ghulam Nabi Memon stated that the nature of the explosion was being determined, adding that it would be "premature" to say whether the blast was intended to target a vehicle of the Pakistan Coast Guard.

Pakistan: Prime minister expresses condolences to bereaved families of victims of a suicide attack

On 15 May, Pakistan's military media wing, the Inter-Services Public Relations released a statement saying the three soldiers and three children had passed away in a suicide attack. The attack occurred in the north western region of the country, which borders Afghanistan. It was reported that the suicide bomber had blown himself up in a local marketplace in Miranshah. The newly minted prime minister of Sharif Shahbaz Sharif criticized the attack and said:



"Blood of our soldiers & citizens is a debt on us that we will repay by eradicating terrorism from our country. Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families."

Pakistan: UN lists as drought-hit country

On 15 May, the United Nations listed Pakistan as a country facing drought emergencies. According to the report released by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), 23 countries including Pakistan have experienced drought emergencies in the last two years. Additionally, the United Nations Global Land Outlook stated that Pakistan's desertification control through Sustainable Land Management Productive land is scarce in Pakistan as 80 percent of the country is arid or semi-arid.

Pakistan: Wildfires ravage forests in Haripur and Mansehra

On 15 May, wildfires ruined forests comprising of hundreds of acres of land in Haripur and Mansehra districts as strong winds pushed the fire across the region. The Rescue 1122 in statement stated that its firefighters had managed to put out blazes in forests in Mansehra Tehsil and its suburbs, while the fires in hilly areas were put out through traditional means.

Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Tajikistan: Violent protests take place in Gorno-Badakhshan

On 18 May, Tajikistan's Interior Ministry said that nine people were killed and several injured in "an anti-terrorist operation" in the Gorno-Badakhshan region. Clashes between the demonstrators and the official are occurring in the region after their demand to look at the 2021 death of a suspect in police custody were rejected. Moreover, the protestors have demanded the release of several arrested activists and others who have been detained or jailed in recent months.

Kazakhstan: Reports the death of 64 endangered seals

Kazakhstan reported that 64 seals along with five huge sturgeons have washed up on the Caspian Sea shores over the weekend. This took place in the Manghystau region in the western part of the country, and the Manghystau regional fishery inspection agency said that the animals will be tested to figure out their causes of death. The species have been victim to industrial pollution and overhunting and this is not the first time that this has happened. About three weeks ago, 94 such bodies had washed up in the same region. Incidentally, as opposed to their 1 million-strong population in the early 20th century, their numbers are now estimated at less than 70,000.

Iran: Inauguration of drone factory in Tajikistan's capital

On 17 May, Iran announced the inauguration of a production line in Tajikistan which will manufacture military drones. Seen as a part of an agreement to facilitate better cooperation between the two countries, the factory will be producing Ababil 2, a drone that can carry out attacks as well as conduct surveillance. This drone is capable of operating from a 200 km range and is named after a bird mentioned in the Quran. The inauguration ceremony took place in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan and was attended by General Mohammad Hossain Bagheri, the chief of staff of Iran's armed forces.

Lebanon: Loss of majority in the parliament for Hezbollah and its allies

On 17 May, the results from Sunday's elections in Lebanon were revealed. The Shia Muslim Hezbollah movement, which is backed by Iran, lost its majority in the parliament, receiving 3 seats less than the necessary 65 out of 128. In the last elections in 2018, the Hezbollah-led bloc comprising Hezbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), and the Shia Amal movement had 71 seats. While candidates representing Hezbollah and Amal managed to hold on to their seats,

their allies, like president Michel Aoun's FPM suffered shock defeats. This year FPM's rival Christian party, the Lebanese Forces, won 19 seats and independent candidates won 13 seats. However, given the political makeup of Lebanon, that there is no outright winner will make the possibility of meaningful change quite difficult.

Saudi Arabia: Sandstorms wreak havoc on city-life

On 18 May, Riyadh reported a severe sandstorm. While sandstorms are a common affair in desert areas of the Middle East, a recent increase in their intensity has been paralyzing city life. Low visibility in Riyadh made it impossible to just a few 100 meters ahead. This in turn slowed down traffic to a large extent and made it difficult to see even the skyscrapers in the front. Not only Saudi Arabia, but neighbouring countries have also reported heavy sandstorms. Since mid-April, Iraq has been through eight sandstorms.

Israel: UN Rapporteurs say that forced eviction of Palestine akin to war crimes

On 16 May, in a joint statement, three UN special rapporteurs said that Israel's decision to evict approximately 1200 Palestinian citizens from their homes in Masafer Yatta amounted to war crimes. They said that Israel's judicial system, by allowing this policy, is a party to the systemic oppression of Palestinians. With the courts rejecting the last appeal by the Masafer Yatta citizens against their eviction, around 1200 Palestinians now stand at risk. Francesca Albanese, one of the UN Special Rapporteurs, said: "Violates the absolute prohibition against the forcible transfer by an occupying power of parts of its civilian population into an occupied territory."

Tunisia: Protest against president's political measures

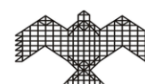
On 15 May, capital Tunis witnessed protests as Tunisians denounced rising food prices and President Kais Saeid's political steps. BBC quoted a coordinator of the Citizens against the Coup group who said the people were protesting against Saeid's new constitution and termed it "unilaterally drawn up." Similarly, an official from the Ennahda Movement said the protests are likely to transform into hunger strikes and sit-ins.

Mali: Germany to increase its UN peacekeeping troops

On 11 May, Germany's government announced its decision to increase the number of German troops serving in the UN peacekeeping mission by 300 soldiers to 1,400. AFP news agency quoted the government spokesperson Christiane Hoffmann: "This is intended to compensate for capacities previously undertaken by French forces." The decision came a week after Germany announced it would not take part in an EU military training mission in Mali, citing concerns over fighting alongside the Russian mercenaries, suspected of human rights violations. Associated Press reported that Germany's support and training further will be offered to Niger, in its fight against Islamist militancy.

Uganda-DRC: Kampala to withdraw troops in DRC within two weeks

On 17 May, Uganda's land forces commander tweeted that Uganda would abide by the agreement with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and withdraw its troops from the latter in two weeks. Ugandan troops had been deployed in the DRC, along with Congolese troops, since December 2021 to tackle the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The commander said Operation Shujaa was scheduled to last only six months and unless there are further instructions, Uganda will not continue to station its troops in the DRC.



Europe and the Americas

Sweden: Youth reluctant to join NATO

On 18 May, prime minister Magdalena Andersson's decision to join NATO marked the end of Sweden's 200-year military neutrality policy, which the Nordic country has followed since the 19th century. While the majority of Swedes favor their nation joining NATO in the midst of the Ukraine conflict, many young people are more reluctant. Some even marched to the streets of Stockholm, condemning the loss of military neutrality as a step that would result in greater global warfare. According to a security policy analyst at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) Alina Engström, the benefits of quitting the military non-alignment status include the possibility of Sweden being involved in NATO's defence planning and receiving security assurances. The disadvantages of alliance participation include that Sweden must be more adaptable in adjusting its security policy and loses some flexibility in foreign and security policy.

Ukraine: Russian forces take control of Mariupol city

On 17 May, Mariupol, which had been under siege from the beginning of the war in February, finally fell to the Russian forces. The last of the Ukrainians holding out in the bunkers and tunnels below the Azovstal steelworks surrendered. Russia's defence ministry reports that 256 fighters have surrendered, among whom 51 were severely wounded, and will be taken to Novoazovsk in the Russian-backed breakaway Donetsk region. The remaining fighters were taken to a prison in Olenivka, near Donetsk. Ukraine has acknowledged the terrific bravery of the defenders at Mariupol, who managed to hold the Russian forces at bay for 82 days, amidst severe bombardment and blockades. Presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said: "Because Mariupol drew in the Russian Federation's forces for 82 days, the operation to seize the east and south (of Ukraine) was held up. It changed the course of the war."

Finland: Parliament approves application proposal for NATO membership

On 17 May, Helsinki's parliament voted yes to join the NATO military alliance. According to the speaker Matti Vanhanen, out of 200 parliamentarians, 188 voted in favor of the motion while eight voted against it. Foreign minister Pekka Haavisto stated that the decision would not change Finland's values of seeking peaceful and diplomatic solutions to conflicts. Haavisto added: "Our border would become the border between the military alliance and Russia. New tensions would not be a risk only during the application process but rather a new and permanent condition of our foreign and security policy." Chairman Jussi Halla-who also mentioned that the decision was taken after considering many experts and noting the opinions of ten parliamentary committees.

NATO: Organizes large scale military drills in Estonia

On 17 May, NATO organized one of the most extensive military exercises in the Baltic regions, involving ten countries. The exercises named Hedgehog were held in Estonia and will continue till 03 June. NATO said the exercises were aimed to enhance the readiness and interoperability of its forces and were planned even before Russia invaded Ukraine. About 15,000 troops are involved in the exercises marking it as one of the largest military drills held in Estonia since 1991. According to the BBC, the exercises were taking place 64 kilometers from Moscow's military bases and were intended to simulate an attack from Russia on Estonia.

The UK and EU: Likely to start a trade war

On 16 March, an article in BBC examined the possibility of a trade war between the EU and UK following hints that the UK government may scrap parts of the Brexit deal regarding Northern Ireland. Economists warn that the EU could target politically-sensitive products like Salmon from Scotland for tariffs to maximize the impact. An all-out trade war may be mutually

devastating at a time when the EU and UK economies are already severely unstable. The Brexit Opportunities Minister, Jacob Rees-Mogg has described such a scenario as an "act of self-harm," possibly betting that the EU will not take that risk. However, Brussels may decide that beginning the retaliation procedure is necessary to gain leverage and force the UK to concede in the Northern Ireland dispute.

Brazil: Tropical cyclone Yakecan causes widespread devastation

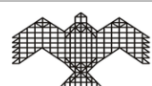
Cyclone Yakecan has hit Uruguay with strong winds and high waves. After significant devastation there it moved north to Brazil, causing massive power cuts. 220,000 homes were left without power, and trees were uprooted, causing damage to the power lines. As a result of this cyclone, temperatures are also set to drop in Brazilian states, and hailstorms have already been reported in the southern state of Santa Catarina. Yakecan, which means "heaven's sound" in Guarani, caused winds of over 100 kph.

The US: Air Force tests new hypersonic weapons successfully

On 16 May, the US Air Force announced that they have successfully tested hypersonic weapons on 14 May. It said that the Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW), has been tested by a B-52 bomber. According to the US it was difficult for air defence systems to track hypersonic weapons because of their speed and manoeuvrability. The Air Force said that these new weapons "will also expand precision-strike capabilities by enabling rapid response strikes against heavily defended land targets."

About the authors

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11 May 2022, Vol.3, No.6

Intensifying political crisis in Sri Lanka, Communal tensions in Ethiopia, and 75 days of Ukraine war

Ashwin Dhanabalan, Poulomi Mondal, and Rishma Banerjee



Sri Lanka witnessed violence, complicating the political and economic crises that the country is facing for the last one month. (Image Source: Daily Mirror)

COVER STORY

Sudan: Three years after Omar al-Bashir

After the regime change in April 2019, which overthrew the Omar al-Bashir government, there was a hope that the country will slowly march into democracy and economic prosperity. However, the developments in Sudan since October 2021 have placed them in a situation that existed in 2019, with the rolling back of civilian rule within the transitional setups, military in political command, rampant economic crisis and widespread violence.

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4 May 2022, Vol.3, No.5

Mali-France tensions and anti-UK protests in the Virgin Islands

Anu Maria and Padmashree Anandhan



UK's latest proposal to impose direct rule has provoked protests among the people of the British Virgin Islands. (Image Source: <https://caribbean.loopnews.com>)

Mali terminates defence accord with France over security violations

In the news

On 3 May, the Mali government announced the termination of defence ties with France, condemning multiple violations of its sovereignty by the French troops. In a statement, the military spokesperson, colonel Abdoulaye Maiga said, "For some time now, the government of the Republic of Mali notes with regret a profound deterioration in military cooperation with France." The accords that Mali ended were the framework for France's intervention in Mali, which was signed on 1 August 2014 to fight against Islamist militancy.

He cited multiple instances of French forces violating the country's air space. He also referred to France's decision on 3 June 2021 to end the joint military operation and on 17 February 2022 to withdraw its troops. A French foreign ministry spokesperson called the junta's decision

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27 April 2022, Vol.3, No.4

UK-Rwanda asylum deal, Mexico's continuing femicides, and Afghanistan's sectarian violence

Apoorva Sudhakar, Sejal Sharma, and Abigail Miriam Fernandez



UK Home Secretary Priti Patel meets with Minister Vincent Biruta at news conference announcing an asylum deal in Kigali. (Image Source: BBC)

UK-Rwanda: Agreement to relocate asylum seekers sparks criticism

In the news

On 22 April, Rwanda's president Paul Kagame defended the latest agreement with the UK to relocate asylum seekers to Kigali and said his country was not "trading human beings." Kagame said the UK had approached Rwanda because of how the latter handled Libyans after 2018 when he decided that Rwanda would shelter migrants attempting to cross to Europe who got stuck in Libya.

On 24 April, the UK government's legal department said a "refugee pushback" policy framed earlier to push back refugees arriving on dinghies from France through the English Channel had been withdrawn.

On 20 April, Denmark's immigration minister said they were engaging with Rwanda to frame a process to transfer asylum seekers from Denmark to the latter. The minister said this would

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20 April 2022, Vol.3, No.3

The battle for Donbas, Violence in Jerusalem, Riots in Sweden, Kyrgyzstan - Tajikistan border dialogue, and China's military drills

Rishma Banerjee, Lavanya Ravi, Sourina Bej, Abigail Miriam Fernandez, and Satyam Dubey



President Zelenskyy said recently: "It can now be stated that Russian troops have begun the battle for Donbas, for which they have been preparing for a long time. A very large part of the entire Russian army is now focused on this offensive." (Image Source: BBC/Institute for the Study of War)

Ukraine: The battle for Donbas

In the news

On 18 April president Zelenskyy referred to the renewed efforts on Ukraine's east, especially in Donbas, recognizing the "Battle of Donbas." He reassured that even in the face of a severe attack, Ukraine will keep fighting and defending. He also spoke about the ground reality and said: "very large part of the entire Russian army is now focused on this offensive."

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13 April 2022, Vol.3, No.2

Violence in Nigeria, and Russia's new military strategy in Ukraine

Apoorva Sudhakar and Rishma Banerjee



The recent surge in attacks by armed groups in different parts of Nigeria has raised security concerns. (Image Source: Al Jazeera)

Nigeria: Over 100 killed in another gunmen attack

[In the news](#)

On 12 April, the Associated Press reported that gunmen had killed over 100 people across four villages in Plateau state, in central Nigeria, on 10 April. The death toll has not been confirmed; witnesses said nearly 130 had died as the gunmen ransacked and set fire to homes. The news report quoted a government statement wherein the state governor promised: "to make it difficult for terrorists and other criminals to set their bases in any part of the state."

On the same day, the BBC reported mass burials conducted in the villages. The BBC estimated the death toll at 150 and said most victims were men and children; several residents are still fleeing to neighbouring villages. The news report quoted survivors who said security forces arrived nearly a day after the attacks.

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6 April 2022, Vol.3, No.1

Political Crises in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Tunisia; Ceasefire in Yemen; and the Battle for Mariupol

Chirshari de Alwis Gunasekare, Abigail Miriam Fernandez, Apoorva Sudhakar, Lavanya Ravi, and Sruthi Sadasivam



Photo Source: REUTERS/Dinuka Liyanawatte

Sri Lanka: The economic woes spiral into a political crisis

[In the news](#)

On 1 April 2021, Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a state of emergency following protests over the economic crisis. In his address, he said: "At this crucial juncture the country needs stability to weather the current financial crisis and difficulties."

On 5 April, the government lost its majority in the Parliament, following a series of resignations by the Parliamentarians, from the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and its alliance partner, the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP). Earlier, the Cabinet ministers also handed over their resignations, and most of the political parties withdrew their support to the ruling party to remain independent within the Parliament.

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30 March 2022, Vol.2, No.53

30 days of War in Ukraine

Padmashree Anandhan



Source: Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMT, 31 March)
Photo Source: BBC/Institute for the Study of War

30 days of Ukraine war: Developments, trends and perspective

[In the news](#)

On 24 February, Russia's President Vladimir Putin began the invasion in Ukraine, launching troops into Ukraine. The launch marked the start of the war in Europe since World War II.

On 27 February, the EU announced a ban on airspace to prevent Russian aircrafts from entering its space. The EU and its allies agreed to cut down Russian banks from SWIFT along with the US. It is the most relied financial telecommunication system of Russia used in oil and gas exports.

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23 March 2022, Vol.2, No.52

Sri Lanka's worsening economic crisis

Chirshari de Alwis Gunasekare



Besides the economic crisis, there is also a serious energy crisis in Sri Lanka: people are standing in long queues in front of the oil stations. (Image Source: REUTERS/DINUKA LIYANAWATTE)

The worsening economic crisis in Sri Lanka

[In the news](#)

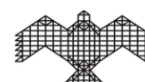
On 17 March, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa addressing the nation, on the current economic crisis claimed: "This crisis was not created by me. When those who contributed to the creation of this crisis are criticizing the government in front of the people today, I am attempting to immediately resolve this crisis and provide relief to the people... The root cause of current issues is our foreign exchange crisis."

[Issues at Large](#)

First, a brief note on the current economic crisis. Sri Lanka's economy was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is currently facing the most severe economic and energy crisis recorded in recent history due to the ongoing foreign exchange shortage. The prices of essential

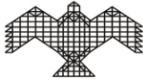
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About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI)

The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI research are published as briefs, reports and commentary.



About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible

About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.



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