

# WORLD TIMES INSTITUTE

## **What is happening with the Bulgarian protest movement?**

On September 2, the two-month-long anti-governmental protests in Bulgaria entered the most violent stage to date. For the first time, the police deployed water cannon, tear gas and pepper spray, marking the end of the relatively peaceful phase in protesting that made Bulgaria such an outlier in Europe in this regard.

The following day the embattled government used the clashes as an excuse to stop negotiating its exit from power. As Member of Parliament Toma Bikov from the ruling GERB party put it on September 3, "after [the events of] yesterday, we can no longer discuss the resignation of the government. This would mean resigning after attacks by criminals."

So what led to these dramatic events and what is next for the Bulgarian protest movement?

### **Half a year of political scandals**

Since the beginning of 2020, a series of localised crises and scandals built up tension in the public sphere and led to an explosive protest wave against GERB's almost uninterrupted 10-year rule. The winter was marked by a water crisis caused by the drying up of several dams, the most serious of which took place in the town of Pernik, 45km southwest of Sofia. The water shortage happened due to lack of maintenance of vital infrastructure and government leniency towards large industries abusing local water reserves.

Then came the coronavirus pandemic and the government's abysmal handling of the situation, which saw doctors resigning due to the lack of protective gear and inadequate emergency measures in place. Then a series of scandals revealed corrupt schemes involving lucrative property along the Black Sea coast. The most notable case was of the Aleppu beach where a landslide cleared the ground for a luxury hotel right on the beach, which the authorities claimed was merely a "fortification wall". This angered the Bulgarian public, which has been reeling over the reckless overdevelopment of the Black Sea coast for years.

The early summer was also marked by thunderous reshuffling within the ranks of the ruling oligarchy and businessmen close to them, leading to the fall from grace of Vassil Bozhkov, one of the richest gambling, tourism and construction bosses in Bulgaria, followed by a full-blown turf war which spilled over into the public sphere in the shape of leaks.

Candid photographs of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov sleeping in his bedroom next to a drawer packed full of 500-euro bills, gold bars and a gun were leaked to the media. The prime minister did not deny the authenticity of the pictures but claimed the money was planted.

Then, the Anti-Corruption Fund, an NGO documenting and investigating high-level corruption, released a documentary about an insidious scheme for stealing high-profile businesses with the help of the judiciary.

In July 2020, Hristo Ivanov, co-leader of the liberal coalition "Democratic Bulgaria" and judicial reform activist, transformed the intra-elite war into a "civil war" of sorts by disembarking on the illegally enclosed beach, surrounding the seafront mansion of Ahmed Dogan, the honorary leader of the liberal Movement for Rights and Liberties (DPS), which claims to represent the ethnic minorities in Bulgaria but is widely known as one of the most corrupt parties.

Ivanov and his crew were brutally pushed back by security guards who refused to reveal if they work for the National Security Service (NSS), a government agency tasked with providing personal security to senior politicians and state functionaries. The skirmish caused an outcry, augmented by the intervention of the Bulgarian President Rumen Radev who confirmed that the security guards are indeed employees of the NSS and were appointed in violation of their mandate.

The chief prosecutor, Ivan Geshev, whom the opposition has accused of aiding and abetting corruption by refusing to press charges against politicians and businessmen, reacted immediately by ordering a raid on the presidency, in blatant violation of all constitutionally sanctioned immunity guarantees and separation of powers.

The following day, on July 9, the first mass protest took place in Sofia.

## **A broad-spectrum protest movement**

Despite the liberal views professed by its organisers, the protest attracted people from across the political spectrum, including President Radev's supporters from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), BSP splinters, the extra-parliamentary and the radical left, not to mention apolitical hipsters, artists and even turbo-folk singers.

This is quite unprecedented given that liberals and the left have always defined themselves in vitriolic mutual opposition to each other, but it seems that GERB and their junior coalition partners from the far right achieved the unachievable - uniting literally everybody against them.

The protests voiced three main demands: the resignation of the ruling coalition and the chief prosecutor, early elections and then judicial reform through constitutional amendments. In a sleight of hand, the governing party changed the order of the demands and in August stunned everybody by declaring they have drafted a new constitution to fulfil the demand for change.

Borisov tied his resignation to the constitutional amendments, explaining that if the party does not manage to collect the signatures of 50 percent of the MPs (or 120 people) by September 2 - the minimum quota required for the Parliament to begin discussing the draft - he will resign.

Notwithstanding the vague promise of resignation, the protesters were infuriated. The constitutional draft was full of mistakes, grammatical as well as technical; it envisioned some worrying changes, perceived as attempts to entrench the governing party's hold on power, such as reducing the number of MPs. It also removed constitutional guarantees for the equality between men and women replacing them with pro-natalist and "family values" paragraphs.

In two nerve-racking weeks of negotiations, Borisov's proposal finally gathered 122 signatures by the September 2 deadline, with the help of the populist party of fuel and pharmacy tycoon Veselin Mareshki. The following day it was revealed that a company linked to Mareshki clinched a lucrative 20-year beach concession.

In effect, Borisov's constitutional exercise aimed at buying him time in power. This infuriated the protesters and on September 2, the largest crowds since the beginning of the crisis gathered in central Sofia.

In the evening, however, some protesters thought to be paid provocateurs, started throwing small fireworks at the police, which eventually provoked a violent response, as officers launched into the crowd, beating people with batons and using tear gas and water cannon. Some 100 people were arrested, many were badly beaten, including at least one journalist who produced his press card but was not spared from the police violence.

The explanations police chiefs later gave about this unheard-of deployment of police force caused an outcry and fuelled conspiracy narratives that the police had let the provocateurs off the hook to have an excuse to attack the protesters.

### **What happens next?**

These events put the habitual understanding of the state as a neutral arbiter to the test. The Bulgarian elite is deeply divided and warring factions wield their power over the state as a weapon against their competitors.

These intra-class clashes sometimes spill over from the "backroom" and reach us via the incessant stream of corruption scandals, leaked photos and recordings, surprise arrests of businessmen who fall out of favour, and even the nationalisation of private businesses. But the violent change of positions within the ruling elite and the elimination of competitors erodes the state.

Despite the boost the liberal coalition of Hristo Ivanov got from the protests, it is unlikely that the party will solve this problem within the narrow legalistic reform framework it proposes (judicial reform and depoliticisation of the general prosecution).

The power of the oligarchy needs to be undercut not only "from above", ie via more stringent criminal and anti-corruption legislation, but also from "below", from the foundations. Money is power and the more wealth one accumulates privately, the greater its gravity, warping and bending the public sphere and the political life to the benefit of its owners.

Therefore, their power must be undercut by economic reforms, too, such as the long overdue abolition of the flat tax regime put in place by a BSP-DPS government in 2008, which funnels money from the bottom to the top, concentrating economic power in the hands of a few business circles.

Bulgaria also needs a more robust welfare state that can make working people less dependent on the oligarchs for their livelihood. That is why it is great news that left-wing forces are also part of the protest. However weak their voice still is, it is nonetheless important to keep pushing for "social" solutions to corruption and mafia rule.

The war against corruption must also be a battle over definitions. Without the notion of social justice to supplement the liberal ideas about rule of law and judicial reform, the lofty calls for justice animating the protest stand a lesser chance of resonating with the majority of the Bulgarian population, whose main concern is socioeconomic survival.

**By: Jana Tsoneva**

**Source: Al Jazeera**

Mega Lecture

## Modi's lingual imperialism

The Great fire of Rome proved that imbecility of an individual who is in charge can decimate lands for pursuance of his pleasure. India's BJP is on spree of axing the peace of South Asian region. After the constitutional genocide of Kashmiris, it is now envisaging to change the Kashmir's culture altogether by putting off 131 years of lingual reign of Urdu as an official language.

Language is said to be the cornerstone of any culture. Through it one civilization and culture communicate with itself and the others. It is what keeps them alive. Hence, it is one the reasons that for any culture to be imposed on a certain group of people, they are first exposed to the language of that particular culture. Language is an art and there is nothing wrong in learning and studying a new language academically and for knowledge but when it is imposed arbitrarily and with force in order to secure political objectives then there actually is a problem. Robert Phillipson puts across the same idea as all kinds of imperialism are preceded by linguistic imperialism. The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, 1996 entitles every human being to speak and pursue the language he or she chooses yet the Hindu Raj continues to enforce the language as it has done in pre-independence era. Changing the status of language is not a small act that can be ignored. Historically, the Hindu-Urdu controversy was among the first things on the list that ignited the disparities among Muslims and Hindus of the sub-continent.

For past 131 years Urdu has been official language of Indian Occupied Kashmir. Under the Jammu and Kashmir Re-Organization Act of India, it is the sole authority of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative assembly to decide the official language. Nevertheless, BJP has not any affinity to going by the constitution, so it did the same here as well. After tearing the Indian democracy, Mr. Modi and his entourage of BJP is on imposing cultural imperialism on Kashmir. In pursuance of this objective on September 2, the Union Cabinet approved the Jammu and Kashmir Official Languages Bill, 2020. Under this act three languages are added into the directory of official languages of Occupied Kashmir i.e. Kashmiri, Hindi and Dogri ending the 131 years of Urdu's status of the official language.

There exist the closest of the links between language, dominance and cultural power. Without a strong power-base no language can progress as the medium of official communication. We have seen English language in this regard. Since, the

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Hindi is the language of the ones in power, and Urdu of the powerless, the future of the later one does not appear to be bright.

This is the just another step towards cultural colonialism which BJP and Modi are planning to impose and vilify the identity of Kashmir. The cornerstone has been set and the next stop would be massive cultural changes to re-design the discourse of Kashmir. In this regard the next step would be construction of Hindu temples and infrastructure nor to forget that in order to alter the demography mass migration of Hindus was already done. Ripping apart every existing value of democracy, Modi is hell-bent to push Kashmiri Muslim to a level where they cease to exist. This peculiar act is also done in his animosity towards Muslims.

The decision might appear to be trivial at this stage, but keeping in view how language, culture and thoughts work, the consequences can be drastic. According to the science of language and Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the language you speak, shapes your world view. The speakers of a particular language dissect the world on the lines of their language. This means that the results of cultural genocide might not appear now, but after a generation or two, if Hindi language is imposed and accepted by the masses, the cultural associated with Urdu will be no more than an artifact. Once, people start speaking the Hindi language, a cultural shift will begin to appear. This may be the reason, why after so many years of subjugation, the Muslims of Indian Occupied Kashmir held onto Urdu language, because it could have been perceived as their link to the Muslim culture.

Urdu language is widely spoken in Sub-continent and in India it is attributed to Muslims mainly. Brick by brick Modi on his un-holy voyage is determined to scrap Muslim identity. In order to do that inoculation of lingual nationalism was necessary. However, this won't stop the struggle of Kashmir cause. The global moral regression when it comes to Muslims is prominent either its Palestine or Kashmir. Global institutes and states need to rebuke BJP's ambition before there is nothing to remorse but a global misery to handle.

**By: Syed Nasir Hassan**

**Source: Daily Times**

*The writer is a research associate at the Islamabad Institute of Conflict Resolution*

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## The genesis of RSS ideology

The author of the hate philosophy against Muslims was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the founder of Hindu Mahasabha, who authored the pamphlet 'Hindutva' during his incarceration in jail at Andaman and Nicobar Island during 1910-1921 wherein he expounded on the racial superiority of Hindus. He is the same man who was also arrested on the accusations of being a mastermind behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

Sardar Vallabhai Patel, in correspondence with Nehru, had mentioned his strong links with Godse and the commission formed to investigate the murder had also alluded to the same connectivity between him and Godse, but the court released him for lack of concrete corroborative evidence.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during the election campaign in Maharashtra, promised to confer the highest Indian honour of 'Bharat Ratna' on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Bestowing the highest honour on the author of Hindutva indicates how faithfully the BJP and Narendra Modi are trying to implement the ideology in letter and spirit.

The Hindutva ideology led to the launching of RSS by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925. The initial objective of RSS was to provide character training through Hindu discipline and to unite the Hindu community to form a Hindu Rashtra (nation). It promoted the ideals of upholding Indian culture and the values and the spread of Hindutva ideology. Hindutva means strengthening the Hindu community. It drew inspiration from European right-wing parties during World War II, particularly leaders like Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler and their philosophy of racial purity.

French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot, specialising in South Asian affairs, particularly India and Pakistan, points out that in the ideology of the RSS along with other Hindu nationalist movements such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, Muslims, Christians and the British are seen as "foreign bodies" implanted in the Hindu nation, who were able to exploit the disunity and absence of valour among the Hindus in order to subdue them. However, a majority of scholars believe that RSS was actually formed to fight Indian Muslims.

In 1927 the founder of RSS Keshav Baliram Hedgewar led a Hindu religious procession beating drums in defiance of the usual practice not to pass in front of a



mosque with music which triggered clash between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The Hindus had the upper hand. This incident vastly enhanced the prestige of RSS and contributed to its subsequent expansion. RSS adopted as its emblem the saffron flag of the Hindu warrior King 'Shivaji' and objected to the adoption of the tricolor flag of India as well as the Indian constitution, particularly its secular creed and the fact that it would treat all castes equally. RSS believed that partition was a result of a mistaken soft-line towards the Muslims, which only confirmed the natural moral weaknesses and corruptibility of the politicians.

After partition the process of RSS becoming a political force to reckon with started during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan which culminated in the emergence of Bangladesh. RSS provided support to the government, by offering its services to maintain law and order in Delhi and its volunteers were apparently the first to donate blood. The organisation got a boost during the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi for its role in the movement against it which was finally lifted in 1977.

The RSS and Jana Sangh, a nationalist party took complete advantage of the 1965 war with Pakistan to 'deepen suspicion about Muslims', and also en-cashed the growing unpopularity of Congress, particularly in the Hindi-belt, where a left-wing alternative was weak or non-existent. The major themes on the party's agenda during this period were banning cow slaughter, abolishing the special status given to Jammu and Kashmir and legislating a uniform civil code.

The RSS dominated Jana Sangh started making alliances by joining anti-Congress coalitions. It became part of the 1971 Grand Alliance and finally merged itself with the Janata Party in 1977. The success of Janata Party in 1977 elections made the RSS members central ministers for the first time (Vajpayee, Advani and Brij Lal Verma) and provided the RSS with an opportunity to avail the state and its instruments to further its ends, through the resources of various state governments as well as the central government.

The former Jana Sangh elements formed a new party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. BJP did not have much electoral success in its initial years and was able to win only two seats in the 1984 elections. After L.K. Advani replaced Vajpayee as party president in 1986, the BJP also began to rally around the Ayodhya campaign. In 1990, the party organised the Ram Rath Yatra to advance this campaign in large-

scale. Advani also attacked the then ruling Congress party with slogans such as 'pseudo secularism', accusing Congress of misusing secularism for the political appeasement of minorities, and established an explicit and unambiguous path of Hindu revival.

The Ayodhya issue and the related communal riots which polarised the electorate along religious lines helped the BJP make good progress in the subsequent elections of 1989, 1991 and 1996. Finally the BJP won the elections in 2014 and a diehard disciple of RSS, Narendra Modi, who is known as butcher of Gujrat for the massacre of Muslims became Prime Minister of India. Modi adopted a belligerent posture towards Pakistan which gave boost to his popularity and enabled him to win 2018 elections with a thumping majority. On August 5, 2019 he finally managed to fulfil his pledge by ending special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir followed by its annexation to the Indian Union and the promulgation of new domicile law meant to change demographic realities of the state.

Modi strengthened his anti-Muslim credentials by laying the foundation of Ram Mandir on the site of the demolished Babri Mosque on August 5, 2020, the day on which his government had ended special status of IIO&JK sending a loud and clear message to the world of his intentions and creed. The UN and the world community must act to stop Modi in his tracks before his madness leads to a catastrophic situation; a strong possibility to which Prime Minister Imran Khan has been inviting their attention.

**By: Malik Muhammad Ashraf**

**Source: The Nation**

## **US sabre-rattling towards China could rip apart the core of the global economy**

Talk of a new cold war is everywhere. Yet the economic context of the confrontation between the US and China is fundamentally different from the days of the iron curtain. The US and the Soviet Union had created competing globalisations, dividing the world into separate economic blocs. The two sides of the present divide are tied together as one “Chimerica” – with China as the global “workshop” and the US as the tech “headquarters” of the world. The old hope that this economic interdependence would prevent political conflict has been shattered. Instead, deep economic integration has increased the stakes: the core of the world economy could fall apart.

Today’s global economic order is still inscribed on the back of every iPhone: designed in California, assembled in China. Both parties in the race for the US presidency pledge to put an end to this arrangement. The promise, this time on both sides, is to bring manufacturing home. President Trump’s campaign proclaims that it will “end our reliance on China”. Joe Biden for his part is trying to out-hawk Trump and promises a future of “Made in America”.

Meanwhile, Xi Jinping proclaims “dual circulation” as China’s new economic strategy, which promises more focus on the domestic sphere rather than reliance on the rest of the world. It is true that one part of this dual approach is to signal that China’s door remains open. Xi has personally written to the CEOs of foreign firms assuring them of a favourable business environment. The Chinese government has announced plans to transform Hainan island into a gigantic free trade port and China has opened its financial and insurance markets at a pace that international fund managers had not dared to hope for. On the other hand, China is preparing for a falling-out with the US, emphasising the goal of self-reliance in critical sectors such as food and technology.

“Decoupling” has become the new buzzword to describe the possibility of an economic break-up between the US and China. Trump, too, has recently added it to his rhetorical arsenal. Decoupling makes it sound as if the disintegration of the world’s two largest economies could be done in one simple step – like disconnecting the coupling between two wagons of a train. This couldn’t be further from the truth.

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In 2012, Barack Obama asked Steve Jobs whether the iPhone could be produced in the US. Jobs answered with a plain no, and the difficulties likely remain in place today. Chinese government institutions, local business partners and multinational corporations have built supply chains in China since the late 1980s. Production sites are sustained by gigantic infrastructure developments, and draw from China's roughly 300 million migrant workers, many of whom live in dormitories at the edge of the assembly line.

When we talk about "decoupling" from China what we really mean is a complete reorganisation of a large chunk of the world's production. As a result of the trade war, China's share in global supply chains in computers and tablets – the most affected sector – shrank by about 4 percentage points. Still, China produces 45% of global exports in this sector, and 54% of all phones worldwide. For furniture, clothing and household electrical goods, the shares are 34%, 28% and 42% respectively.

To the extent that foreign businesses have tried to pull their production out of China, reports tell a worrisome tale for the prospects of a quick decoupling. Foxconn is relocating some of its production to Vietnam and India, yet about 70% is bound to remain in China. Even when aided by China's unique capability in rapid infrastructure development, moving major production facilities around takes time. A previous relocation of Foxconn's factories within China to the inland city of Zhengzhou was several years in the making. As a result of the massive costs involved, the business community is in fact largely reluctant to follow politicians' calls to pull out of China.

While the world remains dependent on China's manufacturing infrastructure, China cannot do without foreign technology. In the critical computer chips industry, China is still years behind the industry leaders and remains tied to US knowhow. Thus, recent sanctions that cut Huawei off US-made chips have been billed a "death sentence" for China's most successful tech company. And although China's Covid-19 stimulus package is focused on long-term, high-quality development and targeted at innovation, the country faces a major uphill battle on the technological frontier. "If the US further hit key areas of the Chinese tech industry," a Chinese executive warns, "the impact would be devastating."

The realm of finance looks ominous as well. China has long aimed to add the RMB to the ranks of the international reserve currencies. The country also continues to command the largest foreign exchange reserve of US dollars. At the same time, Chinese researchers and officials increasingly worry about an all-out “financial war”. Yu Yongding, an economist and former adviser to China’s central bank, warns that China is dependent on the US dollar system and Chinese banks could be severely harmed if shut out by sanctions. According to Yu, the US could go as far as to seize China’s overseas assets. Such financial sanctions could set off a dangerous spiral of retaliations with nothing less than the global production system at stake.

The end of communism might be the closest analogy we have for the prospect of rapid decoupling – it was the last time a cross-border production network was dismantled, as “red globalisation” was cancelled in one big bang. The result from this “shock therapy” in Russia was a violent experience of deindustrialisation paired with a mortality crisis beyond previous peacetime experience of industrial countries.

China averted Russian-style shock therapy in the 1980s by a whisker as the highest level of political leadership had been getting ready to implement this policy. The gradual reform prevailed that laid the foundations for the country’s economic rise. Hope remains that a big shock in US-China relations, too, can be avoided. Global challenges, from the pandemic to climate breakdown, continue to mount and require Sino-American collaboration. After the US election, a window of opportunity might open for a careful renegotiation of the relations at the heart of the world economy. Devising workable strategies of reconciliation is an urgent task on both sides of the divide.

**By: Isabella Weber**

**Source: The Guardian**

*The writer is an assistant professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the author of the forthcoming book *How China Escaped Shock Therapy**

## Trump's Nobel nomination veers from Peace Prize's intent

US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said in August that President Donald Trump should be eligible for the Nobel Peace Prize after the "historic" agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. Such flattery has come true. On Wednesday, Christian Tybring-Gjedde, a member of the Norwegian Parliament, nominated Trump for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize for he "has done more trying to create peace between nations than most other Peace Prize nominees."

Seriously, Trump? Many are mocking this absurdity. What has he done to "create peace between nations"? Trump was nominated once in 2018, and now he is nominated again after two years. This nomination seems to have deviated from Nobel Peace Prize's focus to award those who have, "done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

Trump has nothing to do with "peace." The negative impact he has imposed on world peace is far greater than the positive push. Just take a look at what Trump has done: withdrawing from Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal. He launched a trade war and directly provoked a China-US confrontation. Apparently, Trump was enthusiastic about the nomination, retweeting a dozen or so tweets announcing this news.

Who really thinks Trump has promoted the world peace today?

The prestige of the Nobel Peace Prize has been declining year by year, with its choice often triggering huge controversy in the international community. Compared with natural science prizes, the Nobel Peace Prize is far too political.

In 2007, the prize was awarded to former US vice president Albert Arnold Gore Jr, for his efforts to "disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change." However, critics said that he is not a scientist and does not even understand climate change properly. In 2009, the prize was awarded to Barack Obama after he just took office - this was designed to encourage the new president. But this so-called encouragement was useless as Obama has become the US president at war longer than any other US president.

These American politicians are often nominated for Nobel Peace Prize with undeserved credit. Trump has longed for the prize, and is favored by some Western

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politicians. As one Chinese netizen mockingly wrote, "Why not award a Nobel Peace Prize for every US president after they take office in the future? As long as they do not press the nuclear button, they have obviously maintained peace."

There are too many people who have made substantial contributions to world peace and are more worthy of the peace prize. However, it seems that Norway has turned a blind eye and nominated Donald Trump despite creating a huge controversy. When the Nobel Peace Prize becomes something more like an absurd political stunt, it has become worthless and will eventually become the laughing stock of the international community.

**By: Li Qingqing**

**Source: Global Times**

Mega Lecture

## Climate change and Pakistan

Karachi, the city of lights, is the commercial hub and financial capital of Pakistan. Being the backbone of the Pakistan's economy, it contributes about 25 percent to the country's GDP and 55 percent towards federal tax revenue. It is a most vibrant and generous city which contributes massively to the country's prosperity and feeds everyone.

Unfortunately, for all this, the city has received nothing in return. On the contrary, it has become victim of man-made disasters caused by decades-long myopic policies, dangerous political designs, ethnic tussles, administrative incompetence and negligence.

The city now has changed from the city of lights to a city of darkness and a hub of hatred and terror. It has been looted and plundered at will and deeply divided on ethnic and sectarian lines.

Besides man-made calamities, Karachi is also facing a natural disaster in the shape of intense monsoon rains and heavy urban floods. The recent rains and floods have wreaked havoc with and paralyzed the city. Nature's fury turned Karachi along with a few other cities of Sindh into ponds of water.

Right after that, a blame game was started in which the federal government of the PTI blamed the provincial government of the PPP for mismanagement and inefficiency. The provincial government, in turn, accused the district administrations and the federal government; the PSP and other political parties blamed both. The fact is that everyone has a massive share in the current mess and miserable plight of Karachi and no one can or should escape guilt and responsibility.

Karachi was the first capital city of Pakistan but became a special target of General Ayub Khan's neglect when he shifted the capital to Islamabad. Bhutto furthered harmed the city by introducing a quota system. General Zia too contributed in its weakening by sponsoring religious groups and patronizing the MQM as a counter to the PPP.

The MQM established a reign of terror in the city by inciting violence and bringing in a culture of kidnapping, extortion, and bodies in gunny bags. Musharraf's patronage of the MQM further enhanced its impunity to loot and kill. In short, everyone played a part in bringing down the financial hub of the country.

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The causes of the human-made disaster in Karachi are not a secret. However, natural disasters were a mystery for me and I set out to find out just why Karachi was treated so harshly by Mother Nature. To find the answer, I went through literature on climate change and also contacted environmental policy scholars like Dr Adil Najam. I got some shocking answers.

I found that the sudden and intense rain and heavy floods are the direct consequences of global warming and climate change. It was more worrisome to know that not only Karachi but every part, city, and the village of the country – from Lahore to Quetta and Islamabad and from Gilgit-Baltistan to Chitral – is exposed to the grave danger of climate change.

Climate change seems to be the mother of all the problems of the 21st century and an issue of grave concern for people's lives and the country's future. In this context, the responsibilities of State Minister for Climate Change Ms Zartaj Gul are heavier than those of Murad Saeed and Zulfi Bukhari etc.

Global warming is caused by the excessive emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. China, the US and other industrialized countries are the major contributors to greenhouse gas emission. Pakistan is not even in the list of top ten nations responsible for global warming. But unfortunately, it is on the seventh number in the list of the most affected countries by global warming.

But due to a lack of proper understanding, most of the people in Pakistan consider climate change as just increase in temperature and pollution, when in fact it is much more than that. Due to global warming, the global temperature has already increased by 2 degrees since its recording was started around 1880.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned in its special report on global warming that a 2 degrees Celsius increase in global warming will result in extreme heat, sea-level rise, heavy rainfall, flooding, severe drought, and other severe impacts on humans and ecological systems. The impact of global warming is worldwide and Pakistan too is bearing its brunt. Its consequences for Pakistan are manifold.

First, Pakistan will either face continuous drought or sudden heavy rainfall as we witnessed in Karachi. It will affect the annual pattern of rainfall. It could cause six

months of rain to fall in one or two days to paralyse urban and rural areas as happened in Karachi last week.

Second, agriculture is the largest sector of Pakistan's economy with 21 percent contribution to GDP and 45 percent absorption of the country's labour force. Climate change will affect it in two ways. On the one hand, heavy rains will destroy major crops like wheat, rice, sugar-cane, maize, and cotton as it did in the interior of Sindh. On the other hand, due to the changing pattern of annual weather, our farmers will be unable to predict properly annual rainfall, cold and heat as they did in past and thus will give up the agriculture sector.

At times, there will be severe drought conditions and at times heavy rainfall and floods. Unfortunately, we have no proper planning and infrastructure to cope with this kind of situation. Thus, global warming will result in less economic growth and abject poverty in rural parts of the country where 63 percent of the population lives.

Third, global warming will result in glacier melt. As per a Washington Post report, Pakistan has more glacial ice than anywhere on earth outside the Polar Regions with 7,253 known glaciers. Though these glaciers seem a blessing, since they provide about 75 percent of the stored-water supply in the country, they can easily turn into a great natural disaster due to global warming. There are signs that glaciers in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral are slowing melting down. This will cause sea-level rise, landslides, avalanches, and glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF). The creation of Attabad Lake in Gojal Valley Hunza in 2010 and the death of 140 soldiers and civilians in the Siachen glacier region in 2012 were a result of landslides and avalanche. Moreover, Chitral recently witnessed heavy flood due to glacial lake outburst.

Fourth, if global warming is not stopped and continues at the current pace, experts warn that the sea level will rise considerably by the end of the century and will bring natural catastrophe to the coastal cities of the world. The coastal regions of Pakistan will be affected severely in that scenario.

In short, the existential threat of climate change and global warming has been caused by the greed of the advanced industrialized nations. Pakistan is in the most dangerous zone and exposed to severe impacts of climate change. The most worrisome of all is the fact that we have neither the sense nor any understanding

of the looming threat and no effective planning either to minimize its impact, we need a proper understanding of climate change and effective short- and long-term planning.

**By: Saleem Safi**

**Source: The News**

*The writer works for Geo TV.*

Mega Lecture

## Suicide prevention

Yesterday, Sept 10, marked another World Suicide Prevention Day. Suicide is a global public health challenge, the prevention of which was declared as 'imperative' by the World Health Organisation in 2014. This is because most suicides are preventable.

A country with a strong doctrine of save-a-life-to-save-humanity, Pakistan signed up to reduce suicide mortality by 10 per cent by 2020 as part of the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020. While many countries either initiated or strengthened national suicide prevention programmes in response to this, Pakistan failed to do so. Now, Pakistan has prioritised a set of global goals under the SDG 2030 agenda, including pledges to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one-third through prevention and treatment, and promotion of mental health and well-being. To achieve this target, the designated indicator to be monitored is the suicide mortality rate. There is an excellent opportunity here for the government to develop a national suicide prevention plan.

Eight years ago, the WHO estimated there were 13,377 suicides a year in Pakistan — 7,085 women and 6,021 men. The rate of attempted self-harm is at least 20 times higher, contributing to a significant burden of suicidal behaviour (a term that includes completed suicides, attempts of self-harm and suicidal ideation). Though outdated and under-reported, this burden is still alarming. From some studies in Pakistan, we also know that suicide and attempted self-harm are more common among the young, ie under 30 years of age. We also know rates of suicidal behaviour are higher in Pakistani women than men. Other known risk factors include mental disorders, lower socioeconomic status and domestic violence. Multiple clinical, psychological and sociological variables contribute to suicide psychopathology, all necessitating an urgent and comprehensive national suicide prevention programme.

Based on our resources, collaborative evidence-based strategies, aimed at both the individual and population level, and across multiple settings, should be considered. These may include suicide-awareness campaigns, gatekeeper trainings, access to mental health services, restriction of access to means, media strategies, etc. But this can only be planned if Pakistan first has an effective mental healthcare system in place. Isolated strategies like establishing suicide helplines are likely to waste

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resources and have limited impact if these are not supported by, for example, credible referral pathways to specialist services.

There are two reasons why Pakistan lags behind when it comes to prioritising mental health.

Principally, there are two reasons why Pakistan continues to lag behind when it comes to prioritising mental health. The first are the capacity constraints within an under-resourced health sector that is, for the most part, overwhelmed by public health challenges, including maternal mortality, malnutrition and infectious diseases. Because we think of mental health as a subsidiary of health in general, it continues to remain low on the list of national health priorities. A lack of any implementation of mental health legislation in the country in the last two decades is a glaring example that our national mental health agenda remains destitute.

The second is the demand that any serious effort to address mental health will make on inter-sectoral collaboration with the ministries of health, human rights, education, interior, law and justice, and disaster management authorities. Tackling mental ill health simultaneously requires the government to holistically address the burden of mental disorders; confront an ever-growing challenge of substance abuse; deter psychosocial adversity including childhood abuse; institute stress-coping mechanisms in young people; prevent gender-based violence; and provide psychosocial support in response to conflict-affected populations or following humanitarian crises. This means that policies that are developed in silos will always fall short.

Until serious efforts are undertaken to prioritise mental health and formulate a comprehensive national suicide prevention programme, there are at least three interventions that Pakistan still ought to initiate to monitor the relevant SDG indicator.

First, Pakistan must decriminalise attempted self-harm. This is vital because Section 325 of the Pakistan Penal Code is a strong deterrent for most people against seeking medical help, and problematic because detection and treatment of high-risk cases is a critical suicide prevention strategy. Previous attempt of self-harm is a well-known risk factor for completed suicide. A bill to amend Section 325 was passed by the Senate in 2018 after approval by the Council of Islamic Ideology and

sent to the National Assembly, but unfortunately lapsed following the change in government.

Secondly, Pakistan must set up a national suicide register. The WHO regularly collects suicide data from all member states. Pakistan submits low-quality data on suicides as it is not part of the vital registration system and we do not have official mortality statistics. The complete recording of suicide deaths in death-registration systems requires good linkages with coronial and police systems, yet this is seriously impeded by stigma as well as other social and legal barriers. The provinces will thus have to set up effective surveillance systems to contribute to the national suicide register.

Third, Pakistan must regulate the sale of pesticides and firearms. The three most common methods for suicide in Pakistan are hanging, ingestion of commonly available pesticides, and the use of firearms. Pesticides are highly toxic, commonly used in agriculture and widely available across the country. Similarly, of the 20 million firearms used in the country, only 7m happen to be registered. There is scientific evidence to suggest that restricting access to means of suicide leads to a significant reduction in suicide mortality.

While much work needs to be done, there is an encouraging development as the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives is now looking to implement a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support initiative as part of its Covid-19 emergency response, to be piloted in the federal capital. This project aims to develop a scalable model based on e-mental health interventions, build the capacity of a mental healthcare force through a task-shifting approach, and provide mental healthcare at multiple levels. If successful, this model may offer an effective framework to address mental health at a national level, possibly in tandem with a robust suicide prevention programme as a first step to tackling what is essentially a major public health challenge.

**By: Asma Humayun**

**Source: DAWN**

*The writer is a consultant psychiatrist.*

## Iran is having its #MeToo moment

Across the past three weeks, dozens of Iranian women of various backgrounds have taken to social media, in their own #MeToo moment, to report their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. The police have announced they have taken action against at least one suspect. Many women hope this will be just the beginning of a broader movement against sexual violence.

Iran's #MeToo moment began in early August, when a group of women journalists recorded a video in which they shared their experiences of being harassed by newsroom colleagues or influential people they had interviewed. Then, other women, mostly with anonymised accounts on Twitter, started sharing their experiences of sexual harassment and rape, including by men in positions of power. In one case, a former journalist, Sara Omatali, tweeted that a well-known artist had sexually assaulted her in the summer of 2006.

This was not the first time that allegations of sexual harassment were raised on social media, but this time there was more momentum with more women willing to share their stories. In a few cases, multiple women named or used the initials of specific alleged attackers, with hundreds more calling for their prosecution.

There are many reasons to be pessimistic about how far calls for accountability could go under current legal restrictions and civil society repression in Iran. But the past few weeks have also been the source of inspiration, refocusing the conversation in public space on one of the most fundamental elements of women's rights - protection against gender-based violence. Reading the social media posts makes many feel that society, and particularly the social media-savvy crowd, is more ready to listen to the narrative of those who have experienced abuse and to press for accountability and change.

On August 25, General Hossein Rahimi, the Tehran police chief, announced that the police had arrested a man with the initials KE who was accused of rape by multiple women on social media, and invited others to file their complaints with the police, promising to respect their privacy. One woman who had accompanied her friend to file a complaint against the suspect with the police wrote on her Instagram that she felt the police had treated them with respect and did not infringe on their private life.

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Attempts to hold sexual harassment offenders accountable through the judiciary have proven to be difficult in various legal systems, but in some countries, including Iran, women can face criminal charges for reporting rape. Iran's legal system criminalises consensual sexual relationships outside of marriage, which are punishable by flogging, so a victim risks being prosecuted if the authorities do not believe her. This is especially the case if there is a pre-existing relationship or the authorities construe any form of behaviour leading up to the assault as providing consent.

Moreover, the criminal law explicitly excludes marital rape, and has a limited and problematic definition of rape that includes sexual intercourse outside of marriage between a man and a woman, including adultery or fornication, instead of a broader gender-neutral definition to include other forms of penetration without consent or in coercive circumstances.

In addition, in practice, law enforcement, prosecutors and judges in Iran expect high evidentiary standards to prove coercion, such as bodily harm or attempts to flee. To make matters worse, the mandatory punishment for rape, called "forced zina" under Iranian law, is the death penalty. These legal restrictions, combined with patriarchal social norms, make seeking justice a heavy burden on victims, to the point that many would prefer to not file complaints.

The inadequate legal protections have undoubtedly contributed to a culture of impunity for harassers. But the recent events have shown that more women are willing to defy traditional, political and ideological norms to speak out against sexual assault, naming their attackers and demanding accountability. The alleged attackers identified on social media range from teachers and university professors, to artists, a manager in the start-up industry, and even a sociologist who works on women's rights issues.

It is particularly encouraging to see that, in a society that still criminalises consensual sexual relationships with no marriage and those who choose to engage in them, society is finding its way to push for fundamental human rights. But this change did not happen overnight.

Social media has undoubtedly been a great amplifier and connector, allowing Iranian women to read one another's stories as well as the experiences of women in other countries. But where Iranian women are standing today is also the result

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of years of work on the ground by Iranian women's rights defenders and ordinary women who have fought to be recognised in society.

August marked the 14th anniversary of Iranian women's rights activists launching the One Million Signature campaign to challenge discriminatory laws. Many of the activists from the campaign experienced persecution. Some left the country during various periods of crackdown on civil society, while continuing repression has made it difficult for women's rights activists to push for reforms.

Yet women have continued to demand change, launching new campaigns against child marriage, harassment in public places, violence against women, and the compulsory wearing of hijab. For instance, after an amendment to Iran's citizenship law in 2019, women who are married to foreign men are now being able to pass their nationality to their children.

In Iran's #MeToo moment, the Iranian authorities have taken an important step by arresting one suspect, but they are facing a much more serious test both in how they are going to handle the judicial process and how they will deal with other, much more powerful, alleged sexual predators. The authorities must ultimately amend the law with a definition of rape that is gender-neutral, includes marital rape and other forms of penetration, as well as other forms of sexual assault, and is not punishable by death.

Women speaking out online show that they are not waiting around for the authorities to give them their rights. In the face of oppression, Iranian women have demanded their rights and continued to push for change in many different and innovative ways.

**By: Tara Sepehri Far**

**Source: Al Jazeera**

## High crimes against journalism and decency

Jeffrey Goldberg wrote an article for The Atlantic that could harm U.S. President Donald Trump's chance to win re-election. Setting aside the controversial content of the remarks attributed to the president, it is important to note that this is an atrocious example of journalism.

You could almost call it "fake news."

And corporate media is taking it at face value.

You may think Trump is a turd—I do. You may want him to lose the election—I do. (I also want Biden to lose, but that's another column.) You may believe that Trump probably said what Goldberg reports—I think there's a good chance. But everyone who cares about journalism ought to be deeply disturbed by the nonexistent sourcing for this story and its widespread acceptance by media organizations that ought to know better.

It's easy to see why Democratic-leaning media corporations jumped all over Goldberg's piece: It hurts the president and it reinforces militarism. But they're degrading journalistic standards to manipulate an election.

According to Goldberg, four anonymous sources told him that Trump called American Marines who died in World War I "losers" and repeatedly questioned why anyone smart would join the military or be willing to risk their life by fighting in one of America's wars.

Anonymous sources have their place. I have used them. But basing a news story entirely on accounts of people who are unwilling to go on the record is journalistically perilous and ethically dubious. There are exceptions, as when a Mafia source fears physical retribution.

There is no such claim here. Most media organizations' ethical guidelines are clear: news without attribution is not news. It is gossip.

The Los Angeles Times, a publication my readers know that I hold in low regard, nevertheless takes a stance against anonymous sources. "When we use anonymous sources, it should be to convey important information to our readers. We should not use such sources to publish material that is trivial, obvious or self-serving," the paper's ethical standards say. "An unnamed source should have a compelling

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reason for insisting on anonymity, such as fear of retaliation, and we should state those reasons when they are relevant to what we publish.”

The Atlantic piece falls way short.

Likewise, writing that strips statements of necessary context is anti-ethical. Trump, writes Goldberg, “expressed contempt for the war record of the late Sen. John McCain, who spent more than five years as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese. ‘He’s not a war hero,’ Trump said in 2015 while running for the Republican nomination for president. ‘I like people who weren’t captured.’” He goes on to note that Trump wanted to deny McCain the honor of lowering flags to half-mast after McCain died.

Goldberg frames Trump’s comments as part of a general bias against the military and portrays his attacks as unprovoked. Truth is, long before Trump made those comments he had been engaged in a well-documented, long-running feud with the Arizona senator. McCain based his political career on his military service and the five years he spent as a POW in Vietnam. McCain was Trump’s enemy, and there is considerable evidence that McCain—known for a sharp tongue—started the war of words. Trump gave back in kind.

“Nor did he set his campaign back by attacking the parents of Humayun Khan, an Army captain who was killed in Iraq in 2004,” Goldberg continues in another context-free passage. Khan’s father famously spoke against Trump at the 2016 Democratic National Convention. “You have sacrificed nothing and no one,” Khan said. In Trumpian terms, Khan started it. But Goldberg’s omission makes it look like Trump attacked a fallen soldier out of the blue.

Goldberg does this a third time: “When lashing out at critics, Trump often reaches for illogical and corrosive insults, and members of the Bush family have publicly opposed him.” Both sides have insulted each other; as far as the record shows, Trump is usually running offense, not defense—but Goldberg falsely portrays the enmity as a one-way street.

One of the praiseworthy aspects of this president is his relatively restrained approach to military interventionism, coupled with his willingness to directly engage adversaries like North Korea and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the latter which recently signed a peace agreement with the United States. It is logical for

Trump, who is skeptical of illegal wars of choice like Afghanistan and Iraq, to question why people would volunteer to fight and possibly die in such a pointless conflict. For Goldberg, militarism is a state religion. Questioning it is intolerable.

Goldberg's piece, the tone of which reads like the pro-war hysteria following 9/11, reflects the aggressively militaristic neoliberalism of the Democratic Party in 2020.

Goldberg references Trump's 2017 visit to Arlington cemetery with then-Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly. "A first lieutenant in the Marine Corps, Robert Kelly was killed in 2010 in Afghanistan ... Trump, while standing by Robert Kelly's grave, turned directly to his father and said, 'I don't get it. What was in it for them?' Kelly (who declined to comment for this story) initially believed, people close to him said, that Trump was making a ham-handed reference to the selflessness of America's all-volunteer force. But later he came to realize that Trump simply does not understand nontransactional life choices."

Joining the military, of course, is hardly a nontransactional decision. Soldiers get paid. They get medals. They get free college. They are revered and thanked for their service. Military service gives you a leg up when you run for political office.

Moreover, Trump's question is one Americans should be asking more often. Why would a 29-year-old man volunteer to travel to Afghanistan in order to kill the locals? No one in that country threatened the United States. No one there did us any harm. Afghans don't want us there. Why did Robert Kelly go?

Goldberg seems obsessed with Trump's description of fallen soldiers as suckers. "His capacious definition of sucker includes those who lose their lives in service to their country, as well as those who are taken prisoner, or are wounded in battle," Goldberg writes. But is he wrong?

LBJ suckered us into Vietnam with the Tonkin Gulf incident, which historians of all stripes accept was a lie.

George H.W. Bush suckered us into the first Gulf War with a tale of Iraqi soldiers rampaging through a Kuwaiti hospital and pulling babies out of incubators. Another lie.

After 9/11 George W. Bush suckered us into Afghanistan by saying Osama bin Laden was there—he was not.

Of course Bush lied about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction. More suckering. (At the time, Goldberg spread the lie that Saddam Hussein was allied with his enemy Al Qaeda.)

Assuming that anything in Goldberg's piece was true, Trump was right.

**By: Ted Rall**

**Source: The Japan Times**

*The writer is a political cartoonist, columnist and graphic novelist, is the author of the biography "Political Suicide: The Fight for the Soul of the Democratic Party." You can support Ted's hard-hitting political cartoons and columns and see his work first by sponsoring his work on Patreon.*

Mega Lecture