

# Conflict Weekly

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*A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world*

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## **Bhutan's Gross National Happiness, Return of Syria to the Arab League, Seventh Ceasefire in Sudan, Bakhmut Battle in Ukraine, Zelensky's Diplomatic Offensive, and WMO Report Takeaways**

Lakshmi Parimala H, Nithyashree RB, Anu Maria Joseph, Padmashree Anandan, Sreeja JS and Varsha K



(A happy Bhutan: According to the latest survey, 93.6 per cent of Bhutanese are happy.  
Image Source: Always Bhutan)

## Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH): Deeply Happy, Extensively Happy...

Lakshmi Parimala H

### In the news

On 22 May, the Center for Bhutan and Gross National Happiness (GNH) studies published the GNH survey for 2022. It reported that 93.6 per cent of Bhutanese are feeling happy. The Gross National Happiness Index measures overall happiness and well-being in the country using 33 indicators across nine domains. It was adopted by Bhutan in 2008, following its transition to democracy. The GNH has the following four pillars: good governance, sustainable economic development, cultural preservation and environmental conservation. The four pillars above are divided into nine domains including health, education and good governance and measured through 33 indicators (For example: self-reported health status, healthy days, long-term disability, and mental disability are four indicators under health). Individuals are categorized into four groups according to their score: unhappy, narrowly happy, extensively happy, or deeply happy.

### Issues at large

First, a 3.3 per cent increase in the GNH index during the past seven years, despite the pandemic. According to the report, the following are the reasons for the increase mentioned above: improvements in housing, income, schooling, services, literacy, and positive emotions. The report, however, also raised some concerns relating to the following: deterioration in several indicators such as healthy days, cultural and political participation, mental health, and Driglam Namzha (official dress code of Bhutan).

Second, the urban-rural divide, questioning the correlation between income and happiness. While the urban population has a greater level of happiness in terms of domains and indicators, the rural population shows a more balanced number of happy people, with 56.8 per cent in rural compared to 43.2 per cent in urban areas. The report challenges assumptions that the urban environment guarantees greater happiness and that there is a correlation between income and happiness. The report finds narrowly happy people across all income scales.

Third, the gender factor. Although women's GNH is lower than men's, there is a positive trend. In 2022, 55.3 per cent males are happy compared to 43.8 per cent females. In 2015, 37.9 females were happy compared to 51.1 males. The rate of improvement among females has surpassed that of males, indicating growing equality.

Fourth, the GNH vs the World Happiness Report. Despite the GNH report showing 93.6 per cent of happy people, Bhutan is ranked 97 in the World Happiness Report published by the UN. A reason could be the difference in indicators used by the two reports to measure happiness.

### In perspective

First, Bhutan has been promoting the importance of happiness and simultaneously the GNH as a measure of a country's development rather than the GDP. The GNH is more

comprehensive and considers the environment, human rights, and industrial production.

Second, Bhutan uses the GNH report in policy making to identify the areas which need to be addressed, along with the section of the population to which it must be applied. This is significant; the index would remain only a number unless its results are being considered when improving policies.

Third, the difference between Bhutan's GNH and the World Happiness Report also shows that happiness is relative. Therefore, the indicators considered by each country depend on several factors, especially history and culture.

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## Arab League: The Return of Syria

Nithyashree RB

### In the news

On 18 May, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad reached Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, ahead of the Arab League Summit.

On 19 May, the 32nd Arab League summit was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The summit discussed issues relating to Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Lebanon. The Jeddah Declaration reaffirmed security and stability in the region and welcomed Syria into the Arab League. In the declaration, the member countries express their "hope that this resolution would contribute to supporting the stability of the Syrian Arab Republic, preserving its territorial integrity, and restoring its role within the Arab world."

During the summit, Assad said: "I hope that it marks the beginning of a new phase of Arab action for solidarity among us, for peace in our region, development and prosperity instead of war and destruction."

On 22 May, a US Foreign Ministry's spokesperson stated: "We continue to oppose normalization with the Syrian regime. We do not believe it was appropriate to admit – readmit Syria into the Arab League and we made that position clear to our partners in the region."

### Issues at large

First, a brief note on Syria and the Arab League. In November 2011, Syria was removed from the League following Assad's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, leading to a civil war. The Arab League members, including UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, supported Assad's rebel groups in Northern and Eastern Syria. Russia and Iran supported Assad.

Second, Syria's search for investments and aid. For Syria, returning to the Arab League serves as a strategy to lift Western sanctions. Although lifting sanctions will take a long time, joining the League is a promising start. Syria desperately needs investments and aid and reconstruction of infrastructure. According to the UN, two-thirds of the population requires humanitarian aid. Joining the League will make it easier for member countries to invest in and assist Syria.



Third, the support and opposition for Syria within the Arab League. The member countries aim to confront Syria regarding the refugee crisis and the trafficking of Captagon, a drug produced in Syria that provides revenue to the government. While the Arab League strongly opposed Assad's regime for years, the devastating earthquake of February this year triggered the development. Providing aid to Syrians in both government-controlled areas and rebel-controlled areas were difficult.

Individual countries started normalizing relations with Assad for different reasons. Saudi Arabia, after normalizing relations with Iran, began to normalize its relations with Syria. In February, Assad visited Oman, followed by the UAE in March. On 18 April, Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud visited Damascus for the first time since the civil war. On 3 May, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Damascus. The US opposed Syria joining the League but affirmed that it stands with the decisions of its Arab counterparts.

#### In perspective

First, the return of Syria to the Arab League means Syrian refugees are likely to return to Syria. According to UNHCR, approximately 5.5 million refugees live in Syria's neighbouring countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq). The rejoining of Syria might benefit the Syrians, especially in the government-controlled areas.

Second, The rapprochement of Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the return of Syria indicate the changing interests of the Arab countries. These actions show that Iran's foothold in the region is rising despite the League's aim to curb it by reinstating Syria. Although the League is unable to push Iran completely out of Syria, its intentions lie in the betterment of the Syrians; to provide aid and increase economic opportunities through trade. The Arab League member countries are expected to curb Syria's drug trafficking ventures by promising normalization of relations, aid and investments. Syria will use Captagon as a leverage to normalise relations by promising to stop drug trafficking.

Third, the challenges ahead. For Assad, although it seems like he has won the civil war, countries are unlikely to forget the 14 million people who fled Syria and the 6.8 million internally displaced, according to the (UNHCR). Not holding Assad accountable for the crimes committed by his government might further exacerbate the civil war. For the US, their foothold in the region is waning. The Arab League's decision to reinstate Syria came as a surprise to the West, especially to the US. The US's response to the developments in the region is mostly supportive of the regional players' decisions.

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## Sudan: A Seventh Ceasefire

Anu Maria Joseph

### In the news

On 22 May, a week-long ceasefire between the warring parties, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), began in Sudan. The US and Saudi Arabia have brokered the latest ceasefire. According to a joint statement on 21 May, a "ceasefire monitoring mechanism" will enforce the deal. The US State Department stated: "Unlike previous ceasefires, the agreement reached in Jeddah was signed by the parties and will be supported by a US-Saudi and international-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism."

On 22 May, despite the ceasefire deal, airstrikes and clashes were reported in multiple cities, including Khartoum and Omdurman and separate ethnic violence in the Blue Nile and White Nile regions. However, according to eyewitness reports, the intensity of the fighting in Khartoum has come down.

On the same day, the United Nations special envoy to Sudan, Volker Perthes, stated: "In parts of the country, fighting between the two armies or the two armed formations has sharpened into communal tensions, or triggered conflict between communities." He added: "This [the ceasefire] is a welcome development, though the fighting and troop movements have continued even today, despite a commitment of both sides not to pursue military advantage before the ceasefire takes effect." He called on the parties to comply with the ceasefire deal, end the fighting and "allow access for humanitarian relief, protect humanitarian workers and assets."

### Issues at large

First, Sudan's recent history of failed ceasefires. The latest ceasefire is the seventh one; the earlier week-long ceasefire agreed on 2 May was unsuccessful after both the warring parties failed to comply. Although they agreed to hold talks, the SAF and RSF have continued to fight; both have been accusing each other of violating previously agreed ceasefires.

Second, the effectiveness of the latest (seventh) ceasefire. Hours before the ceasefire agreement was meant to be put in place RSF leader Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo released an audio message saying his troops would not retreat "until we end this coup." Besides, the fighting in Khartoum has already evolved into ethnic violence, threatening the troubled West Darfur, Blue Nile and White Nile regions. As the fighting escalates, the army and the RSF have been mobilizing non-Arab and Arab militias, respectively, to align with them. Persistent tensions have put the effectiveness of the latest ceasefire in question.

Third, the gap between negotiations and compliance. Both RSF and SAF claim openness to negotiations but show little commitment to comply with the agreed terms. Mistrust between the parties prompts them to seek military advantage during the ceasefire. The RSF has accused the army of breaking the ceasefire by "continuing to attack Khartoum with planes." An army spokesperson told Sky News Arabia that the RSF was responsible for "storming prisons" after reports of gunfire in Port Sudan.

Fourth, the efforts of international and regional actors and their effectiveness. International actors (the UN, the AU, the US, and the EU) have urged the warring parties to negotiate to



end the fighting. The African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have also urged regional actors to work together to de-escalate the crisis. Previously on 1 May, in an Arab League emergency meeting in Cairo, Egypt had offered a draft resolution calling for an "immediate and comprehensive cessation" of conflict. Until now, efforts by external parties to implement a long-lasting ceasefire have been unsuccessful.

### In perspective

The latest ceasefire has frozen the conflict, bringing it to a temporary rest. However, impending tensions surrounding the persisting hostilities imply that the ceasefire is difficult to maintain and international and regional efforts are uncertain. Hence a road towards peace talks and a lasting resolution remains elusive. Neither side has much of an incentive to compromise. Although there is a significant external effort to end the fighting, as long as neither RSF nor SAF has the upper hand, a chance for negotiations will not be in sight. The continuing fighting would mean triggering ethnic tensions within and worsening the humanitarian crisis.

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## Ukraine: Russia claims victory in Bakhmut

Padmashree Anandan

### In the news

On 20 May, the Wagner Group's head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, released a video confirming the capture of Bakhmut. He said: "We completely took the whole city, from house to house." Russia's Ministry of Defence confirmed the same, stating: "As a result of offensive actions of the Wagner assault units, with the support of artillery and aviation of the 'Southern' unit, the liberation of the city of Artemovsk was completed."

On 21 May, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denied the claims of capturing Bakhmut. He said: "The fight for the city of Bakhmut is continuing." Meanwhile, Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister, Hanna Malyar, stated: "The enemy failed to surround Bakhmut, and they lost part of the dominant heights around the city. That is, the advance of our troops in the suburbs along the flanks, which is still ongoing, greatly complicates the enemy's presence in Bakhmut."

On 22 May, Prigozhin released another video announcing the group's plan to remove its troops from Bakhmut between 25 May and 1 June. He said that the group had set up "defence lines" in the western outskirts of Bakhmut ahead of the transfer of control to Russia.

On 23 May, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reported that it is likely for the Wagner group to have made advances in the Bakhmut, however, in the case of Russian forces, the efforts were unsuccessful in the "immediate west of Bakhmut." Ukraine forces are reported to have advanced 200 to 400 metres in the southwest during the past 24 hours.

### Issues at large

First, the battle for Bakhmut. Nine months of long battle since August 2022 has led to massive losses for both Ukraine and Russia. The Wagner Group's success in pushing Ukraine

in Soledar helped it to continue its offensive in Bakhmut. Ukraine's continued defence has forced the Wagner Group and Russia to deploy more personnel and weapons. Meanwhile, Ukraine has requested additional weapons and is determined to achieve victory over Russia. The Wagner group strategically moved to the outskirts of Bakhmut, encircling the northern, northeastern, and the industrial zones by December 2022. As Ukraine continues to make minor advances in the north and southwest, the Wagner Group claims to have launched the final offensive in the West (Gnezd, Konstruktor, Domino, and Samolet) and claimed victory.

Second, the strategic significance of Bakhmut. For Ukraine, the city is known for its economic significance, and beyond that serves as a key connector to Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, which have been subject to attacks since April. It is also a key location due to the highway

connecting Lysychansk. For Russia, capturing Bakhmut means cutting off Ukraine from connection with Luhansk and preventing it from venturing further into the Donbas region. Since the beginning of the war, Russia's larger aim has been to keep Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) districts under its control.

Third, the rise and fall of the Wagner Group. The Wagner Group tactically introduced new resources by recruiting. It succeeded in blocking Ukraine's supply routes and encircling Ukraine from within in the north, northeast and south directions excluding the west. However, in due time, the Wagner Group has been weakened due to continued losses, exhaustion of personnel and weaponry, increasing its dependency on Russian forces.

Fourth, Ukraine's demand for advanced weapons. It has now moved on to asking for combat aircraft to strengthen its military ahead of the counter-offensive, referring to its shortcomings in the battles of Bakhmut and Soledar. The delay in the delivery of air defence and advanced weapon systems from the West has not only resulted in exhausting its military resources but has resulted in a difficult starting point for Ukraine's counter-offensive.

#### In perspective

First, the battle may not have favoured Ukraine due to the limited weapons and continued offensives of the Wagner Group. In line with Western reports, if the city has fallen in control of Russia upon the exit of Wagner troops, Russia will now have to concentrate its forces to maintain control. For Ukraine, this will be the right time to re-think its strategy, particularly if it still wants to hold its remaining forces in Bakhmut or withdraw to concentrate on other significant areas such as Sloviansk and Kramatorsk.

Second, mixed results for Russia. Wagner Group's exhaustion is a setback for Russia in launching future offensives. However, gaining ground in Bakhmut will add an advantage. Being one of the largest areas captured since 2022, Russia has prevented Ukraine from intruding into the Donbas region. Still, the threat is not far, with Ukraine preparing for its spring counter-offensive. With less possibility for new recruitment for Russia, it can be expected to use its other units to launch an offensive towards the West of Ukraine.

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## Ukraine: President Zelensky's diplomatic offensive at the G7 and Arab League summits

Sreeja JS

### In the news

On 20 May, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky participated in the G7 summit. He held bilateral talks with the G7 leaders on improving air defence capabilities, training Ukrainian pilots and enhancing targeted collaboration to counter Russia on international platforms. In his address, he underlined Ukraine's peace formula and highlighted the need for air defence systems. He stated: "When our pilots know the F16 and when these aircraft appear in our skies, it will matter not only for Ukraine. This will be a historic moment for the entire security architecture in Europe and the world."

On 21 May, in his closing address, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida condemned Russia and pledged an "unwavering solidarity" with Ukraine. He added: "Wherever in the world, attempting to unilaterally change the status quo by force can never be accepted."

On 21 May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation slammed the G7 summit by calling it a "politicized" event and being anti-Russia and anti-China.

On 20 May, European Council President Charles Michel promised Zelensky further support in its war against Russia. A European Council spokesperson said: "The EU will work with G7 partners to target every pillar of the Russian economy to ensure Putin's war machine fails."

On 19 May, Zelensky attended the Arab League summit in Jeddah to seek support as the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, expressed his willingness to mediate peace between Moscow and Kyiv following a successful prisoner exchange deal brokered by Riyadh last year. In his opening speech, he stated: "We reaffirm the kingdom's readiness to continue mediating efforts between Russia and Ukraine, and to support all international efforts aimed at resolving the crisis politically in a way that contributes to achieving security."

### Issues at large

First, Zelensky's diplomatic offensive outside to balance Ukraine's military offensive within. Russia's success in Soledar and its upper hand in the Bakhmut battle have prompted Ukraine to demand more weapons. Besides, Ukraine has not staged a successful counter-offensive since Russia's Kherson withdrawal. For Zelensky, the recent visits (G7 and Arab League summits) aim to procure military support for Ukraine's counter-offensive. He seems to have succeeded; there have been promises of F-16 jets and training of its pilots.

Second, the responses. G7 leaders, in their statement, strongly condemned the Russian aggression and renewed their commitment to providing further financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine as long as it takes. Earlier this year, Saudi Arabia pledged USD 400 million and voted in favour of UN resolutions calling on Russia to end its invasion of Ukraine. In the G7 meeting, Zelensky met leaders of India, Indonesia and South Korea and persuaded them to support Ukraine.



Third, Ukraine's need to accelerate the West's promised aid. The West has pledged military support, but there has been a delay in delivering the weapons to Ukraine. In May 2023, Zelenskyy said that Kyiv has been delaying its counter-offensive due to a lack of ammunition.

### In perspective

First, Zelenskyy's visit to the Arab League and G7 to garner support is partially successful. His meeting with President Biden resulted in the US pledging financial support of around USD 375 million to meet critical defence needs. The US, UK, and Germany announced military aid for Ukraine and widened the sanctions to isolate Russia. Further, the US extended its permission for the Western allies to supply F16 Jets to Ukraine.

Second, converting the promises into action. This has been an issue for Zelenskyy; Ukraine cannot fight against Russia and win the war with promises alone.

## WMO's Report on "Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update": Seven Takeaways

Varsha K

On 17 May 2023, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) published an updated report titled "Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update" for 2023-2027. Decadal predictions were developed to fill the gap between the time scales of seasonal forecasts and climate change projections to predict climate over the next few years.

The report is edited by WMO designated Global Producing Centres providing predictions for the next five years and an evaluation of the previous forecasts on climate change. Further, the report focuses on climate indices such as global mean near-surface temperature, Atlantic multidecadal variability, El Niño/Southern Oscillation and regional indices. WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said, "the WMO is sounding the alarm that we will breach the 1.5°C level temporarily with increasing frequency."

On 22 May 2023, the WMO updated the data in the "Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water-related Hazards." The report mentions the status of mortality and economic losses due to extreme climate events from 1970-2021. Further, Taalas said: "The most vulnerable communities, unfortunately, bear the brunt of weather, climate and water-related hazards."

The following are the key takeaways from the report.

### **1. Exceeding the 1.5°C threshold**

Since the 1960s, there has been a rise in global near-surface temperature. By 2027, the global near-surface temperature may exceed 1.5°C due to the rapid increase in GHG concentrations (Carbon dioxide, Methane and Nitrous Oxide) in the atmosphere. Human activities and natural factors, such as variability in land and ocean carbon sinks, accelerate atmospheric GHG emissions. The consistent rise in temperature may lead to shifts in regional climates and



impact agriculture, water resources and the natural ecosystem. Further, the report mentioned that the annual mean global near-surface temperature for 2023-2027 is predicted to be between 1.1°C-1.8°C.

## **2. Changing rainfall patterns**

Rainfall may decrease in rain-rich regions, including the Amazon forest, Indonesia, Central America, and parts of Australia. In contrast, rainfall may increase in the Sahel, northern Europe, Alaska and north Siberia areas. La Niña is associated with these shifting rainfall patterns. There has been evidence that the Monsoon onset is earlier; meanwhile, it withdraws later than usual. These patterns indicate extreme weather events ranging from heatwaves, droughts, floods and tropical cyclones; for instance, drought in East Africa, Cyclones in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and heatwaves in Europe, China and parts of Asia.

## **3. A shift in El Niño Southern Oscillation patterns**

El Niño is expected to be positive to a warmer phase during December 2023 - February 2024, while the La Niña effect is predicted to decline in the next five years. El Niño events alternate the natural carbon sinks that absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, eventually increasing GHG concentrations. Therefore, the regions tend to be warmer than usual, predicted with a higher probability of 92 per cent.

## **4. Continuous Ocean Warming, especially in the Arctic**

The heat in the upper 2000 metres of the ocean will continue to increase, and the subsequent changes will be irreversible. Around 90 per cent of the accumulated heat is stored in the ocean, leading to ocean warming. The warming in the upper 2000 metres is recorded to be the strongest in the Southern Ocean, North Atlantic and South Atlantic. On contrary, in some regions, including the subpolar Atlantic Ocean, are cooling by extending from near the surface to over 800 metres. The Arctic region will be the most affected in the upcoming years as the temperature may be more than three times the global mean temperature. In consequence, changing ocean temperatures impact the pH of the ocean, sea levels, and ocean currents causing danger to coral reefs and harmful algae blooms; also, it affects marine biodiversity and the people who rely on marine resources.

## **5. Gradual shrinking of the cryosphere**

Since 1970, there has been a gradual loss of the thickness of glaciers to approximately 30 metres. This has also been affected by El Niño and La Niña events. Further, there have been massive losses of glaciers in Asia, Western North America, and South America. Approximately 40 glaciers experienced an average mass balance of -1.18 m.w.e. (metre water equivalent). The volume of glaciers has decreased from 77 cubic metres to 49 cubic metres in the European Alps (Switzerland), equivalent to a decline of more than one-third between 2001 and 2022. Summit Station (Greenland's ice sheet) had its warmest record in September and experienced melting conditions in September 2022. Meanwhile, Iceland and Northern Norway have faced expansion glaciers due to higher average precipitation and relatively cooler summers.

## **6. Increasing regional temperature trends**

Between 2023 and 2027, most regions will have high temperatures except for Alaska, South Africa, South Asia and parts of Australia. The average sea-level pressure and precipitation for the next five extended seasons, from May to September and November to March, are predicted and evaluated with skill. Sea-level pressure will be low over the Mediterranean and

surrounding regions and tropical East Pacific, while being high over southeast Asia and surrounding countries. There is a pattern of increased precipitation in the tropics and high latitudes, while precipitation will decrease in subtropical regions. However, Regional Climate Centres (RCCs), Regional Climate Outlook Forums (RCOFs), and National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) are asked to interpret and generate value-added forecasts based on this climate update, as it is not official for any specific region.

### **7. Over two million lives lost due to climate change**

There have been 11,778 reported disasters which caused 2,087,229 casualties and USD 4.3 trillion in economic losses from 1970-2022. In case of casualties, Africa, being the highest, had 95 per cent of global deaths from drought, South America had 61 per cent of global deaths from floods, and Asia had 49 per cent of global deaths from tropical cyclones. However, according to the UN, the lives lost due to climate change have been decreasing recently because of the regions' early warning systems.

## **Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups**

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### East and Southeast Asia

#### **North Korea: US and South Korea impose sanctions on North Korean IT workers**

On 23 May, the US and South Korea announced sanctions targeting North Korean IT workers in China and Russia. The US Treasury Department sanctioned Kim Sang Man and the Chinyong Information Technology Cooperation Company for their alleged role in funding North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and missile programs. The Foreign Ministry of South Korea also imposed sanctions on seven individuals and three entities, including Kim and the IT company. These IT workers, hidden behind false identities and documentation, generated revenue that supports North Korea's illegal programs.

#### **Japan: China criticizes restrictions on chipmaking technology**

On 23 May, China condemned Japan's decision to impose curbs on 23 types of chipmaking technology as an abuse of export control measures and a violation of free trade principles. The restrictions, set to take effect on 23 July, are deemed to impact Chinese and Japanese companies, the global semiconductor supply chain security. China has vowed to defend its lawful rights and interests while urging the WTO to examine export restrictions by the US, Japan, and the Netherlands.

#### **Cambodia: Election commission disqualifies main opposition party**

On 17 May, Aljazeera reported that Cambodia's election commission had barred the Candlelight Party, the country's primary opposition party, from participating in the upcoming July election. The ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is now poised to run virtually unchallenged. The commission claimed the party failed to submit the required registration documents. This move follows the banning of the opposition Cambodia's National Rescue Party (CNRP) in the previous election, enabling the CPP to secure all parliamentary seats.



### Myanmar: Attacks in Sagaing Township

On 22 May, the village in Sagaing Township was raided by the military, to which clashes between the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and the military followed. The Badu police outpost, which had around 30 soldiers and police, was attacked by ten PDF members. According to the PDF group, the resistance fighters occupied some parts of the police outpost while burning the prison. However, the lack of ammunition on the PDF's side and the arrival of gunships to conduct further airstrikes by the military made the former group retreat from the site.

### Myanmar: UNHRC report on military's unabated arms acquisition

On 17 May, the United Nations Human Rights Council released a report on Myanmar's acquisition of weapons. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, stated: "The majority of these arms originated from Russia, China, and Singaporean companies." The exports encompassed weapons, dual-use technology, and materials employed for weapon production from the day of the coup until December 2022. The report identified more than 12,500 unique purchases or shipments made directly to the Myanmar military or arms dealers associated with them.

### Myanmar: Cyclone Mocha devastates the Rakhine state

On 13 May, cyclone Mocha, categorized as "extremely severe," approached Myanmar's northwestern Rakhine coast. Affected areas face additional challenges due to armed groups opposing the military, which seized power in a 2021 coup. The military's control and restrictions hinder relief efforts including the distribution of emergency supplies. Furthermore, armed conflict and ongoing landmine threats complicate relief efforts in the areas of Chin, Sagaing, and Magway. The cyclone exacerbates an already dire situation demanding a coordinated and innovative approach to address the pressing needs and challenges faced by affected communities.

## South Asia

### Pakistan: Army Act takes strong measures on 9 May Riots

On 17 May, the civilian and military leadership endorsed a decision to invoke the Army Act 1952 and the Official Secrets Act 1923 against individuals suspected of involvement in the 9 May riots. In addition, the civilian leadership expressed solidarity with the armed forces and martyrs, declaring 9 May as a "black day." Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stated: "The planners and leaders of the 9 May riots who attacked military installations and disrespected our martyrs will be punished and brought to justice. Our nation of 220 million has demanded that those who are sinful, in any regard, should be punished so that such an incident does not take place ever again."

### Bangladesh: Two soldiers killed in an attack by Kuki-Chin National Army

On 17 May, the Daily Star reported on the attack by the Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA) in Ruma Upazila, district of Bandarban. The attack left two soldiers of the Bangladesh Army dead and two officers injured. The incident took place when an army patrol team headed to Jarulchharipara after receiving information about a hideout of armed criminals. In a press release, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that there had been increased criminal activities by the KNA lately in the deep forests of Ruma, district of Rpwangchhari, and Thanchi upazilas, district of Bandarban.

### **Sri Lanka: Commemorating the war victims rekindles agony, says Daily Mirror**

On 23 May, the Daily Mirror reported that the Canadian Premier, Justin Trudeau's remarks would not change in the face of objections from Colombo as it aims to reach the Tamil migrants in Canada. On 20 May, Trudeau stated that the stories of the Tamil-Canadians affected by the conflict "serve as an enduring reminder that human rights, peace, and democracy cannot be taken for granted. That's why Parliament last year unanimously adopted the motion to make May 18 Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day." The report by Daily Mirror added that while the commemorations carry a humanitarian aspect in general, the glorification of sacrifices could justify the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE's) separatist aim in the youth's minds.

### **Central Asia, The Middle East, and Africa**

#### **Iraq: Conflict continues between PKK and Turkey**

On 23 May, France24 reported that three Yazidi fighters were killed in a Turkish drone strike which was aimed at the Sinjar Resistance Units headquarters in Northern Iraq. The latter was targeted because it had connections with the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK). Previously, three fighters were killed in the bombing raid in Sinjar district. For the past four decades, the PKK has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state.

#### **Israel: Attacks on Balata refugee camp**

On 22 May, Al Jazeera reported that the Israeli forces killed three Palestinians during the attack on the Balata refugee camp in Nablus City. They blocked the camp's entries and destroyed some homes. The spokesman for the Palestinian Authority (PA) presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh called the raid a "massacre." Further, he stated: "The US administration's silence on the occupation's crimes encourages it to persist in its aggression and such attacks will drag the region towards explosion." Meanwhile, Al Jazeera reported that according to the Israeli forces, the Balata refugee camp raid occurred following a car-ramming incident near Nablus on 21 June, where an Israeli soldier was injured.

#### **Israel: Flag march turns violent at Gaza Strip**

On 18 May, Al Jazeera reported that the Israeli forces used fire and tear gas against the Palestinians who joined the protest at the Gaza Strip's eastern border. During the protest, the demonstrators urged an end to the Israeli attacks in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The protests took place against the backdrop of the far-right Israeli's "flag march" which is held annually to mark the capture and annexation of East Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Israeli officials stated that they fired only after the Palestinians attacked them with explosive devices at the barrier between Israel and Gaza.

#### **Lebanon: Escalating deportations spark fear among Syrian refugees**

On 17 May, Al Jazeera reported that the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are terrified due to the Lebanese government's crackdown on their presence. According to UNHCR spokesperson Paula Barrachina, at least 73 raids were undertaken on Syrian communities in April. She stated that many Syrians have been detained and deported, including those registered with the UNHCR, without specifying a number. Further, she added: "UNHCR takes reports of deportations of Syrian refugees very seriously and is concerned about current developments."

#### **Sudan: UN examines the human rights abuses**

On 11 May, the United Nations Human Rights Council held a one-day emergency session on killings, injuries, and other abuses against civilians in Sudan. A resolution was adopted



calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities without pre-conditions to scrutinize the human rights violations. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, accused the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Force (RSF) of violating international humanitarian law.

### **Sub-Saharan Africa: 16.5 million displacements in 2022**

On 11 May, Africanews reported that the intersecting crises in Africa had forced millions of people to flee their countries in 2022. According to a joint report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa recorded around 16.5 million people displaced in 2022, and more than half of them displaced due to conflict in the DRC and Ethiopia. IDMC Chief, Alexandra Bilal, stated: "Since the start of the most recent conflict in April, we have already recorded the same number of displacements as we did for the whole year of 2022. It's a very volatile situation on the ground." Bilal pointed out that more than three million people have already been displaced across Sudan in 2023.

### **Mali: Soldiers killed in ambush, Africanews report**

On 11 May, Africanews reported that six Malian soldiers were killed, and nine were injured this week in an ambush on an army detachment near Bamako. According to the police source, the soldiers were attacked near the town of Badala, around 130 km from the capital. It added that the soldiers' retaliation left "several dead." A local politician who confirmed the death toll indicated that the attack was carried out by "terrorists", a term used in Mali to indicate jihadists. Since 2012, there has been a significant spread of jihadist militancy exacerbating the complex political, economic and humanitarian crisis in Mali.

### **Mali: US accuses Mali as Wagner Group's transit route**

On 23 May, Al Jazeera reported that the US Department of State accused the Russian paramilitary, the Wagner Group, of allegedly shipping military equipment through Mali. State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller stated: "We have been informed that Wagner is seeking to transit material acquisitions to aid Russia's war through Mali and is willing to use false paperwork for these transactions. In fact, there are indications that Wagner has been attempting to purchase military systems from foreign suppliers and route these weapons through Mali as a third party." Additionally, Miller stated that these accusations have not yet been proven and added that the US has been imposing sanctions on entities supporting Wagner's military operations.

### **Guinea: Police fires at protestors killing seven, reports Al Jazeera**

On 11 May, Al Jazeera reported that at least seven people were killed and 32 were injured in the anti-military government protests in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. Police in riot gear came down with a heavy hand on the rioters as rocks and burned tires were thrown at the police. A new series of protests is being planned in the face of the killings. Nzerekore, a city in the southeast region and the town of Dabola, witnessed small-scale protests too. In a joint statement, the opposition parties and civil society groups mentioned the reporting of the arrests. They added that a second day of peaceful demonstrations would be held as planned. There have been no responses to the allegations from the military rulers so far. Guinea has been facing widespread protests and deadly clashes since the military takeover in 2021.

### Chad: Southern village under attack; 17 killed, several injured

On 12 May, Africanews reported on the "mass killing" by "unidentified armed individuals" in the village of Don, which killed 17 and left three injured. The prosecutor's office of Chad had opened an investigation into the murder and appealed to the witnesses to identify the perpetrators. Most inhabitants of the village belong to the Kabba community, an ethnic group of mainly Christian belief that mostly relies on agriculture. Clashes between nomadic Muslim herders and indigenous sedentary farmers, mostly Christians, are common in this region.

### Senegal: Three killed in clashes between the Senegalese police and supporters of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko

On 16 May, the BBC Africa reported the death of three people during the clashes between the Senegalese police and supporters of the opposition politician, Ousmane Sonko, who is facing charges of rape. The protests occurred on 15 May following his court appearance for the trial. The latest hearing was adjourned as he denied the charges and refused to turn up. His supporters claim the case is a political plot to prevent Sonko from running in the presidential election this year.

### Somalia: Flood displaces over 210,000 people

On 16 May, Africanews reported that floodwaters in central Somalia displaced thousands of families from the city of Beledweyne. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that more than 460,000 people have been affected, including 219,000 people who have been displaced. Important facilities, including government offices and hospitals were closed. If the flood persists, there will be rising concerns about an outbreak of malaria and cholera in the region.

## Europe and the Americas

### Ukraine: US to permit Western allies to provide F-16 fighter jets

On 19 May, according to a statement by American President Joe Biden during the G7 summit, the US government will permit the Western allies to provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine. According to National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, the US government will train the Ukrainian soldiers. The US government is yet to approve the provision of F-16 jets to Ukraine but if the allies are to send the jets, they should either resell or re-export them to Ukraine. In response, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Alexander Grushko, said in an interview with TASS that the West is to be blamed for the escalation of the war in Ukraine. He added that Russia will respond accordingly if the US approves the selling of jets. The UK government and the French government ensured that they would train the Ukrainian pilots.

### Serbia: Protests against gun violence

On 19 May, thousands of protesters gathered in Belgrade against gun violence. This is the third protest this month following two mass shootings that killed 18 people. Opposition parties accuse President Aleksander Vucic's government of failing to stop the broadcasting of violent content. On the same day, the opposition members left the parliament's special session accusing the ruling party of silencing the protesters. Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic admitted that several complaints had been filed against the gun shooter; however, actions have not been taken. Vucic, during a counter rally in Pancevo, called out the opposition for using the protests for their self-promotion.

### Greece: Mistreatment of asylum seekers

On 19 May, Euronews reported on a video in which asylum seekers were spotted being



abandoned in the middle of the sea by Greece's border patrol near the island of Lesbos on 11 May. The video was shared by an anonymous activist to the New York Times. The video showed 12 asylum seekers arriving in a van and who later got transferred to a speedboat. They were seen boarding a Greek Coast Guard vessel and later abandoned in the Aegean Sea on an inflatable raft. The Turkish Coast Guard rescued the asylum seekers. The Greek government has denied mistreating asylum seekers.

#### **Russia: Military cooperation with South Africa**

On 15 May, Russia's Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Land Forces, Oleg Salukov, met with South Africa's Chief of the Army, Lawrence Mbatia. Both sides are planning to enhance military cooperation and increase the combat readiness of their respective armies through common military exercises. Agreements were signed to establish further collaboration between the two land forces. The meeting was held at the Russian General Command headquarters.

#### **Italy: Floods kill nine people**

On 17 May, according to Vice President Irene Piola, nine people died due to floods in the Emilia-Romagna region following a torrential downpour. Thousands were evacuated. The Italian Civil Protection Minister, Nello Musumeci, said the rainfall was twice the amount of the annual average rainfall in 36 hours. The Formula One race, which was to be held in Imola, was cancelled due to the floods.

#### **Ukraine: Russian missiles attack Kyiv**

On 16 May, Russian anti-aircraft missiles hit Kyiv. According to Kyiv's Mayor, Vitali Klitschko, three people have died, and the debris has fallen into the zoo. The military administration reported that four districts of the city were affected. According to the head of the military administration of Kyiv, Serhiy Popko, most of the Russian missiles have been destroyed.

#### **Ukraine: New military aid from Paris and Berlin but no F-16 jets**

On 15 May, Zelenskyy returned to Kyiv with a renewed promise of further military aid from Germany and France. The Ukrainian President went to Berlin on 14 May after concluding his visit to Rome. Despite Zelenskyy's insistence on receiving combat aircraft, the French and German state leaders, Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz, reacted cautiously, showing their reluctance. Germany has supported Ukraine financially and militarily since the beginning of the war and is the second most significant supporter of Ukraine. The visit has renewed military aid with another EUR 2.7 billion, 20 more Marder armoured personnel carriers, 30 Leopard 1 tanks, and four Iris-T SLM air defence systems. France promised dozens of armoured vehicles, light tanks, long-range air defence systems and the training of Ukrainian soldiers.

#### **The US: NRA sues after Maryland's governor signs legislation tightening regulations on guns**

On 16 May, Maryland's Governor Wes Moore converted gun-control measures into law in response to a US Supreme Court ruling in the *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v. Bruen*. The verdict ended a requirement for people to demonstrate a particular need to get a licence to carry a concealed gun in public. The National Rifle Association (NRA) filed a federal lawsuit against the governor and the state lawmakers. Democrats' Maryland Governor Wes Moore stated: "Gun violence is tearing apart the fabric of our communities, not just through mass shootings but through shootings happening in each of our communities far too



often." The law also changes requirements for a firearms training course and increases fees for the renewal and copies of permits.

### **The US: Report on International Religious Freedom**

On 15 May, the US published its 'Report on International Religious Freedom', calling out Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan and India on violations of the right to religious freedom. The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, spoke on the acts of the governments targeting members of a certain faith and further on work-related violations excluding religious minorities from certain professions. The report highlighted the growing trend of restrictions on accessing holy sites and places of worship. It stressed the need for governments to provide equal access to education and other services. This year marks the 25th year of the International Religious Freedom Act.

### **The US: Republicans pass an extreme immigration bill**

On 11 May, the Republicans in the House of Representatives advanced a bill to the Senate to build more stretches of wall along the United States-Mexico border and impose new restrictions on asylum seekers. The Republicans blamed US President Joe Biden for the increase in illegal immigration. Biden stated that he would veto the bill. Additionally, he admitted that the border would be "chaotic for a while" and that US officials use new policies to curb illegal immigration while offering more legal pathways into the US.

### **Haiti: Increasing vigilantism**

On 17 May, UN officials stated that the violence in Haiti shows no sign of ending as Haitians take the law into their own hands. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights spokesperson, Ravina Shamdasani stated that nearly 1,500 gang-related killings were reported between 1 January and the end of April, with 49 killings reported between 10 May and 15 May. The gang violence has been continuing for two years as armed groups compete for control and power after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. The violence has hindered access to healthcare facilities, forced the closure of schools and clinics and led to food insecurity.

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### **About the authors**

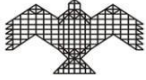
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### About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

National Institute of  
Advanced Studies



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 researches 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. 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 manner.

KAS has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas: Foreign and Security Policy; Economic, Climate, and Energy Policy; Rule of Law; Political Dialogue focused on Social and Political Change; and Media and Youth. The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions that implement jointly curated projects and programmes.

### 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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