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Business at Risk

Taliban to target army's mega companies

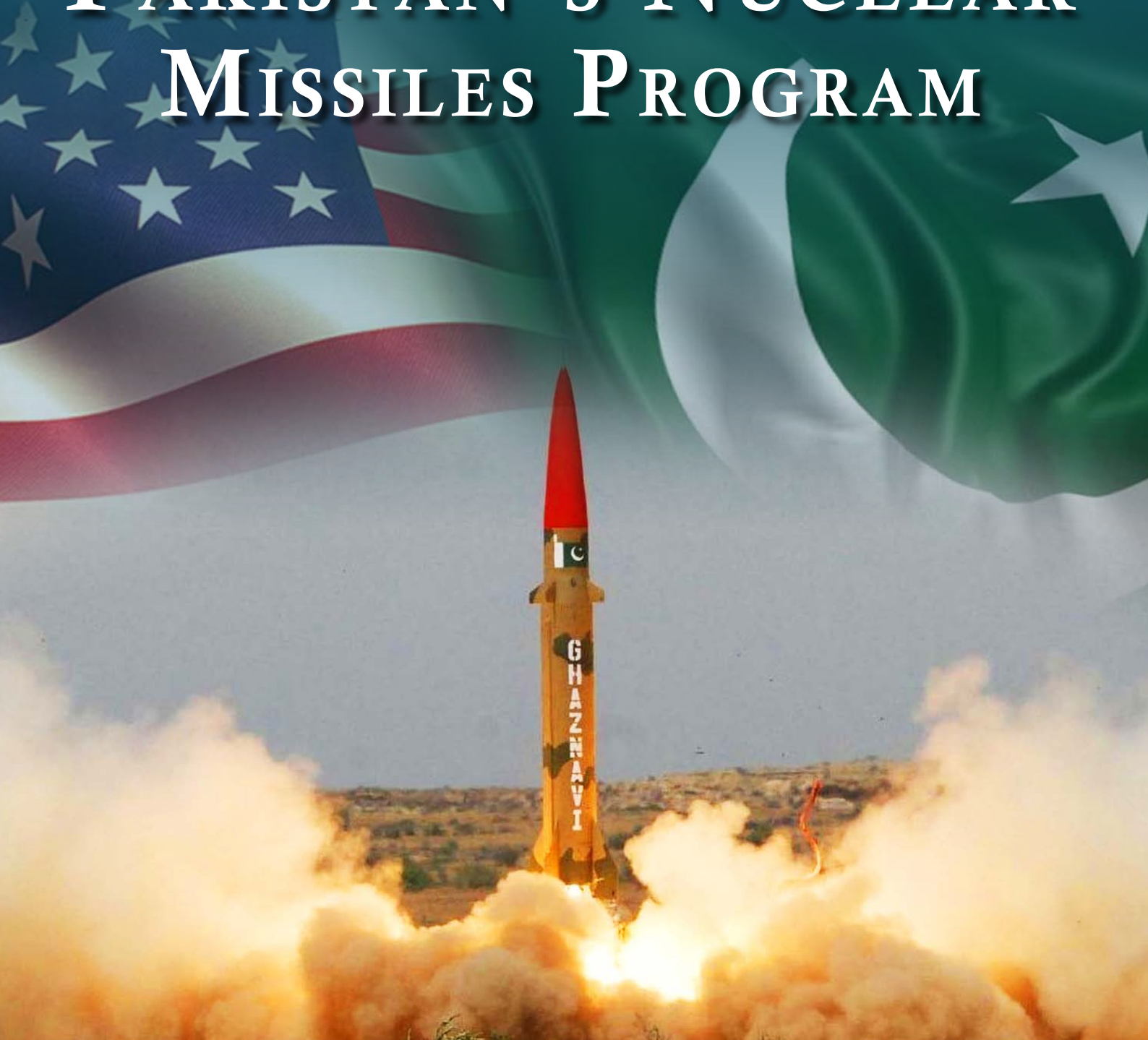
Indian on edge

Trump's unpredictable China policy

Turning point for Canada

Trudeau's resignation signals political shift

US TARGET PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR MISSILES PROGRAM



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Pakistan's Nuclear Missiles Program and U.S. Objections: An In-Depth Analysis



By Kanwal Munir

Since its inception, Pakistan's nuclear missile program has been central to its defense strategy, designed to counter perceived threats from India. The program emerged following Pakistan's 1971 defeat and India's 1974 nuclear test, both of which underscored Pakistan's need for a robust deterrent. Over decades, Pakistan has developed a sophisticated arsenal, including short-, medium-, and long-range missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads. These advancements are integral to its "Full Spectrum Deterrence" doctrine, aimed at addressing threats across all levels of conflict. However, the program has drawn international concern, particularly from the United States, over issues such as proliferation risks, regional security, and the potential for nuclear escalation in South Asia, making it a contentious element of global security discussions.

Genesis of Pakistan's Nuclear Program

The roots of Pakistan's nuclear ambitions lie in the early 1970s, particularly following its defeat in the

1971 war with India, which led to the creation of Bangladesh. This loss was a profound geopolitical setback for Pakistan, exposing vulnerabilities in its national security framework and highlighting the need for a stronger deterrence mechanism to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test, codenamed "Smiling Buddha," which further exacerbated Pakistan's security concerns. The test was seen as a direct threat to regional stability, compelling Pakistan to accelerate its quest for nuclear capability. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, recognizing the strategic implications, declared Pakistan's resolve to develop nuclear weapons, famously stating, "Even if we have to eat grass, we will make the bomb." This marked the beginning of Pakistan's determined efforts to achieve nuclear parity with its neighbor.

Under Bhutto's leadership, Pakistan's nuclear program took shape, bolstered significantly by the expertise of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan. Khan, a

metallurgist who had worked in Europe, brought valuable knowledge and technology to the program. By the mid-1980s, Pakistan was believed to have acquired nuclear weapons capability, though it maintained ambiguity until its public nuclear tests in May 1998, solidifying its status as a nuclear-armed state.

Development of Pakistan's Missile Program

To ensure effective delivery of nuclear warheads, Pakistan developed a range of missile systems, resulting in a sophisticated and diverse arsenal. These missiles form the backbone of Pakistan's strategic deterrence, enhancing its ability to respond to various levels of threats. The arsenal includes:

1. Hatf Series

Pakistan's Hatf series represents its first-generation short-range ballistic missiles. These missiles were primarily designed for tactical battlefield use, capable of carrying both conventional

and nuclear warheads. The Hatf series features varying ranges and payload capacities, making it a versatile option for close-range military engagements. Early iterations, such as Hatf-I, laid the groundwork for subsequent advancements in missile technology.

2. Shaheen Series

The Shaheen series comprises medium- to long-range solid-fueled ballistic missiles. It includes three major variants:

- Shaheen-I: A single-stage missile with a range of up to 750 kilometers.
- Shaheen-II: A two-stage missile capable of reaching targets up to 1,500 kilometers away.
- Shaheen-III: The most advanced variant, with a range of 2,750 kilometers, capable of targeting key locations across India, the Middle East, and beyond.

The Shaheen series emphasizes rapid deployment and mobility, making it a critical component of Pakistan's strategic arsenal.

3. Ghauri Series

The Ghauri missiles are medium-range, liquid-fueled ballistic missiles developed with reported assistance from North Korea. They are capable of delivering conventional and nuclear warheads up to a range of 1,500 kilometers. The Ghauri missiles serve as a counterbalance to India's Agni missile series, providing Pakistan with a reliable platform for intermediate-range nuclear deterrence.

4. Babur Cruise Missile

The Babur cruise missile is a highly advanced, ground-launched system designed to carry both nuclear and conventional warheads. It has a range exceeding 700 kilometers and is equipped with stealth features to evade missile defense systems. Its precision-strike capability makes it a key asset for strategic and tactical operations.

5. Nasr Missile

The Nasr is a short-range, solid-fueled tactical ballistic missile with a range of

approximately 70 kilometers. Designed for battlefield use, it is capable of carrying low-yield nuclear warheads. Its quick deployment and tactical nature make it a critical element of Pakistan's "Full Spectrum Deterrence" strategy.

6. Ababeel Missile

The Ababeel is a medium-range ballistic missile equipped with Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs). With a range of 2,200 kilometers, it can deliver multiple nuclear warheads to distinct targets. This capability enhances Pakistan's ability to penetrate advanced missile defense systems, ensuring the credibility of its deterrence.



Strategic Doctrine: Full Spectrum Deterrence

These missile systems align with Pakistan's "Full Spectrum Deterrence" doctrine, which aims to address threats across all levels of conflict. From tactical responses to strategic engagements, the doctrine ensures a robust defense against conventional, nuclear, and hybrid warfare scenarios. This multi-tiered approach underscores Pakistan's commitment to maintaining strategic stability in South Asia.

U.S. Objections and Concerns

The United States has consistently voiced concerns about Pakistan's nuclear missile program, citing several key issues that pose significant challenges to global security and

regional stability. These concerns are rooted in a mix of historical events, strategic developments, and policy divergences between the two nations.

1. Proliferation Risks

A major flashpoint in U.S.-Pakistan relations occurred in 2004 with the revelation of the A.Q. Khan network. Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, regarded as the father of Pakistan's nuclear program, was found to have led an international smuggling ring that illicitly transferred sensitive nuclear technology and designs to countries such as Iran, Libya, and North Korea. This unprecedented proliferation scandal alarmed the global community, raising

fears of nuclear technology falling into the wrong hands.

Although Pakistan took steps to dismantle the network and placed Dr. Khan under house arrest, the incident had a lasting impact on international perceptions. The United States remains wary of Pakistan's nuclear oversight, citing potential risks of similar networks reemerging.

2. Regional Instability

The United States argues that Pakistan's development of tactical nuclear weapons, such as the Nasr missile, and its expanding missile arsenal exacerbate tensions in South Asia. The historical rivalry and frequent skirmishes with India create a volatile environment, where any miscalculation or escalation could lead to a catastrophic nuclear exchange.

Additionally, Pakistan's "Full Spectrum Deterrence" doctrine, which incorporates tactical nuclear weapons, is viewed as lowering the threshold for nuclear use, increasing the likelihood of a nuclear conflict in the region. U.S. policymakers emphasize the need for restraint and dialogue to reduce the risk of escalation.

3. Security of Arsenal

The security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is a persistent concern for the United States, especially given the presence of extremist groups within Pakistan's borders. While Pakistan has implemented robust command-and-control measures, including its Strategic Plans Division (SPD), the U.S. fears that political instability or internal sabotage could compromise the security of nuclear materials.



The possibility of non-state actors gaining access to nuclear technology or fissile material remains a critical worry, prompting U.S. policymakers to push for enhanced safeguards and international oversight.

4. Development of Long-Range Missiles

Recent advancements in Pakistan's missile program, particularly the development of systems like the Shaheen-III and reports of longer-range capabilities, have drawn significant U.S. attention. These developments suggest a potential shift in Pakistan's strategic objectives, with capabilities extending beyond South Asia to regions including the Middle East,

Europe, and potentially the U.S. homeland.

U.S. officials view this expansion as an "emerging threat," arguing that such advancements go beyond defensive posturing and could destabilize global security dynamics.

5. Global Non-Proliferation Efforts

Pakistan's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains a contentious issue. The United States sees these treaties as critical components of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Pakistan defends its position by citing the discriminatory nature of the NPT, which recognizes only five nuclear-armed states

and excludes others like itself and India. However, U.S. officials argue that Pakistan's non-compliance undermines global non-proliferation norms and weakens efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation.

Recent Developments and U.S. Sanctions

In December 2024, the United States imposed sanctions on four Pakistani entities associated with the country's ballistic missile program. These sanctions, announced by the U.S. Department of State, were linked to concerns over Pakistan's ongoing development of long-range missile capabilities, including its advanced Shaheen-series ballistic missiles.

The move marked an escalation in U.S. efforts to curb Pakistan's missile advancements, which Washington views as a potential destabilizing factor in global security.

Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer labeled Pakistan's missile program an "emerging threat," suggesting that its strategic objectives might extend beyond countering India. Finer expressed apprehension that Pakistan's advanced missile systems, particularly those with intercontinental ranges, could pose risks to regions far beyond South Asia, potentially reaching parts of Europe and even the U.S. homeland. This shift in narrative reflects growing U.S. unease over Pakistan's evolving defense priorities.

In response, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry strongly criticized the U.S. sanctions, calling them "discriminatory" and politically motivated. Islamabad reiterated that its missile development efforts are a vital part of its national defense strategy, aimed exclusively at deterring aggression and maintaining regional stability. The ministry warned that punitive measures like these could have "dangerous implications" for peace in South Asia, exacerbating tensions in an already volatile region. This development underscores the growing rift in U.S.-Pakistan relations over defense policies.

Pakistan's Response to U.S. Concerns

Pakistan has consistently defended its nuclear and missile programs by emphasizing their critical role in safeguarding national security and maintaining regional stability. Islamabad has put forth several arguments to justify these programs, countering international criticism and addressing concerns raised by powers like the United States.

1. Strategic Necessity

Pakistan underscores that its nuclear and missile programs are essential for counterbalancing India's superior conventional military capabilities and expanding nuclear arsenal. With India's defense budget and military modernization significantly outpacing Pakistan's, Islamabad views its nuclear and missile

capabilities as vital deterrents against potential aggression. Pakistan argues that these programs address an asymmetry in conventional forces, thereby ensuring its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2. Robust Command and Control

To counter concerns over nuclear security, Pakistan highlights its well-structured and secure command and control system. The National Command Authority (NCA) oversees the country's strategic assets, while the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) manages the operational aspects. These institutions are tasked with ensuring the safety, security, and reliability of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Islamabad often cites these measures as evidence of its commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship, countering fears of unauthorized use or access by non-state actors.

3. Adherence to Non-Proliferation Norms

Although Pakistan has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), it asserts its commitment to non-proliferation principles. Pakistan has implemented stringent export control measures and collaborates with international frameworks, such as the

Nuclear Security Summit (NSS), to secure nuclear materials and technologies. Islamabad argues that its track record demonstrates a commitment to preventing proliferation, even in the absence of treaty membership.

4. Desire for Strategic Stability

Pakistan contends that its missile program contributes to regional stability by deterring aggression and maintaining a balance of power with India. Islamabad argues that its "Full Spectrum Deterrence" doctrine, encompassing tactical and strategic capabilities, prevents miscalculations and ensures peace by dissuading adversaries from pursuing hostile actions. This, Pakistan maintains, supports long-term stability in South Asia despite historical tensions with India.

Through these justifications, Pakistan seeks to position its nuclear and missile programs as essential, responsible, and stabilizing components of its national defense strategy.

Conclusion

Pakistan's nuclear missile program remains a cornerstone of its defense strategy, deeply shaped by its historical and geopolitical context, particularly its rivalry with neighboring India. The program, developed

as a response to perceived threats from India's growing conventional and nuclear capabilities, serves as a deterrent to safeguard Pakistan's sovereignty. However, it also presents significant challenges to international security, with the United States highlighting concerns over nuclear proliferation and the potential for regional instability.

The United States views Pakistan's missile advancements, especially its pursuit of long-range capabilities and tactical nuclear weapons, as increasing the risk of nuclear escalation in South Asia. This concern is compounded by fears of proliferation, particularly following the A.Q. Khan network scandal.

As the strategic dynamics of the region evolve, addressing these concerns will require continued dialogue, transparency, and confidence-building measures between Pakistan, the United States, and other global stakeholders. The challenge lies in balancing Pakistan's legitimate security needs with the broader goals of global non-proliferation and regional stability. Diplomacy and international cooperation will be vital to mitigating risks, preventing further escalation, and ensuring that South Asia remains stable and secure, with Pakistan's defense priorities aligned with global security norms.



The Axis of Contention: Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan's Nuclear Programs - Global Security at a Crossroads

By Kanwal Munir

Nuclear weapons programs have long been a focal point in global security debates, with Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan frequently under scrutiny. These nations' nuclear ambitions arise from distinct historical, political, and strategic contexts, yet they collectively challenge global non-proliferation efforts. Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology, North Korea's growing arsenal, and Pakistan's strategic rivalry with India highlight complex motivations rooted in security and influence. Each program elicits varied international reactions, from sanctions to diplomatic overtures, reflecting the broader challenges of maintaining global stability. This article explores the drivers, status, and implications of these programs, emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated international responses to address escalating tensions and ensure long-term security.

Iran's Nuclear Program: A Complex Legacy and Escalating Crisis

Historical Context

Iran's nuclear program began in the 1950s as part of the U.S.-led "Atoms for Peace" initiative, aimed at promoting civilian nuclear energy. Under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran sought nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, particularly energy security. The Shah signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1968, committing to non-proliferation while developing civilian nuclear capabilities. In the 1970s, Iran expanded its nuclear ambitions with international cooperation, including the construction of reactors, notably the Tehran Research Reactor, with U.S. support.

However, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran suspended these collaborations, and the newly formed Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini halted nuclear activities, dismantling some nuclear



facilities. Despite this, Iran's need for energy security and regional power drove the reemergence of its nuclear ambitions by the 1980s.

The Resurgence of Iran's Nuclear Program

By the 1990s, Iran's nuclear program resumed, with a focus on energy independence. However, suspicions about its covert intentions grew, especially as Iran pursued uranium enrichment capabilities. The international community, particularly the United States, grew increasingly concerned that Iran was secretly developing nuclear weapons. This culminated in the discovery of undeclared nuclear sites, including the Natanz enrichment facility, in the early 2000s. These revelations led to international scrutiny and calls for Iran to cease enrichment and allow enhanced inspections.

Recent Developments: The JCPOA and Its Aftermath

In 2015, Iran reached a historic agreement with six major powers—the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, China, and Russia—called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This agreement

limited Iran's uranium enrichment capabilities, reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium, and subjected the country to more rigorous inspections in exchange for sanctions relief. The JCPOA was hailed as a diplomatic success aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

However, the 2018 U.S. withdrawal from the agreement under President Donald Trump marked a turning point. The U.S. re-imposed harsh economic sanctions, and in response, Iran began to violate the deal's terms. Tehran ramped up uranium enrichment to 20% purity, far beyond the JCPOA's 3.67% limit. By 2020, Iran enriched uranium to 60% purity, much closer to the weapons-grade level of 90%.

In 2024, reports indicated that Iran had begun producing uranium metal, a key material for nuclear warheads. Iran insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, but many countries, including Israel and the U.S., fear Iran is nearing the ability to develop nuclear weapons.

International Reactions and Implications

Iran's nuclear advancements have sparked significant international concern. Israel,

which views a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat, has warned of potential military action if Iran reaches nuclear weapons capability. Meanwhile, Gulf Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are investing heavily in defense, worried about the regional power shift.

The European Union remains caught in a delicate balancing act, advocating for diplomacy while addressing Iran's nuclear provocations. France, in particular, has expressed alarm over Iran's escalating enrichment activities, with President Emmanuel Macron urging tougher sanctions if the situation worsens. At the same time, Iran's cooperation with Russia on nuclear and missile technology has raised further concerns about the program's trajectory and the regional security balance.

As the 2025 expiration of key provisions in the JCPOA approaches, Iran could potentially expand its nuclear capabilities further, exacerbating global concerns about nuclear proliferation and regional stability.

North Korea's Nuclear Arsenal: An Escalating Threat

Historical Context

North Korea's nuclear ambitions trace back to the 1950s, shaped by the broader Cold War dynamics. The Korean Peninsula was a critical focal point of the Cold War, with North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, seeking to establish itself as a powerful regional player. Pyongyang's early interest in nuclear technology was spurred by the need for self-reliance in military capabilities, influenced by its rivalry with South Korea and the broader security threats posed by the United States and its allies.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, North Korea began pursuing nuclear technology, initially under the guise of civilian nuclear research. However, as early as the 1980s, it was revealed that the country had been covertly working on nuclear weapons, violating its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Despite signing the NPT in 1985, North Korea conducted a series of secretive activities aimed at building nuclear weap-

ons, including the construction of a reactor at Yongbyon, which became a central site in its weapons program.

By 2003, after years of diplomatic efforts and inspections, North Korea announced its decision to withdraw from the NPT, formally ending any obligations to international non-proliferation norms. This move was a critical moment in the escalating tensions surrounding the country's nuclear capabilities, marking its official defiance of global non-proliferation efforts.

Recent Developments

North Korea's nuclear program has continued to advance despite ongoing international sanctions and condemnation. The regime has made significant strides in developing both its nuclear warhead capabilities and delivery systems, with reports suggesting that Pyongyang now possesses dozens of nuclear weapons. In addition to nuclear warheads, North Korea has developed an array of missile systems, from short-range missiles to intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), the latter capable of reaching the United States mainland.

One of the most concerning developments in 2025 was North Korea's successful test of a new hypersonic missile, which Pyongyang claims is capable of striking targets across the Pacific. While South Korean and U.S. analysts have expressed skepticism regarding the hypersonic capabilities, they acknowledge the growing sophistication of North Korea's missile technology. The development of such advanced weapons systems underscores the persistent determination of the regime to develop increasingly lethal weapons and to demonstrate its ability to deter perceived threats.

North Korea's nuclear ambitions are further complicated by reports of growing military cooperation with Russia. Amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, North Korea has reportedly provided ammunition and other military supplies to Russia in exchange for technological assistance, including missile and nuclear technology. This partnership bolsters Pyongyang's capabilities and poses a significant challenge to international efforts to isolate the regime through sanctions. The strategic relationship between North Korea and

Russia, in turn, complicates diplomatic efforts aimed at curbing North Korea's nuclear ambitions, as Russia's support enables North Korea to continue its weapons development.

Regional and Global Implications

North Korea's nuclear advancements have significant implications for regional and global security. In East Asia, Pyongyang's increasing missile and nuclear capabilities have triggered an arms race, prompting neighboring countries to strengthen their own defense systems. South Korea has significantly enhanced its missile defense systems, while Japan has taken steps to revise its pacifist constitution, allowing for greater military engagement in response to the growing nuclear threat from North Korea.

The United States has bolstered its military presence in the region, increasing joint military exercises with South Korea and Japan to reassure its allies and signal its commitment to regional security. The U.S. also continues to maintain a policy of extended deterrence, ensuring that its nuclear umbrella will protect its Asian allies in the event of a conflict with North Korea.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue have remained largely stagnant. Pyongyang demands the lifting of sanctions as a precondition for engaging in talks, while the United States insists on complete denuclearization before any sanctions relief. This stalemate has left the region in a precarious position, with no clear path forward for diplomacy.

China, North Korea's primary ally, plays a complex role in this equation. While China provides economic support to Pyongyang, it has also expressed concerns about regional instability and the potential for conflict. China advocates for stability on the Korean Peninsula, but it also works to manage its relationship with North Korea, balancing its strategic interests with its commitment to regional security.

In conclusion, North Korea's nuclear program remains a persistent challenge to global security. The country's growing nuclear capabilities, coupled with its defiance of international norms, have increased tensions in East Asia and beyond.

Despite years of diplomatic efforts, North Korea's continued development of weapons of mass destruction poses significant risks, and the international community must find new and innovative ways to address the evolving threat posed by Pyongyang.

Pakistan's Nuclear Program: Balancing Security and Scrutiny

Historical Context

Pakistan's nuclear program was initiated in response to India's nuclear advancements. Following India's first nuclear test in 1974, Pakistan accelerated its efforts under the leadership of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. By 1998, Pakistan conducted its first nuclear tests, cementing its status as a nuclear power.



Today, Pakistan is believed to have one of the fastest-growing nuclear arsenals in the world, comprising an estimated 165 warheads and advanced delivery systems, including tactical nuclear weapons.

Recent Political Discourse

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif recently claimed that the United States prefers leaders in Pakistan who would consider dismantling the country's nuclear arsenal. Appearing on the program *Faisla Aap Ka*, Asif stated:

"In today's global environment, if you do not strengthen your defence, you remain at risk. Therefore, our missile programmes

and nuclear assets have always been targets, and the US would prefer leaders who would de-nuclearise Pakistan or dismantle its missile programmes."

Asif also accused former Prime Minister Imran Khan of serving as a "proxy" for foreign influences, undermining Pakistan's strategic autonomy. He criticized opposition figures for aligning with American interests and compromising national sovereignty.

Recent Developments

In December 2024, the United States imposed sanctions on Pakistan's National Development Complex (NDC) and three other entities linked to its missile program. While these sanctions were framed as measures to counter weapons proliferation, Pakistani officials viewed them as attempts to undermine their strategic capabilities.

Despite external pressures, Pakistan continues to expand its nuclear energy capacity. The Chashma-5 nuclear power plant, a \$3.7 billion collaboration with China, is expected to boost the country's energy output by 1,200 MW. This project underscores Pakistan's commitment to leveraging nuclear technology for civilian purposes amidst persistent scrutiny.

Security Concerns

Pakistan's nuclear program faces challenges related to internal political instability and extremist threats. The international community remains concerned about the potential for unauthorized access to nuclear materials. However, Pakistani officials

assert that their security protocols meet global standards and emphasize that their nuclear assets are purely for deterrence.

Key Comparisons and Global Implications

The nuclear programs of Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan differ in origin and intent but share common themes of defiance, strategic necessity, and international contention.

- **Strategic Motivations:** While Iran and North Korea view nuclear weapons as tools for regime survival and regional influence, Pakistan's arsenal is primarily aimed at deterring India.
- **Global Reactions:** Iran and North Korea face severe international sanctions, whereas Pakistan, despite scrutiny, maintains strategic partnerships, particularly with China.
- **Technological Sophistication:** North Korea leads in missile development, while Pakistan has made strides in tactical nuclear weapons. Iran, despite its progress in uranium enrichment, remains further from weaponization.

The combined challenges posed by these nations highlight the limitations of existing non-proliferation frameworks. Addressing these threats requires a multipronged approach, balancing diplomacy with robust deterrence and tailored sanctions.

Conclusion: A Triangular Challenge to Global Stability

Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan's nuclear programs reflect broader geopolitical trends that challenge the global non-proliferation regime. As the international community grapples with these issues, the stakes remain higher than ever for ensuring peace and stability.

From heightened regional tensions to the erosion of global norms, these programs underscore the urgent need for innovative solutions. Whether through diplomacy, economic measures, or multilateral agreements, the path forward demands collective resolve and strategic foresight.

Business at Risk: How the Pakistan Taliban is Targeting Military- Run Businesses



By Kanwal Munir

The threat posed by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistan Taliban, continues to shape the security landscape of Pakistan. In a recent development, the TTP has targeted not only the military but also its commercial interests, specifically military-run businesses. This marks a significant escalation in the group's ongoing insurgency and signals a new front in the conflict between the Pakistani military and the TTP.

Over the past two decades, Pakistan's military has been engaged in a violent struggle with the TTP and other militant groups that have sought to destabilize the country. The TTP's ideology, which is rooted in a radical interpretation of Islamic law, opposes Pakistan's current government and military structure, both of which it views as un-Islamic and corrupt. This latest threat, however, represents a significant shift in the TTP's strategy: targeting the military's economic and commercial operations.

Background on the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), founded in 2007, has been responsible for numerous attacks on Pakistani military personnel, government institutions, and civilians. The group's goals include the imposition of its own version of Sharia law across Pakistan, the dissolution of the current political system, and the establishment of an Islamic state.

Historically, the TTP has relied on guerrilla warfare tactics, such as bombings, targeted killings, and ambushes, to undermine the authority of the Pakistani state. The group's presence has been especially strong in the tribal regions along the border with Afghanistan, where they operate with relative impunity.

The Pakistani military, in response, has carried out a series of counterinsurgency

operations aimed at dismantling the TTP's infrastructure. These efforts have been successful in curbing the group's power, but the TTP has maintained its ability to launch high-profile attacks, particularly in urban centers and on military convoys.

Despite its diminished territory, the TTP remains a significant threat to Pakistan's security, with the group continuously evolving its tactics and expanding its target base. The threat against military-run businesses represents the latest evolution of its strategy, signaling that the TTP is not only targeting military personnel but also seeking to weaken Pakistan's economic foundations.

The Role of Military-Run Businesses in Pakistan's Economy

The Pakistani military has long held a significant presence in the country's economic landscape, operating a diverse

array of businesses and industries. This involvement spans a wide range of sectors, including logistics, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, retail, and real estate. These military-run enterprises have become central to Pakistan's economic framework, creating a unique intersection between the nation's defense and commercial interests.

One of the most prominent examples of military-run businesses is the National Logistics Cell (NLC). Founded in the early 1970s, NLC plays an essential role in the transportation and logistics sector, facilitating the movement of goods and supplies throughout Pakistan. NLC's operations extend beyond civilian logistics, as it also serves as a critical support component for the military's operational logistics. The company's role is not limited to commercial freight; it also plays a pivotal role in enhancing the defense capabilities of Pakistan's military forces, ensuring that essential supplies are rapidly mobilized to any region that requires it.

Beyond logistics, the military's involvement stretches into agriculture, with the Fauji Fertilizer Company (FFC), one of the largest producers of fertilizers in Pakistan. The military also has a substantial stake in the real estate sector, where its investment in land and property development is significant. Military-run businesses such as Fauji Foundation have been involved in numerous ventures, including hospitals, educational institutions, and welfare services. In the retail sector, the military operates stores like Canteen Stores Department (CSD), providing goods to soldiers and their families, which has extended to offering products to the public.

This extensive involvement in the economy has led to a perception that Pakistan's armed forces hold significant sway over the country's economic and political affairs. While the military's business ventures have generated substantial revenue, they have also attracted criticism. Critics argue that the military's dominance in economic matters stifles the growth of the private sector, reduces competition, and leads to greater inequality by concentrating wealth within a select few.

However, the military's business empire continues to thrive, providing the armed forces with vital financial independence.

This economic strength ensures that the military is less reliant on government budgets, giving it greater autonomy in its decision-making. The military's ability to influence national policy, particularly in matters concerning defense, security, and governance, remains a powerful tool in shaping Pakistan's political and economic future.

The TTP's Shift in Strategy: Targeting Military Businesses

The recent threats by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) against military-run businesses mark a significant shift in the group's strategy in its ongoing conflict with Pakistan. By targeting the military's economic assets, the TTP seeks to weaken

precisely what the TTP hopes will weaken the military's operational capacity, particularly in the conflict zones where the TTP operates.

Additionally, the TTP has called on military employees to seek alternative employment, signaling a broader campaign to disrupt the military's civilian workforce. The group's threats are not just aimed at the military's commercial operations but also at the people who depend on these businesses for their livelihoods. By targeting both investors and employees, the TTP hopes to destabilize the military's economic base, thereby undermining its social and political influence.

The TTP's rationale for targeting military businesses is deeply rooted in the group's ideological goals. The Taliban views



the financial foundation of the armed forces, hoping to create a ripple effect that disrupts both the military's operations and the civilian support it has garnered over decades. The TTP's attacks on these businesses represent an attempt to challenge the military's control over critical economic sectors and its influence within Pakistan's political and economic framework.

The TTP has issued a direct ultimatum, urging civilians to withdraw their investments from military-run enterprises within the next three months. This move is designed to deprive the military of a significant portion of its financial resources, forcing it to reallocate resources from military operations to protect its commercial interests. Such a diversion of focus is

Pakistan's military as an extension of a corrupt state apparatus that serves Western interests, and attacking military-run enterprises is seen as a direct challenge to the military's dominance over both the political and economic landscape of the country. This strategy is an attempt to delegitimize the state's authority, weaken its control over Pakistan's financial systems, and, ultimately, destabilize the country's governance structures.

The Pakistan Army's Response to the Threats

In response to the TTP's threats against military-run businesses, the Pakistani military has chosen a restrained approach, refraining from issuing public statements or directly addressing the group's demands.

This silence may be strategic, aiming to avoid further provoking the TTP while quietly assessing the situation. However, given the gravity of the threats and the potential impact on both military operations and the economy, it is expected that the military will take swift and decisive action to protect its commercial assets.

The military's primary concern will likely be the security of its business operations. Increased security measures will be implemented at sites where military-run enterprises, like the National Logistics Cell (NLC) or Fauji Fertilizer Company, are based. These businesses are not only vital to the military's financial independence but also essential to the broader national economy. With the threat of disruption hanging over these entities, it is almost certain that the military will bolster protective measures around key facilities, ensuring that operations continue without interruption.

Beyond physical security, it is expected that the military will take more proactive steps to counter the TTP's ability to disrupt Pakistan's economy. This may involve increased intelligence operations aimed at identifying and dismantling TTP cells operating within the country. The military will likely focus on targeting high-ranking militant leaders and key figures who are orchestrating these attacks, while also enhancing surveillance around military-run business hubs and critical logistical infrastructure.

The protection of these economic assets is critical not just for the military's financial stability but also for the functioning of Pakistan's broader economy. The disruption of key industries would have far-reaching consequences, undermining both national security and the livelihoods of civilians dependent on these industries.

The TTP's evolving strategy, which now targets military-run businesses, marks a shift in the dynamics of Pakistan's insurgency. It poses new challenges for the state in its efforts to counteract the insurgency, highlighting the difficulty of maintaining control over both the political and economic spheres. This dual assault on the state's infrastructure and resources makes the conflict even more complex, further testing the resilience of Pakistan's military and government.

Implications for Pakistan's Security and Economy

The TTP's threat against military-run businesses has far-reaching implications for Pakistan's security and economy. On the security front, the shift in the TTP's tactics could lead to an intensification of attacks against civilian infrastructure linked to the military. This could further strain the already fragile security situation in the country, particularly in regions where the military's influence is most pronounced.

On the economic front, the TTP's campaign could undermine investor confidence in Pakistan, particularly among foreign investors who may perceive the country as unstable or unsafe. The disruption of military-run businesses could also have ripple effects across Pakistan's supply chains, particularly in industries where the military has significant involvement.

The TTP's attempt to destabilize Pakistan's economy could exacerbate the country's already precarious economic situation. Pakistan is grappling with a high inflation rate, a rising fiscal deficit, and a growing debt burden. The TTP's campaign could further strain Pakistan's resources, making it more difficult for the government to address its economic challenges.

Moreover, the rising violence and instability could hinder the government's ability to implement necessary reforms and attract foreign investment. This would only exacerbate the economic difficulties faced by ordinary Pakistanis, who are already dealing with rising costs of living and unemployment.

The Role of Civilians in the Conflict

Civilians occupy a pivotal role in the ongoing conflict between the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Pakistani military. The TTP's recent warnings for civilians to divest from military-run businesses highlight the importance of public support in this struggle. These businesses are not only economic assets for the military but also key sources of political leverage. Civilian participation in these

enterprises, through investments or employment, provides the military with a financial lifeline while cementing its influence within the country.

For the Pakistani military, maintaining civilian support is crucial for ensuring stability and preserving the operational capacity of military-run businesses. The success of these enterprises is tightly linked to public engagement, whether it's through the patronage of retail businesses, employment in sectors like logistics or agriculture, or investment in military-owned companies. This civilian participation reinforces the military's authority, contributing to its ability to sustain its power both on the battlefield and in the national economic sphere.

However, the TTP's attempts to target civilian investors and employees introduce potential risks for the broader public perception of the insurgency. If the TTP's threats result in economic hardship for ordinary Pakistanis, it could alienate the general population, turning public sentiment in favor of the military. Civilians who rely on military-run enterprises for employment or affordable goods may view the insurgents as a threat to their livelihoods, increasing the likelihood of resistance against the TTP's agenda.

Yet, the TTP's strategy also has the potential to sway public opinion if the group succeeds in fostering disillusionment with the military's economic dominance. Many Pakistanis have long viewed the military's control over businesses and industries as exploitative, contributing to inequality and hindering the growth of the private sector. Should the TTP effectively highlight these issues and galvanize opposition to military-run businesses, it could gain support from those who feel marginalized by the military's extensive economic reach.

The evolving dynamics between the military, insurgents, and civilians indicate that public opinion will be a decisive factor in the outcome of the conflict. The TTP's ability to disrupt the military's economic influence, and the public's response to these efforts, will determine the direction of the struggle for political and economic control in Pakistan.

International Reactions and the Role of the Global Community

The escalating violence and targeted threats by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) against military-run businesses have captured the attention of the international community, raising concerns about the broader implications of the ongoing conflict. The Pakistani government, already grappling with internal strife, has appealed for increased international support to counter the insurgency's growing strength, particularly as the TTP's operations extend beyond Pakistan's borders, with strong ties to other militant groups in Afghanistan. The group's cross-border activities and the rise of alliances with various regional and international extremist factions present a more complex and dangerous scenario for Pakistan's security.

The United States, China, and India are among the key global players closely monitoring the situation in Pakistan. These countries, while having distinct interests in the region, share concerns about the potential for the TTP's violence to destabilize Pakistan further and jeopardize regional security. A destabilized Pakistan could lead to a spillover effect, impacting neighboring countries, and further complicating an already volatile geopolitical landscape in South Asia. For instance, instability in

Pakistan could enhance the reach of extremist groups operating in Afghanistan, potentially affecting China's investments in the region or heightening India's security concerns along its western border.

International diplomatic efforts may be aimed at encouraging Pakistan to engage in peace talks with elements of the TTP, although this remains a delicate issue. The TTP's hardline demands, including the establishment of an Islamic state, present significant challenges to any form of negotiations. Given the group's radical ideology and history of violence, the Pakistani government would face immense pressure to make substantial compromises if peace talks were to take place. The international community may seek to mediate or support dialogue between the two sides, but the possibility of meaningful compromise is limited due to the TTP's uncompromising stance and Pakistan's reluctance to cede control over the country's sovereignty and political system.

The conflict's resolution will depend largely on Pakistan's ability to balance military operations against insurgents, maintain domestic stability, and secure international diplomatic support. With the increasing risk of the insurgency spreading and threatening broader regional peace, the international community's role in shaping Pakistan's approach to the TTP remains crucial.

Conclusion

The TTP's threats against military-run businesses mark a significant escalation in its long-standing insurgency against the Pakistani state. By targeting the military's economic assets, the TTP aims to weaken the financial foundation of the armed forces and disrupt the civilian support base that sustains military-controlled businesses.

For Pakistan, the challenge of countering the TTP's expanding tactics is compounded by the need to protect its economic interests and maintain stability. As the military prepares to safeguard its commercial assets, the country must also address the broader implications of this new phase in the insurgency.

The international community has a crucial role to play in supporting Pakistan's efforts to combat the TTP's violence and ensure the country's economic and political stability. However, with the TTP's growing focus on economic disruption, Pakistan's response will require not only military action but also strategic reforms to bolster its economy and secure civilian support.

The outcome of this conflict will shape the future of Pakistan's political and economic landscape, with the military's commercial interests at the center of a broader struggle for power and influence in the region.



India on Edge: Trump's Unpredictable China Policy and Its Implications

By Romana Afsheen

In recent weeks, the geopolitical landscape of Asia has been reshaped by the renewed tensions between India and China, compounded by the uncertain approach of the United States towards both of these giants. The simmering disputes over territorial claims, particularly in the Ladakh region, have once again thrust India-China relations into the global spotlight. The ongoing issues underscore a complex web of regional rivalries and shifting alliances, exacerbated by the transition in US leadership.

As China announced the creation of new counties last week, it not only drew the ire of India but reignited the debate over the contested borders between the two nations. These new counties, according to Chinese officials, encompass areas that India claims as part of Ladakh—a region administered by New Delhi under its federal jurisdiction. The announcement from Beijing, which essentially redraws the map and asserts Chinese authority over these territories, was met with swift condemnation from India. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India, in its official statement, declared that it had “never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation” of the territory in question. The spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, emphasized that such actions by China would not alter India's stance or grant legitimacy to Beijing's territorial claims.

This fresh diplomatic spat between the two nuclear-armed neighbors underscores the volatility of the fragile *détente* that had been established along their contested border just a few months earlier. The *détente* followed a tense four-year-long standoff between Indian and Chinese forces in Ladakh, which came to a halt with a withdrawal of troops from both sides. However, while the troops may have pulled back, the question of what will happen to the land, which India previously controlled but which China has allegedly encroached upon since 2020, remains unresolved. These unresolved issues continue to simmer beneath the surface, threatening to escalate again at any moment.



The US Factor: Trump's Role in Heightening Tensions

As the India-China situation plays out, another layer of complexity has been added by the incoming US president, Donald Trump. Known for his confrontational stance towards China during his first term in office, Trump's approach to foreign policy—particularly his economic and trade policies—has created significant anxiety among many global powers, including India. The US president's threats to impose 100 percent tariffs on imports from China, coupled with his admiration for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have put India in a precarious position.

During his initial campaign, Trump made headlines with his combative rhetoric towards China, labeling it as a trade adversary and vowing to impose severe tariffs to curb its economic rise. However, as the date of his second inauguration—January 20—approaches, there has been an apparent softening in his stance towards China, a shift that is being closely monitored by India's strategic community.

In particular, Trump's relationship with billionaire Elon Musk, an ally who has strong business interests in China, has fueled speculation that the incoming administration may pursue a more conciliatory approach towards Beijing. This potential shift in US-China relations is causing considerable unease in India, which has closely aligned itself with the US in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly as part of the Quad grouping (US, India, Japan, and Australia) that seeks to counter China's growing influence.

India's concerns were compounded by Trump's decision to extend an invitation to Chinese President Xi Jinping for his inauguration, a move that did not include a similar invitation to Modi. This diplomatic slight, when juxtaposed with Trump's previous warm relationship with Modi—highlighted by their joint rallies in Houston and Ahmedabad in 2019 and 2020—has raised questions in New Delhi about the direction of US-India relations under Trump's second term.

The growing uncertainty surrounding US-China relations, particularly in light of

Trump's potential shift in strategy, has put India in a difficult position. Analysts warn that the Trump administration's policy on China could take two distinct paths, both of which could have negative implications for India.

On one hand, Trump may continue his hawkish approach towards China, maintaining tariffs and economic sanctions that would harm Beijing's global economic standing. On the other hand, there is a possibility that Trump could seek a "grand bargain" with China—an arrangement aimed at solidifying his reputation as a master dealmaker. Such a deal would likely involve significant compromises with China, potentially leaving India sidelined in the process.

As Christopher Clary, a political science professor at the University of Albany and fellow at the Stimson Center, explains, "There are twin dangers for India in the second [Trump] term. Trump and his team might be more hawkish than New Delhi's preferences, especially on trade and investment flows that compel India to make choices it would not like to make. Alternatively, it [Trump's team] may try to make a grand bargain with China to burnish his credentials as the ultimate deal maker. It would leave India in the lurch."

India's Strategic Calculus: Navigating the Uncertainty

India's response to the shifting US-China dynamics and the ongoing border dispute with China has been characterized by caution and pragmatism. While India has steadfastly maintained its position on the border issue, it has also signaled its desire to keep its relationship with the US strong, recognizing the importance of Washington's strategic support in counterbalancing China's influence in the region.

However, India is aware that the US's increasingly ambiguous position on China could create dilemmas for New Delhi. India has long been wary of becoming too entangled in US-China rivalries, preferring to retain the flexibility to engage with both powers on its own terms. For instance,

India has actively courted Chinese investment in recent years, despite the ongoing geopolitical tensions. After the deadly Galwan Valley clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in 2020, India took decisive actions to curtail Chinese influence, such as banning Chinese apps like TikTok and imposing restrictions on Chinese investments. However, as the global economic landscape shifts, there have been indications that India may be open to re-engaging with Chinese investments, particularly as the Indian economy seeks to recover from the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amitabh Mathur, a former special secretary at the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external intelligence agency, highlights the complexities of India's position in this evolving geopolitical environment. He suggests that the US has successfully positioned itself as a dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region, partly due to its strengthened ties with India. Yet, Trump's second term presents both opportunities and risks for India, particularly given the influence of pro-business figures like Elon Musk, whose interests in China could sway US foreign policy decisions.

While many experts expect India-US relations to remain strong, there are concerns about how Trump's policies—particularly towards trade and China—will impact India. Analysts like Anil Trigunayat, a retired Indian diplomat, point out that the presence of business leaders such as Musk in Trump's administration could lead to a more tempered approach towards China, which may not align with India's interests. "I think the US pivot towards India is unlikely to change in the broader Indo-Pacific context—while he will try to have a better deal with China," Trigunayat says.

Navigating the Quad and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Amid this uncertainty, India is trying to navigate its position within various regional frameworks. The Quad, a strategic alliance comprising the US, Japan,

Australia, and India, has been central to India's efforts to counterbalance China's rise in the Indo-Pacific. Modi is expected to host a summit of Quad leaders in 2025, with hopes that Trump will attend the meeting in India. This summit will be an opportunity for India to strengthen its strategic ties with the US and its allies in the region.

At the same time, India is maintaining its diplomatic engagement with China, recognizing that a complete estrangement from Beijing could have detrimental economic consequences. This year, China will host the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a regional bloc that includes both India and China. Modi's participation in this summit, which will focus on economic and security issues, will be a delicate balancing act for India. While New Delhi remains committed to its position on the border dispute, it cannot afford to completely alienate China, given the importance of their bilateral trade and economic ties.

India's Strategic Dilemma

The evolving geopolitical dynamics involving India, China, and the United States underscore the challenges facing India in navigating its foreign policy amidst shifting global power structures. The border dispute with China remains a sensitive and unresolved issue, one that continues to strain India-China relations. Meanwhile, the uncertain policies of the incoming US administration under Donald Trump add another layer of complexity to India's strategic calculations.

India's challenge will be to maintain its strategic autonomy while balancing its relationships with both China and the US. The coming years will likely see India engaging in delicate diplomacy to manage its interests in this increasingly polarized and complex geopolitical environment. For India, the task is clear: navigate the twin dangers of an adversarial US-China relationship and emerge as a dominant power in the Indo-Pacific region, all while safeguarding its territorial integrity and economic interests.

A Turning Point for Canada: Trudeau's Resignation Signals Political Shift



By Hina Kashif

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has announced his resignation as leader of the ruling Liberal Party. During a press conference in Ottawa on Monday, the 53-year-old confirmed his decision to step down, stating, "I intend to resign as party leader and as prime minister after the party selects its new leader." He explained that he believes Canada deserves a genuine choice in the upcoming election, and with the internal battles he's faced within his party, he no longer feels he can be the best leader for the country moving forward. Trudeau will continue to serve as prime minister in a caretaker role until a new leader is selected.

Trudeau also disclosed that Canada's parliament would be suspended until March 24 to allow for the leadership transition. He explained that Parliament has been stalled for months, after what became the longest session of a minority government in Canadian history. "This morning, I advised the Governor General that we need a new session of Parliament. She has granted this request, and the House will now be prorogued until March 24," he said. Looking back at his time in office, Trudeau admitted that one of his regrets was his

failure to reform Canada's electoral system. He expressed a wish that Canadians could vote for a second or third choice on the same ballot but acknowledged that such a change could not happen without the support of other parties.

Trudeau has faced increasing pressure to resign, particularly after a drop in public opinion and growing dissatisfaction within his party. The calls for his resignation became more intense after Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland stepped down in December, following disagreements over policies, including how to handle potential U.S. tariffs under Donald Trump's administration. With an election set to take place by late October, and the Liberal Party trailing the opposition Conservatives in the polls, Trudeau's resignation will allow the party to appoint an interim leader and prepare for a leadership convention.

Key Points from Trudeau's Speech:

- "I'm a fighter. Every bone in my body has always told me to fight because I care deeply about Canadians."
- Despite his efforts, Parliament has been paralyzed for months, and Trudeau explained that he advised the Governor-General to call a new session, which has been granted, with the House now prorogued until March 24.
- "I intend to resign as party leader and prime minister after the party selects its next leader through a competitive nationwide process."
- He emphasized that Canada needs a real choice in the next election, and internal battles within the Liberal Party made him feel he could no longer be the best option.
- He sees this moment as an opportunity for a "reset" to allow Canadians a fresh start in Parliament to better navigate domestic and international challenges.

On Regrets:

- Trudeau wished that Canada could have changed its electoral system to allow voters to select a second or third choice on the ballot. However, he recognized that such a change could

- not happen unilaterally and required support from other parties.

On Opposition Leader Pierre Poilievre:

- Trudeau criticized Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre's vision for Canada, specifically opposing Poilievre's stance on climate change. "Stopping the fight against climate change doesn't make sense. We need an ambitious, optimistic view of the future, and Pierre Poilievre isn't offering that," Trudeau said.

Reactions from Opposition Leaders:

- Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), responded, "The problem is not just Justin Trudeau. It's every minister who's been calling the shots, every Liberal MP who looked down on Canadians concerned about high costs or failing healthcare. The Liberals don't deserve another chance, no matter who leads them."
- Pierre Poilievre, leader of the Conservative Party, remarked: "Nothing has changed. Every Liberal MP and leadership contender supported EVERYTHING Trudeau did for nine years. Now they want to trick voters by swapping in a new Liberal face, continuing the same policies that have failed Canadians."

Trudeau's resignation sets the stage for a leadership transition within the Liberal Party and provides the opportunity for a new prime minister to lead the country into the upcoming election. His announcement also highlighted his frustrations with the current state of Canadian politics, particularly the challenges within Parliament and the failure to reform Canada's electoral system.

SERIES OF CRISES

Justin Trudeau, leader of the Liberal Party for 11 years and prime minister for nine, resigned amid a growing series of crises. His leadership was increasingly challenged by threats from Donald Trump's administration, key allies resigning, and poor polling results. Trudeau's decision to step down could be interpreted as him choosing to leave before being pushed, with a general election set for later this year which he was widely expected to lose.

Trudeau first brought the Liberal Party to power in 2015, promising a hopeful and progressive vision for Canada, which he called "sunny ways." He focused on issues like fighting climate change and addressing the wrongs committed against Indigenous peoples. However, as time passed, his administration became bogged down by economic discontent. Rising costs of living became a major issue, culminating in a viral confrontation with a steelworker who criticized Trudeau for not doing enough to address the issue. "You're not doing

anything for us, Justin," the worker remarked a sentiment that seemed to echo the frustrations of many Canadians.

The situation worsened when Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland unexpectedly resigned in 2023. Her resignation, hours before she was scheduled to deliver a major fiscal update, included a scathing letter in which she criticized Trudeau's economic policies. She condemned political gimmicks like a temporary sales tax holiday and \$175 rebates, which she saw as pre-election handouts that came at a time when Canada was potentially facing severe tariffs under Donald Trump's incoming administration. Trump, who had been vocal in his disdain for Trudeau, had promised to impose a 25% tariff on all Canadian goods entering the U.S.

What's Next

With Trudeau's resignation, the Liberal Party is now in the process of selecting a new leader. The national executive of the party, which oversees leadership issues, is expected to meet soon. Parliament has been suspended to allow time for this transition. Several potential candidates to replace Trudeau have emerged, including former Bank of Canada and Bank of England Governor Mark Carney, Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, and Chrystia Freeland, though she has expressed mixed feelings about her future role.

The hope is that a new leader will invigo-





rate the party ahead of the election, set for October 20 at the latest. Recent polling shows the Liberals trailing the opposition Conservative Party, led by Pierre Poilievre, by more than 20%.

Trudeau had been in power for three terms, the most recent being in 2021 when he lost his majority in Parliament but remained in office. Since then, Poilievre's Conservative Party has gained significant ground. Trudeau himself criticized Poilievre's political vision, arguing that it was not the right path for Canada. He opposed Poilievre's views on climate change, diversity, and the media, describing them as regressive and divisive.

Reactions of other leaders on Trudeau's resignation

President-elect Donald Trump, who has had a strained relationship with Trudeau, took to social media to suggest that Canada and the U.S. should merge. He claimed many Canadians would support becoming the 51st state, believing it would resolve trade issues and national security concerns. His comments drew ridicule from many, but they underscored the pressure Trudeau faced from the U.S. under Trump's leadership.

Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservative Party, seized on Trudeau's resignation to offer his vision for Canada's future. In a

video posted on X, he pledged to "take back control of Canada" by addressing issues like immigration, spending, and crime. Poilievre's rhetoric continues to resonate with conservative voters, many of whom share frustrations with the Trudeau administration.

Freeland, a potential successor to Trudeau, acknowledged the challenges that led to his resignation but expressed gratitude for his years of service. "I thank Justin Trudeau for his years of service to Canada and Canadians," she wrote on X. She had previously mentioned that she and Trudeau were at odds over the direction Canada should take, a sentiment she reiterated after his departure.

In his resignation speech, Trudeau also reflected on his relationship with Freeland, noting that he had hoped she would continue as deputy prime minister but respected her decision to move on. However, he did not elaborate on their private discussions.

Trudeau's resignation comes after years of political strain, both internally within his party and externally from growing public dissatisfaction. While his legacy includes some key progressive victories, his final years in office were overshadowed by economic concerns and internal divisions. As the Liberal Party now faces a critical moment, the selection of a new leader will determine its ability to mount a successful challenge against the Conservatives in the upcoming election.

Trudeau's reaction to Donald Trump statement

Outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has strongly rejected President-elect Donald Trump's suggestion that Canada should become part of the United States.

In a post on X, Trudeau responded, "There isn't a snowball's chance in hell that Canada would become part of the United States. Workers and communities in both our countries benefit from being each other's biggest trading and security partner." His comments followed a press conference where Trump claimed he would not use military force to make Canada the "51st state," but would instead apply "economic force."

Trump argued that the U.S. has spent "hundreds of billions" of dollars protecting Canada, despite running a trade deficit with the country. This isn't the first time Trump has floated the idea of Canada becoming the "51st state," often referring to Trudeau as the "governor" of Canada.

The president-elect has also suggested he will impose tariffs on Canadian imports.

Trudeau, who announced on Monday that he will step down as leader of the Liberal Party and as prime minister after a successor is chosen, is expected to remain in office until then.

A Tumultuous 2024: The Strain on Putin's Regime



By Romana Afsheen

The year 2024 was one of profound turbulence for Russia, as Vladimir Putin faced mounting domestic and international challenges. These trials tested the resilience of his rule and exposed cracks in the Kremlin's once-unshakable grip on power. The year saw Putin navigating a landscape rife with complications from the continuing conflict in Ukraine to political unrest, economic difficulties, and foreign policy setbacks. As the 72-year-old president marked 25 years since his rise to power following Boris Yeltsin's unexpected resignation, his control over Russia appeared more fragile than ever. Despite maintaining authority through suppression and strategic maneuvers, the events of 2024 revealed vulnerabilities that threaten to reshape Russia's future.

The Political Landscape: A Nation Under Strain

The Presidential Election: A Pyrrhic Victory

In March 2024, Vladimir Putin was re-elected to a fifth term as Russia's president. However, this victory, which officially saw him secure 87% of the vote,

was shrouded in controversy. Independent observers reported widespread electoral fraud, including the creation of more than 20 million "anomalous" votes. While the Kremlin heralded the result as a testament to Putin's overwhelming support, the truth was far more complicated. The election was marred by the tragic and suspicious death of Alexei Navalny, Putin's most vocal critic, who passed away in a prison camp just weeks before the vote. Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, publicly accused Putin of being responsible for her husband's death, fueling mass protests and silent demonstrations at voting stations across the country.

Despite these challenges, Putin's victory ensured his dominance over Russia for another six years. Yet, the legitimacy of this win was undermined by the very events surrounding it. The death of Navalny, the increase in state-sponsored repression, and the ever-growing fear of dissent among ordinary Russians painted a picture of a leader more reliant on control than true popular support. The elections symbolized a regime that, despite its apparent strength, was facing increasing signs of disillusionment.

Navalny's Death and the Fallout

The death of Alexei Navalny was a pivotal moment in Russian politics in 2024. Navalny, who had been a thorn in the Kremlin's side for years, had been imprisoned under dubious circumstances in 2021 after surviving an assassination attempt that many believed was orchestrated by Putin's regime. His death while in prison was seen as the Kremlin's final act of silencing a major opposition figure. The anger that followed his death sparked a wave of protests, albeit small-scale and largely suppressed by the authorities.

Protests were not limited to Navalny's supporters. The families of soldiers mobilized for the war in Ukraine began to openly demand the return of their loved ones from the front lines, leading to further unrest. In response, the Russian government escalated its crackdown, labeling some of the protestors as "foreign agents," an accusation that became increasingly weaponized against anyone deemed to be a threat to the regime.

This surge in internal dissent showed that Putin's control was not as absolute as it

once appeared. The dissatisfaction simmering within traditional pro-Kremlin factions signaled a deepening fracture in Russian society, which could have lasting consequences for the stability of Putin's rule.

Violence and Terror: The Crocus City Hall Attack

The year was also marked by a shocking act of violence in Moscow. In the days following Putin's re-election, gunmen opened fire at a rock concert held outside Moscow at Crocus City Hall. The attack, claimed by the Islamic State, resulted in 145 deaths and hundreds of injuries, making it the deadliest terrorist attack in Russia in two decades. The event stunned the nation and exposed vulnerabilities in the country's internal security infrastructure.

For Putin, the attack represented a failure in his longstanding claims of maintaining a secure Russia. It not only highlighted the growing threat from extremist factions but also raised questions about the efficacy of the Kremlin's counterterrorism strategies. The tragedy served as a stark reminder of the complexities facing Putin's government and the potential for unrest that lay beneath the surface of Russian society.

Repression and Control: The Kremlin's Efforts to Silence Dissent

In response to the mounting discontent and growing external pressures, the Kremlin intensified its crackdown on dissent in 2024. One of the most significant actions taken by the government was the widespread banning of independent communication platforms. Apps such as Signal, Discord, and Viber were blocked, and threats loomed over popular services like WhatsApp and VPNs. In December, Russia effectively severed access to YouTube, isolating its citizens from uncensored news and alternative perspectives.

This assault on free speech was not just limited to digital platforms. The government targeted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and independent media outlets, labeling them as foreign agents or tools of external interference. The Kremlin's heavy-handed approach was designed

to stifle criticism and maintain an iron grip on public discourse. However, these measures often backfired, driving more Russians to seek out underground channels of communication and amplifying the sense of alienation from the state.

The growing isolation of Russian society from the broader world, compounded by the loss of access to external sources of information, only deepened the cracks within Putin's regime. As the government increased its control over every aspect of Russian life, the question arose: could this be the beginning of the end for Putin's rule?

Regional Strife: Protests and Unrest Across Russia

While Moscow was the focal point of political tension, regional unrest also flared up throughout Russia in 2024. In the North

a growing divide between the capital and the regions.

Another key flashpoint was in the Kursk region, where foreign forces occupied Russian territory for the first time since World War II. As Ukrainian forces made significant inroads into Russia's western territories, displaced residents in Kursk expressed frustration over the government's inability to secure their homes or provide adequate support. This growing disillusionment with the government's handling of the war in Ukraine signaled a deeper crisis in Putin's domestic legitimacy.

Foreign Policy: The Decline of Russia's Global Ambitions

Russia's foreign policy in 2024 was dominated by its ongoing involvement in



Caucasus republic of Dagestan, anti-Israeli riots broke out, fueled by long-standing ethnic and religious tensions. These protests led to deadly attacks on Orthodox churches and synagogues, further exacerbating ethnic strife in the region.

Meanwhile, in Bashkortostan, mass protests erupted in response to the jailing of an activist. The Russian government responded with brute force, quelling the protests through a heavy military presence and arrests of key organizers. These incidents showcased the volatility of Russia's regional politics, where discontent was bubbling just beneath the surface. Local leaders and citizens alike began to question the effectiveness of Moscow's centralized control, pointing to

the war in Ukraine. However, this conflict had far-reaching implications for Russia's international standing. A significant blow came in the form of the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, a country that had long been a critical ally of Moscow. Despite years of heavy investment and military support, Assad's government was toppled, casting doubt on Russia's ability to maintain its regional influence.

This setback in Syria left Russia vulnerable, particularly in the Middle East, where its military presence in Tartus and Khmeimim — two vital bases — was now at risk. For Putin, the loss of Syria represented not only a diplomatic failure but also a strategic one. These bases were integral to Russia's ability to project power in the region and serve as

logistical hubs for its operations in Africa, including support for the Wagner Group, a private military contractor linked to the Kremlin.

Despite these setbacks, Putin pinned his hopes on a potential reset with the United States following the election of Donald Trump as President-elect. Russia's leadership hoped that Trump's foreign policy approach would be more favorable to Russian interests, especially regarding the war in Ukraine. However, Trump's unpredictability posed a significant risk to Putin's strategy.

Exiled former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov warned that Putin's reliance on Trump could backfire. "Trump's impulsiveness might lead to increased U.S. support for Ukraine instead of the de-escalation Putin seeks," Kasyanov cautioned. If this scenario materialized, it could result in even more escalation, further complicating Putin's ability to resolve the conflict on favorable terms.

Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine resulted in a deepening diplomatic isolation. Western sanctions remained in place, and new measures from the European Union and the United States only added to the economic pressure. The ruble remained volatile, and the government's reserves were severely constrained due to

frozen assets. As a result, Russia's global influence continued to wane, and its capacity to assert itself on the international stage was increasingly limited.

The prospect of a prolonged conflict, combined with the rising cost of sanctions and the loss of strategic allies, left Putin in a precarious position. His hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough with the West, particularly under Trump, seemed increasingly remote as the year drew to a close.

The Economic Strain: War at a Cost

The war in Ukraine continued to drain Russia's resources, both in terms of human capital and financial assets. While the country's GDP growth was projected to be 4% in 2024, analysts expected this to slow to under 1.5% in 2025. The war's toll on Russia's manufacturing and agricultural sectors was becoming increasingly apparent, as military expenditures took precedence over domestic development.

The country also faced a persistent labor shortage, exacerbated by the increasing number of casualties in Ukraine and a growing exodus of young, educated Russians seeking work abroad. This brain drain — which had been a steady trend since the annexation of Crimea — was beginning to show its effects, weakening

the country's economic potential and innovation capacity.

Putin's Final Act: Will 2024 Be His Last?

By the end of 2024, Russia found itself at a crossroads. The combination of internal unrest, foreign policy failures, economic strain, and international isolation created an environment where the stability of Putin's regime was under serious scrutiny. While his ability to cling to power remained unquestioned for now, the cracks in his authority were becoming increasingly visible.

Putin's tenure has been marked by strategic maneuvering, political suppression, and foreign policy adventurism. However, the events of 2024 showed that even the strongest regimes can falter when faced with mounting pressure from multiple fronts. As Russia enters a new year, it is unclear whether Putin will be able to navigate the challenges ahead or if his reign will ultimately crumble under the weight of the crises he faces.

The future of Russia under Vladimir Putin remains uncertain. While he may still have the support of key elites and a segment of the population, the year 2024 revealed that his rule is no longer as unassailable as it once seemed.



Is Russia-Ukraine ceasefire possible in 2025?

Russia is dead set against Ukraine joining NATO: One of the demands Moscow put forward as a way to avert the full-scale invasion was a binding assurance that Kyiv would never become a member. Analysts say the Kremlin is also almost certain to bristle at any arrangement it can cast as the virtual equivalent of membership in the Western military alliance.

By Harry Javed

Once Russia's initial push to subjugate Ukraine failed in the first weeks of its full-scale invasion, a widespread view prevailed for two years or more: There's no end in sight.

That has changed in recent months for several reasons, with factors ranging from the situation on the battlefield and shifts in public opinion to the election of former U.S. President Donald Trump, who returns to the White House on January 20 and has repeatedly said he would put paid to the biggest armed conflict in Europe since World War II within a day or two.

So, will Russia's war against Ukraine end in 2025?

If an end means a durable peace deal, the answer is no, many analysts say – in part because Russian President Vladimir Putin doesn't want it, regardless of what he claims, unless it leaves Moscow with a degree of dominance over Ukraine that is unacceptable to Kyiv and its backers abroad.

OPEC+ May Be Facing Long-Term Production Cuts

Experts say Putin wants Russia to pose a persistent threat to Ukraine and a challenge to the West, which he casts as the aggressor in a civilizational confrontation.

Ukrainians, meanwhile, don't want a peace deal if it means formally handing territory to Russia and giving up hope of holding Russia to account for its crimes against the country and its people.

"I think we're very, very far from an end to the war," said Nigel Gould-Davies, senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

A push for a cease-fire is almost a given, though, in light of Trump's promises to end the war quickly, and negotiations seem



more likely than they have since a series of discussions petered out a few months after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

"The smart money right now is that [Trump] can probably get the Russians and the Ukrainians to talk to both him and each other," Olga Oliker, program director for Europe and Central Asia at the Crisis Group, told RFE/RL.

"I think that...what we will likely be looking at is some de facto, at least, if not a de jure cease-fire with some degree of negotiation, tacit or explicit, over the course of 2025," Sam Greene, professor at the King's Russia Institute at King's College London and director of democratic resilience at the Center for European Policy Analysis, told said.

Land And Security

There are plenty of pitfalls that could stem from a cease-fire, including the risk that Russia could use it as a chance to regroup and attack again unless effective deterrents and protections for Ukraine are in place. There are also plenty of obstacles to any deal, some of them stemming from

seemingly irreconcilable positions on crucial aspects of the conflict.

One of them is territory. A cease-fire agreement seems more likely now than it has in the past in part because of signs that Ukraine, which Oliker said is "tired and exhausted and on the back foot" amid slow and enormously costly but persistent Russian battlefield gains, may be prepared for a deal that would leave much of the land Moscow's forces now occupy under de-facto Russian control on a temporary and unofficial basis.

But that might not be enough for Putin. He and other Russian officials have said that recognition of four mainland Ukraine provinces in their entirety as Russian -- including large portions that Ukraine controls -- is not negotiable, a position that is unacceptable for Kyiv.

An even bigger obstacle is the need for serious, effective security guarantees for Ukraine.

Russia is dead set against Ukraine joining NATO: One of the demands Moscow put forward as a way to avert the full-scale invasion was a binding assurance that Kyiv

would never become a member. Analysts say the Kremlin is also almost certain to bristle at any arrangement it can cast as the virtual equivalent of membership in the Western military alliance.

If Kyiv's Western backers "tried to tiptoe around this, to construct something that had the content but not the form of a guarantee, Putin would make clear that would not be acceptable to him, Gould-Davies said.

"It's very, very hard to see what that would look like," he said of a security assurance for Ukraine that would suit both sides.

'His Theory Of Victory'

A major focus of discussion in recent weeks has been the prospect of sending Western troops into Ukraine in the event of a cease-fire. But there are disagreements about this in Europe, and Russia would not be happy with it.

"The Kremlin will not want to see Western troops, NATO troops, in particular, along that line of control of policing a cease-fire," Greene said, because "Russia will want to maintain the power of initiative. It will want to be the one controlling the dial when it comes to escalation; it will want to be able to keep everybody else, including the Ukrainians in the West, off balance."

"The question is, will [Kyiv and the West] be able to force Moscow into a position where it doesn't have a choice but to accept that kind of an arrangement?" he said.

With Russia advancing on the battlefield, its economy apparently far from collapse despite warning signs, and uncertainty about the future of Western support for Ukraine, that prospect seems distant for the time being.

"At this point, [Putin] believes that his theory of victory is proving itself, that Russia is just in the long term big enough and tough enough to impose costs and incur costs against the smaller adversary, Ukraine, grind it down militarily, and outlast the West politically," Gould-Davies said.

"The thing that could change that and force Putin to take a different view of the future would be if the Trump administration put real pressure, significant major pressure on

Putin by threatening costs of continuing the war that would lead Putin to believe that his own regime could be jeopardized," he said.

Beyond suggesting he would use levels of aid to Ukraine as levers of influence over both Kyiv and Moscow, Trump has said little about how he hopes to end the war.

While he waits for Trump's term to begin, Putin seems to be playing a double game, as he often does, sending contradictory messages in almost the same breath: – casting Russia as constructive and prepared for concessions but at the same throwing up barriers to any agreement that might be acceptable to Kyiv and the West.

Case in point: At a question-and-answer session live on state TV, Putin asserted that Russia is ready for compromise on Ukraine.

'Built Around The War'

For one thing, Putin portrayed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy as an illegitimate leader with whom he would not sign a deal. For another, he once again indicated that the so-called Istanbul Communique, a framework agreement floated shortly before talks between Moscow and Kyiv broke down months into the full-scale invasion, must serve as a basis for any negotiations.

"What Putin is saying though is that the terms of that deal, which envisaged an essentially neutered Ukraine — not just barred from joining NATO, but also demilitarized, and thus a very, very easy target for Russia in the future...has to essentially be at the center of any future peace deal," Russia analyst Mark Galeotti said.

"He's trying to make this process as awkward as possible while making it sound as if he's as flexible as possible," Galeotti said.

Greene suggested Russia might be prepared to "turn down the violence" and consider a cease-fire, but only if Putin is confident that Moscow could continue to threaten Ukraine and keep its standoff with the West, which he has made a defining feature of his rule, simmering along.

"The Russian economy right now is only functioning because of the war. The

Russian political system is now built around the war. It excuses and explains the level of centralization, the level of repression, the level of ideological control, which are going to be things that the Kremlin will be very loathe, if able at all, to countenance pivoting away from," he added. "Even if Russia were to pivot towards a cease-fire, I think it would find itself seeking to maintain the level of confrontation that it currently has with Ukraine, but [also] with the West more broadly."

In propaganda terms, Greene said, "Putin and the Kremlin, in general, has given itself a significant amount of rhetorical wiggle room. They can define victory, even temporary victory, partial victory, in some different ways," he said.

'An Enormous Mistake'

Oliker also indicated that Russia's stated positions on territory and other issues don't necessarily mean a deal would be out of reach if talks take place.

"There is an advantage of getting talks started. And once you've gotten them started, people might be willing to make concessions that they don't say they're willing to make when they go in," she said. "You always go in with your maximal position, and you'd be a fool not to."

An agreement may not come to pass in 2025. But if talks are held and a deal is done, analysts warn, Western nations must be careful to avoid congratulating themselves and considering the matter closed.

"Europe's response to any cease-fire agreement will be critically important -- both for Ukraine and for themselves," Ruth Deyermond, senior lecturer in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, said in written comments to RFE/RL.

"With many countries dealing with political turmoil at home (often stoked by Russia), they may be tempted to treat this as an end to the conflict and an opportunity to reset relations with Russia. That would be an enormous mistake," she wrote. "Russia will continue to pose the most serious and immediate conventional and non-conventional threat to European security."

Born in war, dying in the cold crimes against humanity/crimes against Kids



By Hina Kashif

Hypothermia is Killing Gaza's Children

As the conflict in Gaza continues, a growing threat to the lives of its residents—especially children—has emerged in the form of hypothermia. With limited access to winter aid and medical supplies due to ongoing Israeli restrictions, many in Gaza, particularly infants, are facing severe cold without adequate protection, resulting in fatal consequences.

The war on Gaza has already claimed the lives of over 45,500 people, the majority of them women and children. The brutal cold, compounded by hunger, makes young children especially vulnerable, as their bodies generate less heat than adults, putting them at higher risk of hypothermia.

What is Hypothermia?

Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition that occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can generate it. The body normally maintains a core temperature of around 37°C (98.6°F) through processes like digestion and muscle movement. This temperature range—between 36.1°C (97°F)

and 37.2°C (99°F)—is vital for the proper function of organs such as the heart and brain.

When the body can no longer keep up with heat loss and its internal temperature falls too low, hypothermia sets in.

At What Temperature Does Hypothermia Develop?

Hypothermia can occur even in temperatures above freezing, especially when the body is exposed to wet conditions, wind, or cold water. Medically, hypothermia is defined as a drop in body temperature below 35°C (95°F), about 2°C lower than normal.

The severity of hypothermia depends on how far the core temperature falls:

- Mild Hypothermia: 32–35°C (89.6–95°F)
- Moderate Hypothermia: 28–32°C (82.4–89.6°F)
- Severe Hypothermia: Below 28°C (82.4°F)

Signs and Symptoms of Hypothermia

The body's response to cold begins as it loses heat through the skin. Wind or water accelerates this process, stripping away warmth around the body. To conserve heat, blood vessels near the skin constrict, reducing blood flow to extremities. As a result, hands and feet become numb, and the body starts to shiver to generate more heat. Breathing and heart rate also increase.

At this stage, confusion, clumsiness, and fatigue may occur as the cold begins to affect the brain and muscles.

As cold exposure continues, the body's attempts to generate heat become ineffective, and moderate hypothermia sets in. Shivering ceases as the muscles run out of energy, and the body's metabolism slows, further reducing heat production. The heart rate and breathing slow, and the situation becomes more dire.

If the temperature drops significantly, the brain begins to lose its ability to function, leading to unconsciousness. The cold can also cause irregular heart rhythms, leading

to cardiac arrest. Without immediate intervention, the body's vital functions can fail, resulting in death.

Can Hypothermia Be Stopped?

Yes, hypothermia can be reversed if caught early. For mild to moderate hypothermia, individuals should be moved to a warm, dry place, wet clothing should be removed, and they should be covered with blankets. Warm, non-alcoholic beverages can help if the person is conscious.

However, severe hypothermia requires immediate medical attention, including methods such as heated blankets or intravenous fluids to warm the body actively.



In Gaza, where medical resources are scarce, preventing and treating hypothermia has become an urgent concern, particularly for the most vulnerable, including babies and young children who face the added risk of inadequate nutrition. Hypothermia is just one of the many challenges facing a population that is already suffering from displacement and a lack of basic necessities.

Are Babies More at Risk of Hypothermia?

Yes, infants are at a higher risk of hypothermia because their bodies lose heat much more quickly than adults. This is primarily

due to their physical characteristics. Babies have a larger surface area in proportion to their body mass compared to adults, which makes them more susceptible to heat loss, especially in cold conditions. Furthermore, their small bodies are less efficient at producing heat, putting them at greater risk of becoming dangerously cold.

Additionally, babies may not show clear signs of cold stress, making it harder to detect hypothermia in its early stages.

The risk is further heightened by severe malnutrition. Since the war in Gaza began on October 7, 2023, ongoing restrictions on food and medical supplies have created famine-like conditions, compounding the vulnerability of infants and young children to both malnutrition and hypothermia.

Palestinians Infants are freezing to death but world is sleeping

Israeli forces have displaced almost all of the 2.3 million residents of Gaza, forcing tens of thousands of them into making tents in open-air camps along the rainy, windswept coast.

Seela al-Faseeh, just two weeks old, tragically passed away from hypothermia in southern Gaza. Her father, Mahmoud al-Faseeh, recalled the heartbreaking moment when he found his baby daughter unresponsive and cold, her body stiff and blue. He rushed her to the Nasser Hospital

in Khan Younis, but the doctors confirmed that Seela's heart had stopped beating due to the extreme cold, as there were no underlying health issues or congenital conditions.

Ahmed al-Farra, the director of the pediatric ward, explained that Seela's death was caused by hypothermia, a condition where the body's temperature drops dangerously low, especially affecting babies and children. He shared that such cases have become increasingly common, with at least four babies dying from hypothermia in Gaza over the past week alone. On average, the hospital treats two to three hypothermia cases daily, describing the situation as catastrophic.

The harsh winter in Gaza has made matters worse, as temperatures drop dramatically, especially at night, while displaced families, living in makeshift tents, have little to protect them from the freezing cold. Many children, like Seela, are particularly vulnerable to cold-related injuries like hypothermia and frostbite.

In addition to Seela's tragic death, a nurse named Ahmad al-Zahrani also lost his life due to the severe cold in Gaza. These deaths highlight the grim situation in the region, where many families are left to endure not only the effects of the ongoing war but also the devastating cold without the necessary resources for survival.

A newborn Palestinian baby in Gaza has died from the freezing cold, bringing the death toll from the harsh winter weather to eight, according to the Health Ministry. The baby, 35-day-old Yousef Ahmad Kalloub, succumbed to the extreme cold.

Since the onset of Israel's war on Gaza following a Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, more than 45,800 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed, with over 109,000 others injured. The blockade imposed by Israel has exacerbated the crisis, pushing the entire population to the brink of famine.

A cold wave and torrential rains have further worsened conditions for displaced civilians, who are living in makeshift tents in overcrowded camps.

In November, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu-

hu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Israel also faces a case of genocide at the International Court of Justice for its ongoing military actions in Gaza.

UNICEF Warning

UNICEF has raised alarms about the dire conditions, noting that many children in Gaza are suffering from extreme cold due to a lack of adequate winter supplies, including blankets and warm clothing. The ongoing blockade on humanitarian aid further limits the assistance that can reach the people in need.

The war has led to significant loss of life and destruction of Gaza's infrastructure, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations continue to warn about the disproportionate impact on Gaza's children, especially as the cold continues to worsen, with many still lacking essential winter clothing and shelter.

Gaza's Government Media Office reported that the "bitter cold and frost" sweeping through the region had claimed the lives of seven people, including a healthcare worker. These fatalities occurred in the overcrowded camps, where residents are living in dilapidated tents.

In addition, Gaza's Ministry of Health

confirmed that 27 people had lost their lives in the previous 24 hours, further highlighting the escalating humanitarian crisis in the region.

HOSPITALS UNDER FIRE

Hospitals under fire in parallel, Israel has attacked two hospitals – al-Wafaa and al-Ahli – in Gaza City. The bombing of al-Wafaa on Sunday killed seven people and critically wounded others, according to the Palestinian Civil Defense. A witness at the scene of the al-Wafaa bombing described seeing bodies “ripped to pieces”. The Israeli military said its attack targeted a Hamas “command and control center”, but it provided no evidence to support this assertion. Israeli forces also detained hundreds of Palestinians, including dozens of medical staff from Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza on Friday. Among them was its director, Dr Hussam Abu Safia. The military has not disclosed Abu Safia's whereabouts. However, CNN reported on Monday that he was being kept at the Sde Teiman army base, which is also a detention facility in the Negev desert in southern Israel. It quoted two recently released Palestinian prisoners who had seen him and heard his name being read out. On Monday, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organization, called for Abu Safia's immediate release. Tedros, who last week escaped an Israeli strike on Yemen's main airport

that he said hit meters away from him, said in a post on X that hospitals in Gaza had become “battlegrounds” and the health system was “under severe threat”. “We repeat: stop attacks on hospitals. People in Gaza need access to health care. Humanitarians need access to provide health aid. Ceasefire!” he said. Meanwhile, Israeli media released a video of the moments before Abu Safia was detained by Israeli forces. The footage captured his efforts to move hundreds of patients and medical staff to safety after the Israeli military issued a 15-minute warning to leave the hospital. Reporting from Deir el-Balah, Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum said the military had released the footage in a bid to depict their operations as “incredibly targeted, precise and humane”. “But later on, we have heard from eyewitnesses ... quite the opposite in terms of the humiliation [and] bad treatment that they received at the hands of the Israeli soldiers [and] the brutal beatings that they have witnessed during the military operations,” he added. Since Israel's war began in October 2023, Gaza's residents have endured severe shortages of electricity, drinking water, food and medical services as the vast majority of them have been forced out of their homes and displaced – many repeatedly. The Israeli genocide in Gaza has killed at least 45,541 Palestinians and wounded 108,338. More than 1,100 people were killed in Israel during Hamas-led attacks on October 7, 2023, and dozens were taken captive.



Building Bridges: Advancing Regional Cooperation in South Asia for a Sustainable Future



By Romana Afsheen

In 2024, South Asia witnessed a year marked by political transitions, elections, and social changes that highlighted the diverse dynamics within the region. From political upheavals in Bangladesh to general elections across several countries, much of the domestic spotlight was focused on internal matters. However, amid these shifts, there were significant strides in regional cooperation that may not have always captured headlines, but are crucial for long-term sustainable development. This progress on a regional scale paints a picture of cooperation that is gradual, sometimes slow, but ultimately moving forward with determination.

As the countries of South Asia work together to address shared challenges such as air pollution, climate change, and regional energy needs, their collective efforts demonstrate that regional cooperation is not a sprint but a marathon. In this marathon, progress is not linear; sometimes it's a sprint, at other times a steady walk, and at times, even a pause, but the direction remains forward.

The year 2024 has proven to be pivotal in addressing critical regional issues such as air quality, climate risks, women's

inclusion in economic activities, and energy cooperation. These efforts reflect a growing understanding that many of the region's most pressing challenges cannot be tackled in isolation. Through collaborative efforts, countries are beginning to recognize that shared solutions will yield better, faster results than individual approaches. This article takes a closer look at some of the key highlights from the year 2024, focusing on air quality management, climate cooperation, energy collaboration, gender inclusion, and the role of youth in shaping the future of South Asia.

1. Air Quality Management and Climate Cooperation

One of the most pressing challenges for South Asia in 2024 has been air pollution, which has grown to be a transboundary issue affecting the health and well-being of millions across the region. The Indo-Gangetic Plain and Himalayan Foothills (IGP-HF), encompassing Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, and Pakistan, are home to some of the most polluted cities in the world. Tackling this problem requires collaboration between these nations to reduce emissions, improve air quality, and

mitigate the long-term effects of pollution.

In 2024, there was significant progress on this front. The second Science Policy Dialogue on Air Quality Management, held in Bhutan in June, brought together policymakers, scientists, and development partners from the IGP-HF region to discuss the air pollution problem. The event underscored that air pollution knows no borders and that cooperation across countries is essential. The participants at this meeting reached a consensus on the importance of multi-sectoral and transboundary collaboration to combat this issue effectively.

The agreement emphasized that coordinated actions are not only more effective but also less costly, with estimates suggesting that such collaborative measures could reduce the cost of air pollution management by 45% compared to isolated, ad-hoc interventions. A significant outcome of this dialogue was the setting of an ambitious goal: to reduce annual PM_{2.5} concentrations to less than 35 µg/m³ by 2035. This goal, known as "35 by 35," is now a collective target for the region, one that will require sustained effort and collaboration over the next decade.

This growing consensus on addressing air

quality management and climate risks collectively signals a positive shift in regional cooperation, recognizing that solutions to air pollution and climate change cannot be confined within national borders. Furthermore, the region's ability to come together on these challenges lays the foundation for greater cooperation on other pressing environmental issues, such as plastic pollution.

2. Addressing Marine Plastic Pollution

Plastic pollution has emerged as a significant environmental challenge for South Asia, particularly due to the region's high levels of plastic waste and its proximity to large bodies of water. The shared coastline of South Asia makes marine plastic pollution a regional issue, necessitating coordinated action across borders to reduce plastic waste and promote sustainable practices.

In 2024, momentum built in efforts to address this issue regionally. Countries in South Asia, including Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, have been working to reduce marine plastic pollution through collaborative initiatives. The region is increasingly focusing on innovations that promote alternatives to single-use plastics and improve waste management systems. Regional partnerships and dialogues on plastic waste management have emphasized the need for collective action to curb plastic pollution. The establishment of recycling networks, improvements in waste management infrastructure, and research on alternative materials are all steps in the right direction. The continued push for regional collaboration on plastic pollution is not only crucial for preserving marine ecosystems but also for safeguarding the livelihoods of millions who rely on the oceans for sustenance.

3. Cooperation on Climate Risks: Saving Lives and Livelihoods

The South Asia Hydromet Forum, supported by the World Bank, continued to make significant strides in fostering regional cooperation on climate risks in 2024. This forum facilitates the exchange of meteorological and hydrological data, enhances

forecasting capabilities, and builds consensus on climate-related risks.

One of the most impactful areas of collaboration has been in the field of early warning systems for extreme weather events. For instance, meteorologists in India and the Maldives have provided valuable support to Sri Lanka in improving the accuracy of forecasts related to extreme wave heights. These forecasts have been crucial for informing the country's fishing communities about potential dangers, saving lives and preventing economic losses.



This type of cooperation in early warning systems, data sharing, and technical training has helped improve resilience to climate risks in the region. Strengthened regional cooperation in meteorology and hydrology has enabled better preparedness for extreme weather events, ultimately saving lives and livelihoods, especially in coastal and flood-prone areas. The continued sharing of data and resources promises to bolster the region's ability to adapt to the growing impacts of climate change.

4. Women's Empowerment in Regional Development

One of the most heartening developments in South Asia in 2024 has been the increasing involvement of women in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as infrastructure, construction, and energy. Over the past year, regional initiatives have focused on empowering women and improving their participation in economic activities,

contributing to greater economic growth and regional integration.

In Bangladesh, women like Halima Begum are leading the way in construction and infrastructure development. Halima is one of the 795 women working in the local engineering department involved in the construction and maintenance of the Western regional corridors in Bangladesh. Similarly, in Assam, India, women like Runu Hazarika are breaking gender norms by becoming boat operators and owners in the inland water transport sector.

Efforts are also underway to make traditionally gender-blind sectors more inclusive. The introduction of simple yet effective measures such as childcare facilities on-site, access to separate restrooms, and well-lit spaces have made it easier for women to participate in the workforce. These initiatives are removing barriers that have traditionally hindered women's economic participation.

In addition to these sectoral changes, regional platforms like WePower, a network of women professionals in the energy and power sector, are playing a crucial role in strengthening women's participation and skill development. WePower's cross-border knowledge exchange programs have allowed women in South Asia to build networks, share expertise, and enhance their leadership roles in the energy sector. This year, 101 mid-career South Asian women engineers participated in the SAR100 program, a nine-month training that focused on

upgrading skills and building leadership capabilities in the power sector.

These efforts are not only empowering women but also ensuring that the region's economic growth is more inclusive, creating opportunities for women to contribute to and benefit from regional development.

5. Hydropower and Cross-Border Energy Cooperation

South Asia's energy needs have been growing rapidly, driven by economic growth and population expansion. In response to this growing demand, regional cooperation in the energy sector has become increasingly important. In 2024, South Asia witnessed a historic trilateral energy cooperation agreement, marking a significant milestone in the region's energy landscape.

Power in India to develop 5,000 MW of clean hydropower. This partnership highlights the increasing importance of the private sector in driving the clean energy transition in South Asia. The potential for cross-border electricity markets and renewable energy initiatives is vast, offering solutions to energy scarcity while also contributing to reducing the region's carbon footprint.

The World Bank's analysis suggests that energy demand in South Asia will double by 2050, and the region's emissions could increase by 30%. However, with the right policies and incentives—such as leveraging the private sector, developing cross-border electricity markets, and promoting renewable energy—the region could achieve up to a 40% reduction in emissions by 2050. This would be a significant contribution to global climate goals and a vital step toward sustainable energy development in the region.



In November 2024, Nepal began exporting 40 MW of hydroelectric power to Bangladesh through India's electricity grid. This marked the official opening of energy trade between Nepal and Bangladesh, a significant step toward regional energy integration. The deal has the potential to expand significantly, as both countries seek to meet their growing energy demands with clean, renewable energy sources.

In Bhutan, Druk Green Power Corporation Limited signed an agreement with Tata

6. The Role of Youth in Shaping South Asia's Future

As the largest youth population in the world, South Asia is home to a dynamic and growing demographic of young people who will play a crucial role in shaping the region's future. In 2024, one of the most exciting developments in regional cooperation was the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the South

Asian Economics' Students Meet (SAESM).

SAESM is a vibrant network that brings together undergraduate economics students from across South Asia to share academic research, deepen their understanding of the region, and build lasting connections. The World Bank has been closely associated with supporting SAESM, and the network has grown to include over 1,000 alumni who have benefited from their participation in this initiative.

For many SAESM participants, their engagement in the network has opened doors to jobs, fellowships, and partnerships in regional organizations. The growing involvement of youth in regional dialogues reflects a commitment to building human capital and preparing the next generation of leaders to tackle regional challenges, including climate change, economic inequality, and political instability.

These young individuals, armed with knowledge and a passion for change, are ready to drive the region's development in the coming decades, offering fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to complex challenges.

Conclusion

As 2024 comes to a close, South Asia stands at a crossroads. The progress made in regional cooperation, especially in tackling climate risks, air quality, energy cooperation, gender inclusion, and youth engagement, indicates that South Asia is slowly but surely moving toward a more integrated, collaborative future. While the road ahead is still challenging, the collective actions taken in 2024 lay a solid foundation for the region's future prosperity and sustainability.

The work in South Asia demonstrates that while the region's cooperation may sometimes feel like a slow process, every step taken brings countries closer to realizing a better future for all. And as they continue on this marathon journey, the shared vision of progress and unity will become increasingly important, ensuring that the region's challenges are met with collaborative solutions rather than isolated efforts.

"RAW Accused of Orchestrating Assassinations in Pakistan, Claim Intelligence Sources"

Indian Government Allegedly Ordered Killings in Pakistan, Say Intelligence Officials



By Hina Kashif

According to intelligence officials from both India and Pakistan, the Indian government authorized assassinations in Pakistan as part of a broader strategy to eliminate terrorists living on foreign soil.

Interviews with intelligence operatives and documents provided by Pakistani investigators reveal new insights into how India's foreign intelligence agency, the Research & Analysis Wing (RAW), allegedly began carrying out assassinations abroad following a more assertive approach to national security after 2019. RAW operates directly under the control of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is currently campaigning for a third term in office.

The new revelations add weight to claims that India has pursued a policy of targeting individuals it views as hostile. Although the individuals targeted in these alleged operations are charged with serious terror-related crimes, India has also faced accusations from Washington and Ottawa regarding involvement in the deaths of dissident figures, including a Sikh activist in Canada and a botched assassination attempt on another Sikh in the US last year.

The fresh allegations focus on almost 20 killings since 2020 in Pakistan, carried out by unknown gunmen. While India had previously been unofficially linked to these deaths, this marks the first time that Indian intelligence officials have discussed the alleged operations in Pakistan, and it is the first time detailed documentation has surfaced, reportedly implicating RAW directly in these assassinations.

Further claims suggest that Sikh separatists involved in the Khalistan movement were specifically targeted as part of these foreign operations, both in Pakistan and in the West.

Pakistani investigators contend that these killings were orchestrated by Indian intelligence sleeper cells, primarily based in the United Arab Emirates. The uptick in killings in 2023 is attributed to the increased activity of these sleeper cells, which allegedly paid local criminals or impoverished Pakistanis millions of rupees to carry out the assassinations. In some instances, Indian agents are said to have recruited jihadists to carry out the killings, convincing them they were targeting "infidels."

According to two Indian intelligence officers, the shift in focus to targeting dissidents abroad was triggered by the 2019 Pulwama attack, in which a suicide bomber targeted an Indian military convoy in Kashmir, killing 40 paramilitary personnel. The Pakistan-based group Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for the attack.

At the time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seeking re-election and subsequently won a second term in the aftermath of the attack.

"After Pulwama, the approach changed to target the elements outside the country before they could launch an attack or create any disturbance," one intelligence officer explained. "We couldn't prevent the attacks because their safe havens were in Pakistan, so we had to address the source."

The officer further noted that such operations required approval from the highest levels of the government.

He also revealed that India had drawn inspiration from intelligence agencies like Israel's Mossad and Russia's KGB, which have been linked to extrajudicial killings

abroad. The officer mentioned that the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist and dissident Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi embassy had been cited by RAW officials as an example.

"It was just months after Khashoggi's killing when there was a debate among senior intelligence officials in the prime minister's office about how something could be learned from this case," he recalled. "One senior officer said, 'If the Saudis can do this, why not us?'"

The officer emphasized, "What the Saudis did was very effective. You not only eliminate your enemy but also send a chilling message to others working against you. Every intelligence agency does this. Our country cannot be strong without exerting power over our enemies."



Pakistani intelligence sources claimed India's involvement in up to 20 killings since 2020, citing evidence from investigations into seven cases, including witness testimonies, arrest records, and financial documents. These documents, which The Guardian has seen but could not independently verify, suggest Indian spies were responsible for these targeted assassinations on Pakistani soil. The sources added that the number of such killings spiked in 2023, with at least 15 deaths attributed to Indian involvement, most of which involved shootings by unidentified gunmen at close range.

In response, India's Ministry of External Affairs denied the allegations, calling them

"false and malicious anti-India propaganda." They reiterated a previous denial from India's Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, who had stated that targeted killings in other countries were not part of India's policy.

Regarding the killing of Zahid Akhund, a Pakistani document alleged that RAW operatives paid for information on his whereabouts over several months. Akhund, an alias for Zahoor Mistry, who was involved in the 1984 hijacking of an Air India flight, was allegedly contacted by a RAW handler pretending to be a journalist. The dossier revealed that after confirming his identity, millions of rupees were allegedly paid to Afghan nationals to carry out the assassination in Karachi in March 2022. The gunmen fled to Afghanistan but were later arrested by Pakistani authorities.

Investigations suggested that these killings were organized from the UAE, where RAW allegedly established sleeper cells to oversee various parts of the operations and recruit the killers. Pakistani investigators claimed that millions of rupees were paid to local criminals or impoverished individuals to carry out the murders, with payments often routed through Dubai. Meetings among RAW operatives coordinating the killings were also said to have taken place in Nepal, the Maldives, and Mauritius.

"This policy of Indian agents orchestrating killings in Pakistan has been in development for some time," a Pakistani official stated. "We believe they have been working for around two years to establish these

sleeper cells in the UAE, and after that, the killings began to increase."

In the case of Shahid Latif, a prominent commander of Jaish-e-Mohammed, several attempts were allegedly made on his life. According to documents, the successful assassination in October was carried out by a 20-year-old Pakistani man, who was reportedly recruited by India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) while working in a UAE Amazon warehouse for a modest salary.

Pakistani investigators revealed that the young man was paid 1.5 million Pakistani rupees (£4,000) by an undercover Indian agent to track Latif. Later, he was promised 15 million rupees and a catering business in the UAE if he succeeded in carrying out the assassination. The man shot Latif at a mosque in Sialkot but was arrested soon after, along with his accomplices.

Further investigations revealed that the deaths of Bashir Ahmad Peer, a commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, and Saleem Rehmani, on India's most-wanted list, were also allegedly orchestrated from the UAE. Receipts from Dubai suggested that millions of rupees were paid to the killers involved in these operations. Rehmani's death was initially thought to be the result of a robbery.

Analysts suggest that Pakistan has been hesitant to publicly acknowledge these killings, as many of the targets are individuals tied to terrorist groups that Islamabad has long denied supporting. While public details on these deaths have been limited, Pakistani agencies have conducted investigations and made arrests behind closed doors.

Ajay Sahni, executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management in Delhi, stated that his organization had tracked 20 suspicious deaths in Pakistan since 2020, with two of those claimed by local militant groups. Sahni noted that Pakistan's refusal to investigate or even acknowledge the presence of these individuals makes it impossible to determine the cause of death.

In January, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi publicly accused India of a "sophisticated and sinister" campaign of "extraterritorial and

extrajudicial killings" in Pakistan. However, these claims were met with skepticism due to the longstanding rivalry between the two nations, which have fought four wars and frequently made accusations against each other.

For decades, India has accused Pakistan of supporting militant insurgencies in Indian-administered Kashmir. High-profile attacks on Indian soil, including the 2006 Mumbai train blasts and the 2008 Mumbai bombings, were linked to Pakistan-based groups.

Since 2020, however, analysts and Pakistani officials have described the systematic targeted killings of dissidents on Pakistani soil as a new and unprecedented approach by Indian agents.

The majority of the victims were associated with militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, many with direct links to some of India's deadliest terrorist incidents. Others were seen as operatives facilitating attacks or spreading information from Pakistan.

One Indian intelligence officer explained that the 2019 Pulwama attack, which killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel, made it clear that the handlers of militants in Pakistan were a significant threat. While India had previously focused on preventing attacks in Kashmir, the officer noted, "We could not just wait for another Mumbai or

another attack on Parliament when we knew the planners were still operating in Pakistan."

The Canadian and US governments have also raised concerns about India's involvement in the killings of prominent Sikh activists abroad. In September, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau indicated there were "credible allegations" that Indian agents had orchestrated the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Vancouver. Similarly, the US Department of Justice released an indictment detailing an Indian agent's attempt to recruit a hitman to kill Sikh activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.

A senior Indian intelligence official revealed that, following these allegations, Delhi ordered a suspension of targeted killings in Pakistan. No suspicious deaths have been reported in 2024 so far.

Indian agents had reportedly become focused on diaspora Khalistani activists, especially following the farmers' protests in India in 2020. These activists, particularly in Canada, the US, and the UK, were seen as influential in rallying support for the protests and reviving the Khalistani movement, which seeks an independent Sikh state.

In the UK, Sikh separatists have been issued "threat to life" warnings, as concern grows over the targeting of these activists.

Similarly, Pakistani authorities claimed that Paramjit Singh Panjwar, a prominent Khalistani leader, was murdered in Lahore by Indian agents in May 2023.

Pakistani investigators found that Indian operatives had used social media to recruit Pakistani Islamist radicals to carry out killings of Indian dissidents. These radicals were reportedly misled into believing they were carrying out "sacred killings" of "infidels."

These killings have raised concerns globally about India's aggressive foreign policy under Modi, as well as the potential consequences of extrajudicial killings in violation of international law.

Despite occasional peace talks, tensions between India and Pakistan remain high. Pakistan accuses India of using covert operations as a strategic tool to exert pressure on Islamabad, particularly over issues like Kashmir and counter-terrorism efforts.

These new revelations only exacerbate the already volatile geopolitical landscape, as both nations contend with significant internal challenges. While Pakistan struggles with economic turmoil, India faces growing international criticism over its human rights practices. India's alleged covert assassination campaign adds a dangerous layer of instability to an already fragile region.



Govt-PTI talks _ Look Busy Do Nothing



By Hina Kashif

In the ongoing standoff between the government and the opposition, Imran Khan's sister, Aleema Khan, revealed that the former prime minister had been offered a deal by the authorities regarding his transfer from Adiala jail to his Bani gala residence. Aleema Khan claimed that these offers, relayed through Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, suggested that her brother remain silent in exchange for a move to house arrest. However, she noted that Khan would not consider such a proposal after enduring lengthy detention in jail.

This revelation comes on the heels of both the government and PTI denying any such offers to move the former prime minister from jail just days earlier.

Negotiations Stall Over 'Unmonitored' Access

Despite an official meeting between PTI negotiators and Imran Khan in jail, talks on two major demands— the release of prisoners and the formation of a judicial commission to investigate the crackdown on the party— have not progressed positively. PTI leaders had

been seeking consistent, uninterrupted access to Khan for dialogue, but after several delays, they were granted a meeting on Tuesday.

Following the session, PTI spokesperson Omar Ayub expressed dissatisfaction with the government's refusal to allow unmonitored meetings with Khan, citing concerns over surveillance devices allegedly installed in the meeting room. He criticized the government for undermining the negotiations process.

Interim PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan suggested that tensions between the government and opposition could be alleviated if the issue of submitting written demands was not blown out of proportion. Barrister Salman Akram Raja, representing PTI, reiterated that the party had already shared its two core demands: the release of political prisoners and the establishment of a judicial commission to probe the violence on May 9 and November 26.

PM's law adviser, Barrister Aqeel Malik, responded by warning that PTI's delay tactics could derail the entire negotiation process and worsen the political deadlock.

Imran Khan Takes Legal Action Over Jail Conditions

In a separate development, Imran Khan has filed a petition in court alleging the denial of basic rights during his imprisonment. The petition, submitted to Islamabad's Special Judge Central, accuses the jail administration of inhumane treatment, claiming the government is using unlawful measures to restrict Khan's access to essential facilities and communications.

The legal team highlighted several grievances, including the denial of phone calls to his children, restrictions on medical visits, and the absence of access to newspapers and television. Khan's team also claimed that he was being kept in isolation and subjected to measures intended to sever his ties with the outside world, further arguing that these actions were politically motivated to pressure Khan into abandoning his stance on democracy. The petition calls on the court to direct the jail authorities to restore his rights, including weekly phone calls with his children, access to his personal doctor, and compliance with prison regulations.



Court Delays Bail Applications

Additionally, the Additional Sessions Court of Islamabad postponed the pre-arrest bail hearings for Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, until January 28. The cases, stemming from protests in the capital, are currently under review. Bushra Bibi's legal team requested her exemption from personal attendance, which the court accepted. The next hearing will address all remaining matters, including the participation of the PTI leader via video conference.

PTI's Statements on Imran Khan's 'House Arrest Offer' Contradict Each Other

Amid uncertainty surrounding the much-discussed negotiations between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the government, conflicting statements from PTI leaders regarding the alleged "offer of Imran Khan's house arrest" have complicated the process. A report published, quoted PTI founder Imran Khan's sister, Aleema Khan, as claiming that the offer was made by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. However, other PTI leaders, including Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Sher Afzal Marwat, expressed differing views on the matter.

In an interview on Tuesday after meeting Imran Khan at Adiala Jail, Aleema Khan revealed that her brother had been offered house arrest at his residence in Bani Gala, with the proposal brought forward by Gandapur. She noted that these kinds of deals had been offered to Imran "since the beginning," but no direct contact had been made until now.

"My brother has been in jail for a year and a half. If he wanted to strike a backdoor deal, he would have done so already," Aleema remarked, questioning why the offer of house arrest was being proposed after Imran had been in prison for so long. She further claimed that Imran had been asked to remain silent and refrain from speaking out.

Aleema expressed skepticism about the negotiations, highlighting that Imran Khan had made only two consistent demands:

the formation of a judicial commission to investigate the events of May 9 and the release of political prisoners. She also criticized the authorities for preventing the PTI's negotiating team from meeting with Imran. She added that the repeated calls for the formation of the judicial commission and the release of prisoners had gone unanswered.

Commenting on the transparency of the negotiation process, Aleema pointed out that nothing is hidden from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), suggesting that talks regarding a three-year silence agreement or other terms were being discussed.

However, PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat provided a different perspective, claiming that the proposal for Imran's house arrest came from the establishment and the government, with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi acting as the mediator. Marwat revealed that after rejecting the house arrest offer, another proposal was put forward for Imran's release, either after three weeks or by December 20. He emphasized that the tragic events on November 26 during PTI's "do-or-die" protest in Islamabad prompted the initiation of talks.

Marwat acknowledged that the establishment had occasionally been in contact with PTI, but insisted that no backdoor negotiations had taken place since the November 26 incident. He also suggested that talks might have concluded faster if Mohsin Naqvi had been included in the government's negotiation team, citing Naqvi's flexibility during negotiations.

On the other hand, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan denied any discussions regarding the transfer of Imran Khan to Bani Gala. In a telephonic conversation with Geo News, he stressed that neither the issue of Imran's release, house arrest, or transfer. Gohar clarified that contact with the government had been restored shortly before November 26, but negotiations had not yet started with Naqvi at that time.

Imran Khan, who has been in jail since August of the previous year following his conviction in the Toshakhana case, remains a long-standing demand for his party's release. After months of political tensions, PTI and the coalition government began

talks last month to de-escalate the situation. PTI's initial demands included the release of Imran Khan and other political prisoners, as well as a judicial probe into the events of May 9 and November 26.

During two rounds of talks, PTI's negotiating team emphasized the need for frequent meetings with Imran Khan to finalize their "charter of demands." However, despite PTI's vocal stance on their key demands, the party has not submitted a written charter of demands to the government committee.

At present, the negotiation process is at a standstill, with PTI claiming that they have been denied permission to meet with Imran Khan. Meanwhile, the government has cited PTI's failure to present a written charter of demands as a reason for the delay in scheduling a third meeting.

Fawad Chaudhry Claims Government Engaged in Talks with PTI Under International Pressure

Former Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry has asserted that the government-initiated negotiations with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) due to growing international pressure.

"Talks will persist as long as international pressure remains high. They will cease if the government feels it can manage the external pressure," Chaudhry stated.

PTI leaders have demanded "unrestricted and unmonitored" access to their party founder, Imran Khan, who is currently incarcerated in Adiala Jail, to discuss "serious and important" matters. During the second round of negotiations with the government, PTI's negotiating team pushed for this access in order to present their "Charter of Demand."

The government has asked PTI to submit a formal written list of their demands. Among PTI's key demands are the formation of a judicial commission to investigate the events of May 9 and November 26, as well as the release of all "political prisoners."

PTI spokesperson Sahibzada Hamid Raza had previously indicated that the party leaders expected to meet with Imran Khan



on either Monday or Tuesday. He also warned that PTI would take further action if access to Khan was not granted.

"If the government cannot even facilitate a meeting between PTI leaders and Imran Khan, how can it fulfill PTI's other demands?" Fawad Chaudhry questioned, emphasizing the need for a broader political dialogue, including discussions with the military, to ensure political stability. He suggested that backdoor negotiations were already ongoing between both sides, asserting that no formal talks would have been possible without such behind-the-scenes discussions.



Chaudhry also expressed concern over the military's increasing prosecution of suspects, warning that it could further strain Pakistan's relationship with the United States and lead to deteriorating ties. "Pakistan cannot afford sanctions," he cautioned.

When asked about Pakistan's position in US priorities, Fawad clarified, "If Pakistan is not a priority for the United States, it means the establishment is not a priority, not the state itself."

US CALLED FOR RELEASE OF IMRAN KHAN

Richard Grenell, President-elect Donald Trump's incoming special envoy for missions, called for the release of former Pakistani Prime Minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, who is currently imprisoned in Pakistan on corruption charges.

In an interview with the American news

outlet Newsmax, Grenell discussed the US-Pakistan relationship during Trump's first term, highlighting the improved ties when Imran Khan assumed power. Grenell emphasized that Khan, seen as an outsider and not a typical politician, forged a strong connection with Trump, partly due to his background as a former cricket star and his straightforward approach.

Grenell further noted that the allegations against Khan are similar to those that led to the legal troubles of former President Trump. He argued that both leaders are facing what he believes are politically motivated charges and called for Khan's

release, drawing a direct parallel between the two.

"We had a much better relationship with Pakistan during the Trump administration when Imran Khan was the leader. That's because Khan wasn't a politician; he was a former cricket player, and he spoke in a very common-sense way," Grenell said. "He and Donald Trump had a very good relationship."

Grenell added, "I would like to see Imran Khan released from jail. He's facing the same kind of allegations that President Trump faced, where the ruling party has put him in prison based on false accusations of corruption. He's in prison now."

Earlier on Tuesday, Grenell responded to US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller's post on X (formerly Twitter), where Miller expressed concern over the sentencing of Pakistani civilians in a military tribunal. Grenell criticized Miller's statement as insufficient and

delayed, demanding a stronger stance.

"You are late. And this is too little and too weak. Speak normally. Free Imran Khan," Grenell wrote in his reply to Miller's post, which called on Pakistani authorities to respect the right to a fair trial and due process.

Rana Sanaullah: Pakistan Will Not Bow to Trump Administration Pressure to Free Imran Khan

Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs, Rana Sanaullah, stated on Tuesday that the government would not yield to any pressure from the incoming US administration, led by President-elect Donald Trump, to engage in talks with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) or to release its leader, Imran Khan. When asked about potential pressure from Trump's loyalist Richard Grenell, who had tweeted calling for Khan's release, Sanaullah responded firmly, saying, "We will not operate under pressure from Donald Trump... If any intervention occurs, we will view it as interference in our sovereignty."

Sanaullah, who is also part of the government's negotiation team, emphasized that the initiation of dialogue with PTI was not influenced by Trump. He stressed that negotiations should be conducted directly between the ruling party and the opposition, with no external influence. While acknowledging that Pakistan's relationship with the United States has had its ups and downs, he made it clear that Islamabad would not accept anything that goes against its national interests.

Regarding PTI's demand for "conclusive and time-bound" talks, Sanaullah stated that the government would not obstruct such discussions if they were pursued. However, he noted that the negotiations could not proceed unless both sides reached a consensus on their demands. He added that the government was not in a rush to schedule meetings immediately. His comments referred to a recent statement by PTI Chairman Gohar Ali Khan, who had called for a clear "timeframe" regarding the progress of their demands after meeting Imran Khan at Adiala Jail earlier that day.

Indonesia joins BRICS bloc: BRICS represents half of the world's population now

With its nine members and nine partners, BRICS now represents approximately half of the world's population and over 41% of global GDP (measured in purchasing power parity, or PPP). The bloc is a significant economic force, encompassing top producers of vital commodities such as oil, gas, grains, meat, and minerals.



By Javed Mahmood

Indonesia welcomed Brazil's announcement on Tuesday that it has officially joined BRICS, a bloc of major developing economies increasingly viewed as a counterbalance to Western influence.

In a statement on Monday, Brazil's foreign ministry highlighted Indonesia's shared vision with other BRICS members to reform global governance institutions and strengthen cooperation within the Global South. Brazil, which will hold the BRICS presidency in 2025, confirmed that Indonesia's membership bid was approved during the 2023 summit in Johannesburg. Indonesia expressed its gratitude, calling the inclusion a testament to its active role in addressing global challenges.

"This achievement reflects Indonesia's commitment to fostering multilateral cooperation and contributing to a more inclusive and equitable global structure," the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Tuesday.

BRICS Expansion and Strategic Goals

BRICS was originally formed in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining the following year. In 2023, the bloc expanded to include Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Indonesia described its membership as "a strategic step to enhance collaboration with other developing nations, grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, and sustainable development." Jakarta also extended its "gratitude to Russia," the 2024 BRICS chair, and Brazil for supporting its accession.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, outlining his priorities for Brazil's presidency, emphasized strengthening ties within the Global South and reforming multilateral institutions. A key focus will be the development of alternative payment

systems to facilitate trade among member nations.

Non-Dollar Trade and US Response

At the November 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, members discussed promoting non-dollar transactions and enhancing the use of local currencies. The initiative drew criticism from US President-elect Donald Trump, who warned of "100 percent tariffs" on BRICS members if they undermined the US dollar's dominance in international trade.

Upcoming Summit in Rio

The next BRICS summit is scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro in July 2025, where member nations are expected to further address economic cooperation and global governance reforms.

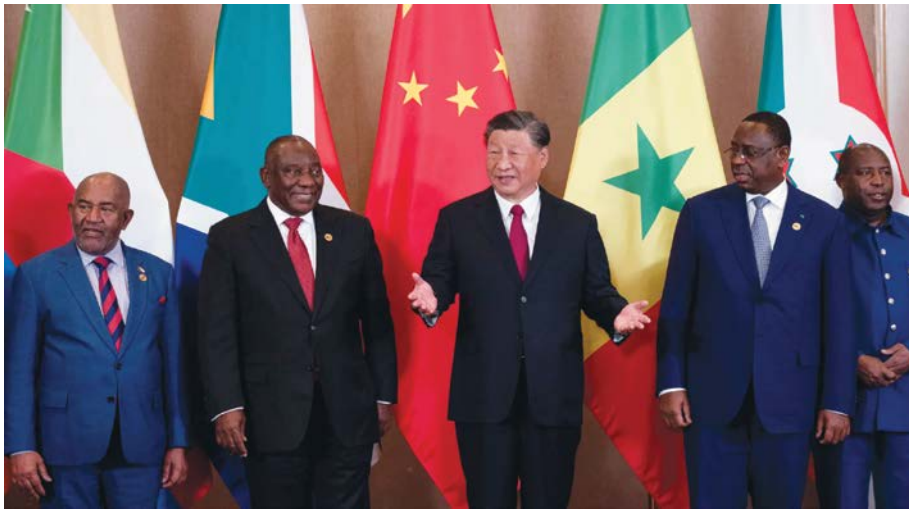
BRICS Expands Influence as a Global Economic Powerhouse

BRICS, the Global South-led forum for economic cooperation, continues to grow in prominence as it pursues de-dollarization and reforms to the global monetary and financial system.

On January 1, 2025, BRICS officially welcomed nine new nations as partner countries, expanding its global reach. The newly added partners are:

Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan

With its nine members and nine partners, BRICS now represents approximately half of the world's population and over 41% of global GDP (measured in purchasing power parity, or PPP). The bloc is a significant economic force, encompassing top producers of vital commodities such as oil, gas, grains, meat, and minerals.



2024 Expansion and New Partnerships

During the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024, the organization extended partnership invitations to 13 nations. Of these, nine accepted, officially joining as partners in 2025.

The remaining four—Algeria, Nigeria, Turkey, and Vietnam—had not provided formal responses by the end of 2024. Russia emphasized its expectation of eventual positive responses from these nations.

BRICS' Economic Footprint

Originally founded in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China, BRICS expanded in 2010 with the addition of South Africa. Subsequent expansions have significantly bolstered its economic and political influence.

At the 2023 Johannesburg summit, BRICS invited six countries to join as full members: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Of these, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE officially joined in January 2024.

While Saudi Arabia had not finalized its decision by the end of 2024, Argentina withdrew under its new pro-US government led by Javier Milei, overturning the prior administration's agreement to join.

The bloc now boasts nine full members and nine partners, cementing its role as a leader of the Global South and a counterbalance to Western-dominated institutions like the G7.

Global Population and Economic Contributions

BRICS' members and partners collectively account for nearly half of the global population—approximately 4 billion people. Among the world's most populous nations, BRICS includes India (1st), China (2nd), Indonesia (4th), Brazil (7th), Russia (9th), Ethiopia (10th), Egypt (14th), Iran (17th), and Thailand (20th).

The nine BRICS members alone make up 36.44% of global GDP (PPP). When

including the nine partners, this share rises to 41.41%, outpacing the G7, which accounted for only 29.08% of global GDP (PPP) in 2024. This marks a dramatic shift in global economic dynamics, as the G7's influence has declined from its 1990 peak of nearly 52% of world GDP (PPP).

BRICS as a Commodities Powerhouse

BRICS nations and partners dominate the production of key global commodities:

- **Crops:** Brazil, India, and China produce two-thirds of the world's sugarcane. China and India together produce over half of the world's rice, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand account for nearly 90% of global oil palm fruit production.
- **Meat:** China and Brazil produce over 20% of the world's chicken and beef, while China alone produces over 40% of global pork.
- **Seafood:** China leads in aquaculture, producing nearly 60% of global seafood, with India and Indonesia contributing to more than 70% collectively.

Future of BRICS: Challenges and Opportunities

BRICS' rapid expansion and emphasis on de-dollarization underscore its ambition to reshape the global economic order. The bloc's focus on alternative payment systems and local currencies signals a direct challenge to the dominance of the US dollar. As BRICS prepares for its 2025 summit in Rio de Janeiro, its growing membership and economic influence position it as a leading force in advocating for a more equitable and multipolar world order.

While BRICS continues to grow in influence, its member nations face several key challenges that could hinder their collective objectives and individual progress:

1. Economic Disparities Among Members

Diverse Economies: BRICS countries represent a wide range of economic sizes

and structures, from industrial giants like China to resource-dependent economies like South Africa. This economic disparity can create challenges in aligning policies and setting common priorities.

Inflation and Debt: Some members, like Brazil and South Africa, struggle with high inflation, currency instability, and significant public debt, which limit their ability to invest in BRICS-led initiatives.

2. Geopolitical Tensions

Regional Rivalries: India and China, both BRICS heavyweights, have unresolved border disputes and differing geopolitical priorities, which can complicate the bloc's unity. **Alignment with Western Powers:** Some members, such as Brazil and South Africa, maintain strong ties with Western countries, leading to differences in how they approach global governance reforms and relations with the Global South.

3. Dependence on Commodities

Vulnerability to Market Shocks: Resource-rich members like Russia, Brazil, and South Africa are highly dependent on commodity exports. Fluctuations in global demand or prices for oil, gas, minerals, or agricultural goods can significantly impact their economies.

Diversification Challenges: Many BRICS nations face difficulties in transitioning to more diversified and knowledge-driven economies.

4. De-Dollarization and Financial Reforms

Implementation Hurdles: While BRICS aims to reduce reliance on the US dollar, developing effective alternative payment systems, digital currencies, or trade settlements in local currencies is complex and requires extensive coordination.

Resistance from the Global Financial System: Efforts to reform global financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, face resistance from entrenched Western interests.

5. Infrastructure and Development Gaps

Internal Challenges: Members like India and South Africa grapple with significant infrastructure deficits, inadequate health-care, and uneven educational systems, which hamper economic growth and development. **Financing Needs:** Although the New Development Bank (NDB) has supported infrastructure projects, the demand for financing far exceeds its current capabilities.

6. Climate Change and Environmental Concerns

Balancing Growth and Sustainability: Members like China and India, which rely heavily on fossil fuels, face pressure to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. **Vulnerability to Climate Risks:** Nations like Brazil and South Africa are particularly vulnerable to climate change, including deforestation, water scarcity, and extreme weather events.

7. Political and Governance Challenges

Internal Political Instability: Some BRICS members, such as Brazil and South Africa, experience frequent political turnover, corruption scandals, and governance issues that can delay decision-making. **Authoritarian Tendencies:** Countries like Russia and China face criticism for their political systems, which can strain relationships with more democratic BRICS members and complicate the bloc's global image.

8. Coordination and Consensus-Building

Diverging National Interests: Reaching consensus on critical issues, such as trade policies or foreign relations, is difficult due



to the diverse priorities and domestic pressures of BRICS members.

Operational Challenges: With the addition of new partners and members, ensuring effective coordination and decision-making within the bloc is increasingly complex.

9. Global Perception and Western Pushback

Perception as Anti-Western: BRICS is often portrayed as a counterweight to the West, which may alienate some nations or partners that value ties with Western powers. **Sanctions and Trade Barriers:** Members like Russia and Iran face extensive sanctions that can complicate their integration into global markets and BRICS initiatives.



10. Technological Competition

Innovation Gaps: While China and India are advancing rapidly in technology, other members lag in innovation and R&D investments. Bridging this gap is essential for collective progress.

Cybersecurity Threats: As BRICS nations push for digital payment systems and de-dollarization, they must address significant cybersecurity risks and vulnerabilities. Addressing these challenges requires BRICS to enhance internal coordination, strengthen multilateral cooperation, and implement innovative strategies to support its members' economic and geopolitical ambitions.

Opportunities for BRICS Member Countries

The BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and its growing network of partners present numerous opportunities for member nations to leverage collective strengths, enhance their global influence, and drive domestic development. Here are the key opportunities:

1. Economic Growth Through Trade and Investment

Intra-BRICS Trade: Increased trade among BRICS members offers opportunities to reduce dependency on Western markets and strengthen domestic industries.

systems, trade in local currencies, and potential creation of a BRICS currency offers members financial independence and reduced vulnerability to Western sanctions or currency fluctuations.

Digital Currencies: Collaborative development of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) can modernize financial systems, improve cross-border payments, and enhance trade efficiency.

3. Leadership in Global Governance Reform

Voice for the Global South: BRICS provides a platform to advocate for reforms in global institutions like the United Nations, IMF, and World Bank to make them more inclusive and representative of developing economies.

Shaping Global Policies: Through collective influence, BRICS can shape policies on climate change, trade, and technology, positioning its members as leaders in a multipolar world.

4. Energy Cooperation and Security

Energy Resources: With Russia, Brazil, and South Africa rich in oil, gas, and renewable energy resources, and China and India as major consumers, BRICS has the potential to establish long-term energy partnerships.

Green Energy Transition: Collaboration on renewable energy technologies, such as solar, wind, and hydrogen, can help BRICS members meet sustainability goals and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

5. Technology and Innovation Collaboration

R&D Cooperation: Joint research initiatives in areas like AI, biotechnology, space exploration, and clean energy can help members share expertise and reduce dependence on Western technology.

Digital Transformation: Strengthening digital infrastructure and technological partnerships can enhance e-commerce, digital payments, and innovation across BRICS economies.

Investment in Infrastructure: The New Development Bank (NDB) provides funding for infrastructure and sustainable development projects, which can spur growth, especially in resource-constrained economies like South Africa and Brazil.

Market Access: BRICS provides access to some of the world's largest consumer markets, including China and India, enabling smaller economies like South Africa to expand exports.

2. De-Dollarization and Financial Innovation

Reduced Reliance on the US Dollar: BRICS' push for alternative payment

6. Strategic Partnerships with Emerging Economies

Expanding Membership: The addition of new members and partners from the Global South (e.g., Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia) creates opportunities for increased trade, investment, and political collaboration.

South-South Cooperation: BRICS serves as a hub for collaboration among developing countries, fostering knowledge sharing and reducing reliance on developed nations.

7. Commodities and Agricultural Powerhouse

Global Supply Chains: BRICS nations dominate the production of key commodities like oil, gas, grains, and minerals. By strengthening supply chains and trade agreements, members can stabilize global markets and increase revenue.

Food Security: Collaborative efforts in agriculture can address food security challenges and position BRICS as a global leader in sustainable food production.

8. Tourism and Cultural Exchange

Tourism Development: With rich cultural and natural heritage, BRICS nations can develop joint tourism initiatives to boost their economies. For instance, China and India can drive tourism to smaller economies like South Africa and Brazil.

Soft Power Diplomacy: Cultural exchanges

and educational collaborations can enhance mutual understanding and strengthen people-to-people ties among member nations.

9. Climate Change and Sustainability

Joint Climate Action: BRICS members can coordinate efforts to combat climate change, develop renewable energy technologies, and finance sustainable development projects.

Carbon Markets: Members can collaborate to create carbon trading systems and reduce emissions while benefiting financially.

10. Strengthened Regional Leadership

Regional Influence: Membership in BRICS enhances each country's leadership in its respective region (e.g., Brazil in Latin America, South Africa in Africa, India in South Asia).

Balancing Global Power: By aligning with other major economies, BRICS members can counterbalance the influence of Western powers, particularly the US and EU.

11. Human Development and Education

Knowledge Sharing: BRICS provides opportunities to collaborate on education and healthcare initiatives, improving human capital and social outcomes in

member countries.

Skill Development: Joint programs for skills training and capacity building can address labor market gaps and enhance employability across the bloc.

12. Multipolar Global Order

Shared Leadership: As global power shifts away from a unipolar world dominated by the US, BRICS members have the opportunity to shape a multipolar order that reflects their interests and values.

Alternative Alliances: BRICS offers a platform for members to diversify alliances and reduce dependence on Western-led institutions like NATO and the G7.

13. Economic Resilience and Crisis Management

Collective Support: Members can pool resources to create contingency funds or mechanisms to help one another during economic crises, natural disasters, or pandemics.

Trade Diversification: Increased intra-BRICS trade and reduced reliance on Western markets can help members build resilience against global economic shocks.

By leveraging these opportunities, BRICS nations can strengthen their individual and collective influence, enhance economic development, and provide a viable alternative to the existing global power structures.



How to Develop Emerging Markets?

High-yield bonds can outperform investment-grade assets by more than 10 percentage points in the first nine months of a calendar year, but it is unusual. Over the past three decades, it's happened only three times, in 1999, 2003, and 2009.



By Harry Javed

It is always the case that some countries embrace market-friendly reforms, while others do the opposite. And most of the time, there seem to be few distinct patterns in the choices different countries make. But these days there is a more visible trend in policymaking across emerging market and developing economies: the most financially fragile countries are pursuing disciplined market-friendly reforms, while some of the more historically stable developing economies seem to be moving in the opposite direction. Call it “two-way traffic” in emerging markets.

This year has been remarkable for the sheer number of financially fragile emerging market economies adopting economic reforms aimed at eliminating vulnerabilities. Argentina, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Türkiye, and others are making efforts to end distortions in their foreign exchange markets, rein in the growth of public debt, accumulate foreign exchange reserves, and set the stage for sustainable growth.

At the same time, several middle-income emerging market economies with healthier macroeconomic fundamentals and more stable relationships with international capital markets are adopting, or soon seem likely to adopt, looser policies that threaten to erode public sector balance sheets and push up country risk premiums. Examples include Brazil, Hungary, Indonesia, Mexico, Poland, and Thailand.

Bond prices in emerging markets have responded in a predictable way to these trends: credit spreads of countries that are fragile but improving have narrowed disproportionately. In the first nine months of 2024, sub-investment-grade dollar-denominated sovereign debt in emerging markets returned more than 15 percent. By contrast, investment in more creditworthy countries returned less than 5 percent during the same period.

High-yield bonds can outperform investment-grade assets by more than 10 percentage points in the first nine months of a

calendar year, but it is unusual. Over the past three decades, it's happened only three times, in 1999, 2003, and 2009.

Aftermath of a crisis

What those historical episodes have in common is that each was in the aftermath of a crisis of some sort. That makes intuitive sense: when risk appetite returns to a market after a crisis, investors tend to bias their portfolios toward riskier countries that will benefit disproportionately from a rise in confidence.

But this time is a little different, in that there hasn't been a major financial crisis, either for emerging markets or the world in general. Indeed, the stock of sovereign debt in default was a mere half percent of global GDP last year, according to a database on sovereign default maintained by the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England. Although that's higher than a few years ago, the prevalence of default is nevertheless lower than in the late 1980s, when

the stock of defaulted debt was more than 2 percent of global GDP.

One explanation is that the dangers posed by vast yet volatile capital flows are much better managed today than in the 1970s and 1980s. That's because many developing economies have learned two important lessons: keep current account deficits within limits and accumulate foreign exchange reserves.

The former insulates countries from the “flow vulnerability” of too much dependence on external financing. The latter insulates against the “stock vulnerability” of having too few dollars when financing sources dry up. And this may help explain why so many financially fragile countries have embraced reform. The benefits of self-insurance—and the need to limit both flow and stock vulnerability—are so well known now that fragile countries may be getting the message that living permanently beyond their means is not a viable policy choice, particularly when the US is tightening monetary policy.

Countries with stronger national balance sheets and fewer recent memories of financial instability seem determined to spend more.” Tweet this

More Spending

Some of the fiscal adjustments being undertaken by historically fragile countries are highly ambitious. In Argentina, for example, the authorities are aiming to turn a primary budget deficit of 3 percent of GDP in 2023 into a 1 percent surplus next year. Egypt's government is targeting a primary surplus of 5 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2027. Türkiye plans to turn a primary deficit of 2.6 percent of GDP in 2023 into a surplus of 0.5 percent of GDP next year.

By contrast, countries with stronger national balance sheets and fewer recent memories of financial instability seem determined to spend more. Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum has inherited a 2024 budget deficit of some 6 percent of GDP, the largest since 1989. Market participants have valid concerns that a sustained period of fiscal loosening may be starting.

Brazil's government is struggling to persuade investors that President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's tilt toward fiscal

loosening is compatible with financial stability. Notwithstanding a sovereign upgrade by Moody's, a rating agency, market participants worry that a recent surge in GDP growth is keeping the economy growing faster than potential, and that weaknesses in the government's financial position will quickly come to light when growth slows.

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto has raised the prospect of a big hike in government debt to complete the construction of a new capital city, raise defense spending, and provide free school meals. He says he has “no problem” letting the debt-to-GDP ratio rise to 50 percent, up from 39 percent at present.

One way of explaining this two-way traffic in emerging markets is to keep in mind the distinction between financial globalization, which in recent decades created space for a surge in volatile capital flows, and real globalization, which during the same period made room for a surge in trade.

Looking back to the 1980s and 1990s, two decades marked by intermittent financial crises in emerging markets, it's easy to suggest now that developing economies faced the negative consequences of financial globalization even while enjoying the positive consequences of real globalization. Global trade growth was predictably robust back then, except in a small number of years when the world economy fell into recession. Global capital flows, by contrast, were unpredictably volatile.

World trade hostility

The opposite may now be true. Global capital flows are still volatile, for sure, but emerging market economies have learned ways of managing the risks, or at least responding sooner than they used to.

The bigger problem today seems to be with real globalization: global trade growth has been markedly weak compared with GDP growth in the past two years, as it has for much of the past decade. And global trade hostility seems more likely than not to bite harder in the future. That leaves exports less reliable as a path toward growth for emerging market economies—and it may be this weakening external trade environment that is encouraging countries with

healthy balance sheets to consider spending some of their accumulated reputational capital to support domestic demand. The demands of the climate transition and national defense will amplify this trend.

If fiscal easing is moderate, boosts productivity, and adds to potential growth, these cases of looser policy may not cause market participants particular concern, and the two-way traffic now visible in emerging markets will not be a bad thing. But if the problems associated with real globalization get worse—if, in other words, global trade suffers a steeper or more protracted collapse—public sector balance sheets will deteriorate further. Market participants are then likely to charge higher rates to supply credit. The future of global trade could, therefore, play an important part in deciding the kind of traffic patterns we end up with in emerging markets and whether they embrace market-friendly reform—or the opposite.

How to Develop Emerging Markets?

Developing emerging markets involves fostering economic growth, improving infrastructure, enhancing governance, and enabling access to global markets. Below are some strategies to help develop emerging markets effectively:

Strengthen Economic Fundamentals

- **Macroeconomic Stability:** Maintain low inflation, manageable public debt, and stable exchange rates.
- **Diversify the Economy:** Reduce dependence on a single industry or commodity by promoting sectors like manufacturing, services, and technology.
- **Encourage Investment:** Create favorable conditions for both domestic and foreign investments through tax incentives, regulatory reforms, and robust legal frameworks.

Build Infrastructure

- **Physical Infrastructure:** Invest in roads, ports, power plants, and telecommunications to connect regions and improve productivity.

- **Digital Infrastructure:** Expand access to high-speed internet and digital services to integrate into the global digital economy.
- **Urban Development:** Promote smart and sustainable urbanization to accommodate growing populations.

Foster Human Capital Development

- **Education and Skills Training:** Invest in quality education and vocational training to prepare the workforce for diverse industries.

- **Effective Regulation:** Balance regulatory oversight with flexibility to encourage innovation and growth.

Promote Trade and Integration

- **Regional Cooperation:** Join or create trade agreements to improve market access and reduce tariffs.
- **Global Supply Chains:** Encourage local industries to participate in international supply chains.
- **Export-Oriented Growth:** Identify and promote sectors with export potential.

markets to provide credit and investment opportunities for businesses and individuals.

- **Inclusive Finance:** Promote financial inclusion by expanding access to banking services for underserved populations.
- **Stable Banking System:** Ensure a well-regulated banking system to prevent financial crises.

Address Social Challenges

- **Reduce Inequality:** Implement policies to bridge the wealth gap and promote equal opportunities.
- **Empower Women and Minorities:** Focus on inclusive growth by supporting marginalized groups through education, employment, and leadership opportunities.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Balance growth with sustainability by adopting green technologies and practices.

Strengthen Global Partnerships

- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** Attract FDI through stable policies and infrastructure development.
- **Development Aid:** Partner with international organizations for funding and technical assistance.
- **Diaspora Engagement:** Leverage the global diaspora to bring investment, expertise, and networks.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Use reliable data to assess progress and adjust strategies.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Engage with local communities and stakeholders to ensure policies meet their needs.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Regularly publish reports on development goals and outcomes.

By combining these strategies and adapting them to local conditions, emerging markets can unlock their potential and achieve sustainable development.



- **Healthcare:** Improve access to healthcare services to ensure a healthy workforce and reduce productivity losses.
- **Entrepreneurship Support:** Encourage startups and small businesses through mentorship programs, access to credit, and incubators.

Enhance Governance and Institutions

- **Transparent Policies:** Implement fair and transparent policies to reduce corruption and attract investors.
- **Rule of Law:** Strengthen legal systems to protect property rights and enforce contracts.

Leverage Technology and Innovation

- **Adopt Modern Technologies:** Invest in automation, AI, and clean energy to boost productivity and sustainability.
- **Support Research and Development (R&D):** Encourage innovation through tax breaks, grants, and partnerships with universities.
- **Digital Economy:** Promote e-commerce, fintech, and digital payment systems to facilitate trade and inclusion.

Enhance Financial Systems

- **Access to Capital:** Develop financial

Reflecting on 2024: A Year of Progress for Water Security



By Romana Afsheen

As 2024 came to a close, it offered an important moment to reflect on the milestones achieved in the ongoing journey toward global water security. The year marked a significant period of progress, as nations, organizations, and communities took collective action to address some of the world's most pressing water-related challenges. Water was not just a vital resource but the lifeblood of communities, agriculture, industry, and ecosystems. With water scarcity, climate change, and the inequitable distribution of water resources continuing to threaten the well-being of populations worldwide, 2024 underscored the urgency of prioritizing water in development agendas and environmental policies.

This year, the Global Department for Water made significant progress in addressing the world's most pressing water-related challenges, marking 2024 as a year of transformative efforts toward ensuring water security for people, food systems, and the planet. The global community made notable strides in enhancing water access, improving management practices, and fostering partnerships aimed at ensuring water security for all. From launching new water strategies to producing groundbreaking reports and fostering cross-sectoral collaborations, 2024 proved to be a year of progress for

global water security.

This article highlights the key achievements of 2024, with an emphasis on the steps taken to secure water for all, addressing not just immediate needs but also long-term solutions that promoted sustainability, resilience, and equitable access to this precious resource. Through new strategies, flagship reports, innovative partnerships, and impactful projects, 2024 marked a pivotal year in securing water for people, food systems, and the planet.

1. Crafting a Bold Vision: The New Water Strategy

A pivotal moment in 2024 was the launch of the new Water Strategy, which reflects an ambitious, unified approach to tackling the world's water challenges. With a clear focus on "Water for People, Water for Food, and Water for the Planet," the strategy brings together the collective strengths of the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) to adopt a more integrated approach to water management.

This strategy is comprehensive in scope, addressing three critical pillars

that encapsulate the global water security agenda.

Water for People: Ensuring Universal Access to Safe Water

The first pillar, Water for People, prioritizes providing universal access to safe water and sanitation. Despite significant advancements in recent decades, over two billion people around the world still lack access to clean water, and nearly four billion live without safely managed sanitation services. This crisis disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where access to water is limited and sanitation facilities are often inadequate.

In response to this challenge, the strategy calls for a coordinated effort to accelerate the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, which aims to ensure access to clean water and sanitation for all by 2030. Through investments in infrastructure, technological innovation, and improved service delivery models, this initiative seeks to close the water access gap and reduce waterborne diseases that disproportionately affect the poorest and most marginalized communities.

Water for Food: Enhancing Agricultural Productivity and Livelihoods

The second pillar, Water for Food, emphasizes the role of water in food production and smallholder livelihoods. Agriculture accounts for roughly 70% of global freshwater use, and the efficiency of water use in farming is crucial to feeding the world's growing population. Water shortages, however, are putting immense pressure on food production, especially in regions where irrigation systems are outdated, inefficient, or poorly maintained.

This aspect of the strategy focuses on increasing food production in a sustainable manner, improving water-use efficiency, and empowering smallholder farmers. Small-scale farmers are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of water scarcity and climate change, and providing them with access to better water management tools, climate-resilient crops, and irrigation technologies is key to boosting their productivity and livelihoods.

By investing in water-efficient irrigation systems, promoting rainwater harvesting, and supporting climate-smart agricultural practices, the strategy aims to reduce water waste and improve food security, particularly in regions where water scarcity threatens agricultural output.

Water for the Planet: Promoting Sustainable Water Management

The third pillar, Water for the Planet, focuses on the sustainable management of water resources. Climate change has exacerbated water-related risks, including extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and storms. These risks not only threaten human populations but also disrupt ecosystems, agricultural productivity, and economic stability.

This pillar emphasizes the need to reduce water-related risks and promote the sustainable use of water resources. It aims to protect water ecosystems, restore wetlands, and improve watershed management to enhance water availability, quality, and resilience to climate impacts. Integrated water resource management (IWRM) is central to this approach, ensuring that water resources are used equitably,

efficiently, and sustainably, balancing the needs of different sectors—agriculture, industry, and domestic consumption.

By tackling water-related risks, protecting ecosystems, and improving water governance, this pillar seeks to secure water resources for future generations while reducing the negative impacts of climate change.

2. Groundbreaking Insights: Flagship Reports on Water Security

In 2024, a series of flagship reports deepened our understanding of the critical role water plays in sustainable development. These reports not only provided vital insights into the state of global water security but also outlined actionable solutions and strategies to address ongoing challenges.

Water for Shared Prosperity: Bridging the Water Inequality Gap

The report Water for Shared Prosperity, launched at the 10th World Water Forum in Bali, Indonesia, focused on the interconnections between water access, economic growth, and shared prosperity. It examined the growing inequalities in water access, particularly in developing countries, and called for solutions that address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

The report highlights that the unequal distribution of water is not just a social issue but an economic one. Poor water access and sanitation are key barriers to economic development, particularly in rural areas. The report emphasizes the need for inclusive water policies that provide equitable access to all, particularly marginalized groups, and that support the development of infrastructure and services that benefit the broader economy.

Funding a Water-Secure Future: Addressing the Global Financing Gap

One of the most pressing issues identified in 2024 is the significant financing gap in the

water sector. According to the Funding a Water-Secure Future report, global public spending on water is falling short by an estimated \$140.8 billion annually. This financing gap undermines efforts to meet the ambitious water security goals set by international organizations and national governments.

The report calls for governments to step up their investments in water infrastructure, particularly in developing countries, where the lack of adequate water systems exacerbates poverty and inequality. It also stresses the importance of leveraging private sector investments and enhancing public-private partnerships to fill the funding gap. By adopting more efficient spending mechanisms and improving the governance of water projects, the world can work toward a more water-secure future.

Scaling Up Finance for Water: A Roadmap for Action

The Scaling Up Finance for Water report provides a strategic framework for catalyzing greater investments in the water sector. It offers a customizable roadmap for governments, international organizations, and the private sector to collaborate in scaling up financial flows into the water sector. The report advocates for the creation of financing mechanisms that attract investments while ensuring that water projects are both economically viable and socially beneficial.

One of the key recommendations is the establishment of dedicated water financing facilities that can pool resources for large-scale water projects, particularly in developing countries. These facilities would help countries access the funds needed to build resilient water infrastructure and promote sustainable water management practices.

3. Strengthening Alliances: Partnerships that Drive Change

In 2024, partnerships continued to play a central role in advancing water security. Through collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and international institutions, progress was

made in addressing complex water challenges. Several key partnerships drove innovation and impact in the water sector.

Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership (GWSP)

The Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership (GWSP) has been instrumental in advancing water-related SDGs. In 2024, the partnership influenced over \$9.3 billion in new lending, impacting 240 initiatives across 70 countries. GWSP's collaborative approach has led to the development of innovative water solutions, particularly in regions most affected by water scarcity.



The 2024 GWSP Annual Report highlighted the partnership's success in scaling up water projects and improving access to safe water and sanitation. The report also emphasized the need for increased investments in water and sanitation infrastructure, particularly in low-income countries where funding gaps remain a significant challenge.

2030 Water Resources Group (WRG)

The 2030 Water Resources Group (WRG) is another key platform fostering collaboration between businesses, governments, and civil society. In 2024, WRG expanded its reach, with active initiatives in countries such as Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. By facilitating dialogues between stakeholders, WRG has helped create solutions to water risks affecting food production, urban water supply, and ecosystems.

The partnership has also spurred investments in water management projects, from improving water storage infrastructure to enhancing water efficiency in agriculture. WRG's work demonstrates the power of cross-sector collaboration in addressing complex water challenges and securing water for future generations.

Singapore Water Center

Launched during Singapore International Water Week, the Singapore Water Center leverages Singapore's expertise in urban water management to support countries worldwide. Through joint research, pilot

studies, and training programs, the center helps cities in developing countries adopt innovative solutions to manage their water resources more sustainably. By sharing knowledge and providing technical assistance, the center plays a key role in building capacity for water management in both urban and rural areas.

4. Catalyzing Dialogue: Key Global Events

Throughout 2024, water took center stage in several key global events, further cementing its role as a fundamental issue in both development and climate action.

COP29 in Baku: Water and Agriculture Day

During COP29 in Baku, the Water and Agriculture Day event highlighted the close links between water security and climate

resilience. The report *Water Security and Climate Change: Insights from Country Climate and Development Reports* was launched, offering lessons from 41 countries on integrating water management into climate strategies.

The discussions underscored that water security is not just a local issue but a global one. The need for transboundary water cooperation, innovative financing mechanisms, and climate-smart agriculture was emphasized as a path forward for improving both water management and food security worldwide.

The UN Water Conference: Advancing the Water Action Decade

The UN Water Conference held in March 2024 was another significant milestone. It marked a key moment in the implementation of the Water Action Decade and provided an opportunity for world leaders to commit to actionable steps to address water challenges. The conference focused on cross-cutting solutions to accelerate progress on SDG 6 and provide a platform for nations to exchange knowledge and best practices.

Conclusion: The Path Forward

As we look back on the achievements of 2024, it is clear that while significant progress has been made, the journey to water security is far from complete. The lessons learned and strategies outlined throughout the year provide a strong foundation for continued action in the years ahead. However, the challenges of climate change, water scarcity, and inequality will continue to require concerted efforts and innovative solutions.

The year 2024 reminds us that water security is not just an environmental issue but a crucial driver of economic, social, and political stability. By remaining committed to the principles of equity, sustainability, and cooperation, the global community can ensure that future generations have access to the water they need to thrive.



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