

# Newsletter

## The Unusual Result of Israel's Election 2021



**Israel's fourth election** in the past two years held on **23rd March** is best to be described as an impasse and paving no clear way towards attaining majority. As votes have been counted, the political gurus are struggling to find a formula that the current **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu**, locally known as **Bibi**, might use to magically accumulate **61 seats** that are required to form a government.

The elections held in the past two years were all about him, as a means of securing power and for the sake of his political survival in the country. The political pundits of **Israel** have

divided the parties contesting elections for **120 seats of Knesset** into two blocs: **pro-Netanyahu** and **anti-Netanyahu**. Both blocs lack clear victory to form a government and notably, these blocs are barely unified internally. This is the reason why the media houses and other analysts in the country are envisaging **fifth elections** in-country in the coming summer. Understanding Israel's politics has always been an arduous task for the outsiders unaware of local political culture.

For years, factors such as extremist ideology, religiously motivated groups, and especially demographics have been impacting **Israel's general election** results. Irrespective of the final vote count, which will not mystically alter the election results, horse-trading and dealing and wheeling are going to be immediate. It is anticipated that after the elections the promises made during the campaign are likely to be shattered and rivals might end up forming coalitions to attain a certain degree of power in government. What makes this election different from those held in the past two years is that now the right-wing and the far-right are divided with former Netanyahu allies.

Former allies are seen to be parting ways and making new political alliances. The pundits have labeled **Mansour Abbas**, who leads **Islamist United Arab List (UAL)** as a kingmaker, whose 4 seats can help Netanyahu secure the required **61 seats** in the parliament. **Yamina Party's Neftali Bennett** is seen to be another kingmaker, who has been successful in securing seven seats. In last year's March elections, Netanyahu avoided far-right politicians, but this year's situation is different as he sees himself in a stronger position of negotiating with them. Although Netanyahu's party lost some ground but unexpectedly managed to emerge as the largest party by securing 30 seats. The real test for Netanyahu would be reconciliation with the far-right religious factions and perhaps forming an alliance with the Islamist UAL.

**Bezalel Smotrich**, a prominent religious Zionist leader remarked that he would not allow the formation of a government with the support of the Islamist UAL. **Mansour Abbas** has not yet stated his stance on supporting the far right for forming the government, but a prospect of such an alliance is expected however in exchange for improved services for the Arab community settled in Israel.

A very crucial matter that was absent from the election campaign was the prospects of reviving the peace talks with **Palestine**. Netanyahu used the **successful vaccination scheme of COVID-19** as an accomplishment to secure votes but this was shadowed by what Israeli people believe to be a sluggish response and mismanagement of the pandemic, which also proved detrimental to the economy. Moreover, **Netanyahu is under trial for corruption charges and accepting bribes for his political survival**. Netanyahu might be able to gather parties to form a government through a coalition but it will be fragile and unreliable thus likely to break up soon.

On the other hand, if by some miracle the **anti-Netanyahu camp** is able to form a government with the support of like-minded factions, it will be the beginning of a new era and departure of a person who since the **1990s** has been dominating Israel.

## **Suez Canal: A Giant Ship blocking the Canal**



One of the world's strategic shipping canals, the Suez Canal, was blocked by a giant Japanese-owned Ever Given cargo ship, **1,400-foot** long **weighing 200,000-tons**, for nearly a week.

The ship was operated by Taiwanese company Evergreen Marine and obstructed at an angle in **Egypt's Suez Canal** on **March 23, 2021**. The blockade initiated a major cargo ships jam causing billions of dollars of trade to be delayed in efforts to refloat the vessel. As per Leth Agencies, **367 vessels** were trapped along the canal including dozens of container ships, bulk carriers, oil tankers, and liquefied natural gas (LNG) or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) vessels.

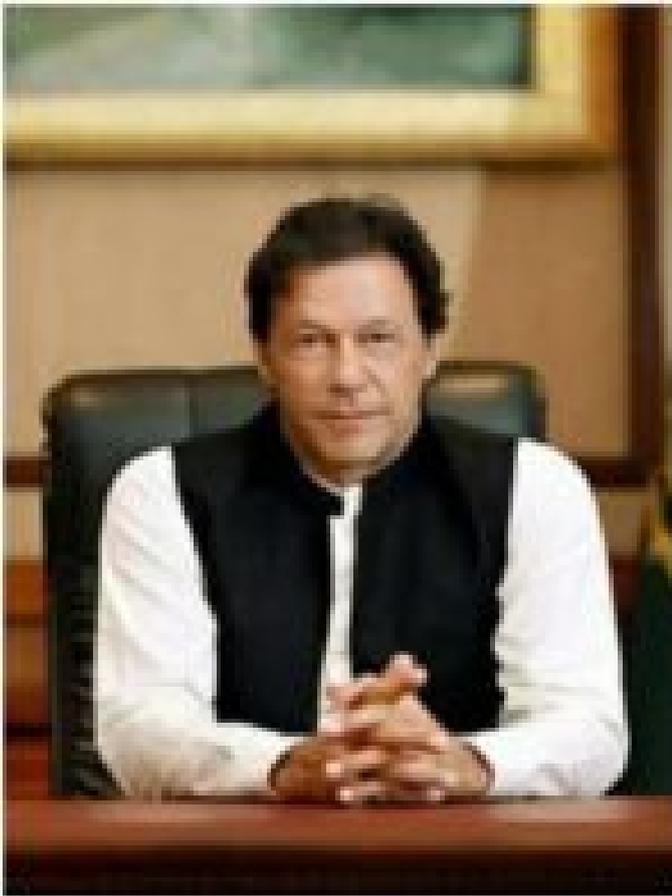
The blockade invited global attention as authorities and workers were carrying out a rescue mission to refloat the vessel to unblock the waterway. As per NBC News, "*Dredgers worked over the weekend to dislodge the stranded vessel, shifting some **27,000 metric tons** of sand to a depth of 60 feet. A total of 14 tugboats were conducting pulling maneuvers from three directions to dislodge the ship.*" **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** commented, "*Today, Egyptians*

*have been successful in putting to an end the crisis of the stranded ship in the Suez Canal, despite the enormous complexity surrounding the process.”* The blockage caused the oil prices to augment and disturbed the global supply chain which also put companies at risk of facing costly delays, especially with COVID-19 restrictions.

The shipping resumed through **Suez Canal** on Monday as the skyscraper ship refloated with help of tug boats that moved it slowly in the center of the canal and the ship started moving at the speed of **1.5 knots (2.8kmph)**. The ship was repositioned and inspected for seaworthiness. There is a sense of relief among the authorities and workers but another challenge looking straight in the eyes is the congestion of ships that the blockade has caused. Suez Canal authorities have decided that stranded vessels would be allowed to pass through the Canal on a **first-come-first-served basis** and there might be some exceptions to particular ships depending on what kind of goods are on board. There had been no reports regarding pollution or cargo damage, and initial investigations had ruled out any mechanical or engine failure as a cause of the grounding last week.

**Other than the economic and financial jolt**, this situation raises another concern; security. It was highly possible that ships could have been exploded or damaged by radical groups. This could have caused another challenge globally. Authorities must be prepared in the future for situations that are not only on the **contours of economy and finance**.

## **Pakistan Bangladesh Ties**



The **Pakistan-Bangladesh relationship** is weighed down by history. But if bilateral ties are to progress, both **Islamabad** and **Dhaka** must look forward instead of living in the painful past. **Improvement in bilateral relations** can be reactivated which in turn can help create a more integrated and peaceful **South Asia**.

Government to promote trade relations with Bangladesh, said that **"Bangladesh is one of the top destinations for exports of Pakistan. Trade between Pakistan and Bangladesh has always been in favor of Pakistan"**. While giving a breakdown of exports and imports of the past five years, the minister told the parliamentarians that both countries had total trade of **\$700.39 million in 2019-20**, wherein Pakistani exports amounted to **\$654.79 million** and import from Bangladesh stood at **\$45.60million**. **"Even though trade remained in surplus this year too, the overall trade including both exports and imports decreased in the wake of Covid-19, the economic fallouts of which remained palpable throughout the world since February**

2020," the ministry stated.

Both the countries had a total trade of **\$806.75m in 2018-19, \$805.00m in 2017-18, \$678.43m in 2016-17, \$763.08m in 2015-16 and \$769.53m in 2014-15.** The government of Pakistan has included Bangladesh in List 'A' countries from October 2019 which has facilitated the travel of Bangladeshi businessmen to Pakistan. **Pakistan's major exports** to Bangladesh include **woven cotton fabrics, cotton yarn, raw sugar, raw cotton, tanned leather, machinery, and its parts, and synthetic fabrics including silk and woolen.** Islamabad has been actively pursuing to build better ties with all neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh. The removal of visa restrictions for Bangladeshi citizens and steps to improve trade ties signify Pakistan's efforts in this regard. **Pakistan's President Dr. Arif Alvi** recently expressed Islamabad's desire to boost bilateral ties with Bangladesh at all levels. **Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh Imran Siddiqui** also stated that the country is eager to boost economic ties with Bangladesh with the resumption of direct flights and establishing maritime connectivity.

**Pakistan's main items of imports from Bangladesh** are raw jute, tea, and mate, yarn & thread of synthetic fibers, and tobacco. A congratulatory letter from **Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina** on the occasion of **Pakistan's National Day** is another sign of improvement in relations between the two countries. Though the relations between the two countries have remained tense for the last many years, now, close people-to-people contact will heal the wounds of the past.

---

# Newsletter

## U.S.-Russia: Blame Game



U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia for the poisoning of the opposition leader Alexey Navalny. Russia has claimed that the imposed sanctions are **“hostile anti-Russian lunge”**. Earlier, U.S. blamed Russia meddle in the presidential elections to ward former president Donald Trump.

The assessment was made in a 15-page report into election interference published by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Russia labeled the claims as **“baseless”**. U.S. intelligence report also stated that some of Trump’s top allies were involved in being a helping hand to Moscow to amplify the prerogatives against Biden. The report said Moscow sought to **“push influence narratives”** that included misleading or unsubstantiated claims against Biden *“to US media organizations, US officials, and prominent US individuals, including some close to former President Trump and his administration.”* It was said that Putin was **“probably”** fixed the campaign to boost Trump and emasculate Biden. U.S.

officials claimed that they also noticed efforts made by Cuba, Venezuela and the Lebanese group Hezbollah to sway the election. The U.S. officials further added that *“in general, we assess that they were smaller in scale than those conducted by Russia and Iran”*. US intelligence agencies and former Special Counsel Robert Mueller formerly established the claim that *“Russia also interfered in the 2016 US election to boost Trump’s candidacy with a campaign of propaganda aimed at harming his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton”*. Biden recently made a statement that Putin will pay for what he tried to do with U.S. elections if the claims made in U.S. intelligence report confirmed. While giving an interview to George Stephanopoulos, Biden said, *“He will pay a price. We had a long talk, he and I, when we – I know him relatively well. I know you and you know me. If I establish this occurred, then be prepared”*.

The U.S. has imposed sanctions against four Russian senior officials because they have made serious interventions in U.S. national affairs. The U.S. commerce department added that *“it was also tightening sanctions on some exports to Russia in response to the March 2018 poisoning of former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England with a military-grade nerve agent”*. In an answer to the claims and sanctions made, the Kremlin extended their message to U.S. that the intelligence report has absolutely no foundation. No evidence has been provided to back those allegations. The Kremlin also warned the U.S. that any additional sanctions will be detrimental to the U.S. – Russia ties.

## **North Korea Disregards US**

# Talks for Denuclearization



The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) indicated that North Korea might be engaged in nuclear fuel reprocessing which raised concerns in Pentagon.

The Head of Intelligence of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Rear Admiral Michael Studeman, said that the nuclear activities of North Korea can be a way for the country to get attention of the new Biden Administration and use it as a means to bargain on sanctions relief. In a virtual conference about technology and security Studeman told the participants that, *"We have our eye on this. And it is deeply concerning where North Korea wants to go."* The Director General of IAEA Rafael Mariano Grossi commented that North Korea has been active at Yongbyong and Kangson nuclear facilities. He indicated about operationalization of a steam plant which serves as a radiochemical laboratory. Previously North Korea used its Yongbyong radiochemical laboratory to reprocess plutonium from a reactor to develop a nuclear bomb. After the statements made

by Grossi, the American Head of Intelligence Studeman said *"If that is true, then that could put us into a different level of tension with Korea."*

The Biden Administration is currently reviewing the US-North Korea policy laid down by the former President Trump. All measures previously taken by former President Trump were futile in persuading Pyongyang to give up their nuclear weapons. Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State said that an approach to North Korea could involve either more sanctions or some unspecified diplomatic incentives. He further added that the nuclear program is *"a threat to the region and to the world."* Blinken emphasized on multilateral engagement with South Korea, Japan and other regional and international allies to achieve denuclearization of North Korea. On the other hand, North Korean diplomat labelled US attempts to initiate contact as **"cheap trick"** and such calls would not be responded unless American administration did not drop its hostile policies. This statement by Choe Son Hui, the vice minister of North Korea Foreign Affairs was the first formal rejection of tentative measure taken by the US administration. According to Choe this is a cheap trick of US to gain some time and influence public opinion. In a statement given to news agency, he elaborated, *"What has been heard from the U.S. since the emergence of the new regime is only lunatic theory of 'threat from North Korea' and groundless rhetoric about 'complete denuclearization.'"*

The stance of North Korean administration is that no dialogue with US will be possible until they do not roll back their hostile tactics, and any attempts from US in future will be ignored/ U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits to South Korea alongside Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are expected to engage with Chinese officials to discuss standoff with North Korea. The peace talks with North Korea, especially to persuade it to give up nuclear arms have been stalled since 2019. Blinken has made it very clear that pressure and

diplomatic options are both available to North Korea, and what approach US would adopt will depend on the policy review. Analysts have been debating about the possibility that if the United States and its allies should settle for a deal which would freeze North Korea's nuclear activities in return for easing up sanctions to thwart its arsenal from mounting.

---

## Weekly Newsletter

### Myanmar: Military Coup



A protester holds a placard with an image of Myanmar military Commander-in-Chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and Justice For Myanmar as fellow protesters march around Mandalay, Myanmar on

Monday, Feb. 8, 2021. A protest against Myanmar's one-week-old military government swelled rapidly Monday morning as opposition to the coup grew increasingly bold. (AP Photo)

The military in Myanmar toppled the Aung San Suu Kyi's frail democracy on February 1st, 2021. Myanmar military has arrested many civil leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, along with cabinet ministers, the chief ministers of several regions, opposition politicians, writers and activists under the impression, without any evidence, that the elections won by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party are scam and fraud. Myanmar's leading Democratic Party, National League for Democracy, won the elections by 83%. Military refused to accept the elections. Aung San Suu Kyi has been Myanmar's de facto leader since the elections of 2015. The military argued that elections were fraudulent and threatened to take action. Not long after the threat was made, Myanmar's houses of parliament were surrounded by the military soldiers. Military has also accused Aung San Suu Kyi of violating an obscure import law, many are viewing this accusation as a ploy to keep her incarcerated.

Military had been in power in Myanmar since 1962. In 2011, quasi-democracy began when military implemented parliamentary elections and other reforms. Unfortunately, the recent coup has brought back the full military rule just after nine years of quasi-democracy. The military coup in Myanmar was effectively declared on the military owned Myawaddy TV station. The presenter quoted the constitution of 2008 and described that it allows military to take control and declare national emergency. It was further added that the national emergency will stay in place for one year. Power has been handed over to Commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing. According to reports, two days from February 1st, military took control of the parliament and other State institutions and operations including country's infrastructure, suspended most television broadcasts and cancelled all domestic and international

flights. Telephone and internet access was suspended in major cities. The stock market and commercial banks were closed. The full military takeover has caused protests against the military regime. The protestors include teachers, lawyers, students, bank officers and government workers. It has also been reported that soldiers have used water cannon against the protestors. Strict restrictions have been imposed including curfew and gatherings. Many international States have condemned the military takeover including EU, Australia, UK and the U.S. Whereas, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines called it an internal matter. China urged all sides to resolve the differences.

## Glacier collapse in India



A piece of Himalayan glacier in the Indian state of Uttarakhand broke off and fell into a river Sunday, causing flood that have killed at least 20 people so far, while nearly 200 remain missing. The wall of water barreled down a valley in the northern state of Uttarakhand on Sunday morning,

destroying bridges, roads and two hydroelectric power plants this is not a small incident, it's more alarming that the glaciers are melting more rapidly as compare to previous years. Environment protectionists are worried and call it a climate change event and the glaciers are melting due to global warming, however they also warned people to get ready for more disasters.

Asia is home to some of the world's biggest waterways, from the Ganges and the Indus in India to the Yangtze and Mekong originating in China, that snake for thousands of kilometers. They support the livelihoods of vast numbers of farmers and fishermen, and supply drinking water to billions of people, but have come under unprecedented pressure in recent years.

Higher temperatures are causing glaciers that feed the rivers to shrink, threatening water supplies and also increasing the chances of landslides and floods, while critics blame dam building and pollution for damaging fragile ecosystems.

Rivers are really at risk from development projects, dumping of solid waste and liquid waste, sand mining and stone mining, Himanshu Thakkar, from the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People are very much dependent on these rivers. In regions like the Himalaya, the problem of rising temperatures is three-fold:

- It leads to the melting of mountain glaciers, which can spark floods.
- It also decreases glacial coverage, which leads to a reduction in the long-term availability of water for people, agriculture, and hydropower.
- As glacier cover reduces and the area is replaced by water or land and hence the land Corrosion started.

Glaciers are often referred to as the "water towers" of the world, with half of humanity depending on mountains for their water needs. The Tibetan Plateau alone is the source of 10 of

Asia's biggest rivers and provides water to 1.35 billion people, or 20 per cent of the world's population.

The incident raises questions about developing a region that is vulnerable to climate change. The IPCC's Special Report on Oceans and Cryosphere warned that glacier retreat could increase the risk of landslides, floods and cascading events in regions where these disasters were previously unheard.

In the Paris Agreement, Member States committed to limit global temperature increases to well below 2°C, and preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. Slowing global warming would help save glaciers, but countries must also prepare mountain ecosystems for an unavoidable increase in temperatures. Steps need to be taken otherwise there will be a regret at the end.

---

## **Weekly Newsletter**

The EU has been receiving denigration from member States for the slothful pace of COVID vaccinations. It has been reported that U.S. and UK are far ahead from EU in terms of ratio of population that is being vaccinated. The EU's vaccination scheme includes co-ordination purchase of COVID vaccines for all 27 member States. As per European Commission, buying vaccines for all member States kills the urge of competition between States and they all receive the vaccines irrespective of their power of buying. EC further explains that buying vaccines in large bulks is also cost effective because then one has the power and space to negotiate. After receiving the multiple batches of vaccines, EU distributes them among the member State as per their population. EU approved the purchase of about 300 million doses of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in

December but the company could not deliver 12.5 million doses by the end of December 2020 due to supply chain issues. The head of BioNTech, Uğur Şahin, explained that the cause of delay, despite company's fast manufacturing capacity, in delivering the vaccine is because EU erroneously presumed that many vaccines will be ready at once. This has caused many States to approve Moderna or Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine for their population. EU has also ordered 400 million doses from Moderna or Oxford-AstraZeneca, 300 million doses from Sanofi-GSK, 400 million doses from Johnson & Johnson, 405 million doses from CureVac along with doubling the doses of vaccine from Pfizer/BioNTech to 600 million.

Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said that Moderna or Oxford-AstraZeneca is also falling behind in producing and delivering the vaccine on time. It is also noteworthy that the AstraZeneca vaccine is not approved by the EU's drug regulator, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) but is expecting to get approval by the end of January 2021. Moderna or Oxford-AstraZeneca said that due to production problems EU will be receiving initial doses of the vaccine lower than expected, about a cut of 60%. EU is receiving great criticism over the slow rollout of the vaccines because only 0.29% of the population in France has received vaccine jabs, whereas, Israel has successfully vaccinated 22% of its population out of nine million. Amid this, EU has issued a warning that it will constrict the rules on exporting the COVID vaccines. The health commissioner also said that any of the companies preparing vaccines against COVID will have to issue an early warning before exporting it to any third world countries.