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GLOBAL UP-TO-DATE

A  Publication

The world around us is changing rapidly. Wars, new turn in global politics, human rights issues are occurring every day, posing new challenges and concerns. Global Up-to-Date is an initiative by Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) which will work as a hub for explaining the contemporary global issues.

The regular briefs will focus and explain the issues related to International Politics, Economy, Security, Human Rights, and Development. There will be a monthly printed version newsletter containing briefs of all the contemporary global important issues. The online version contains regular updates of the pressing issues along with the PDF version of the newsletter.

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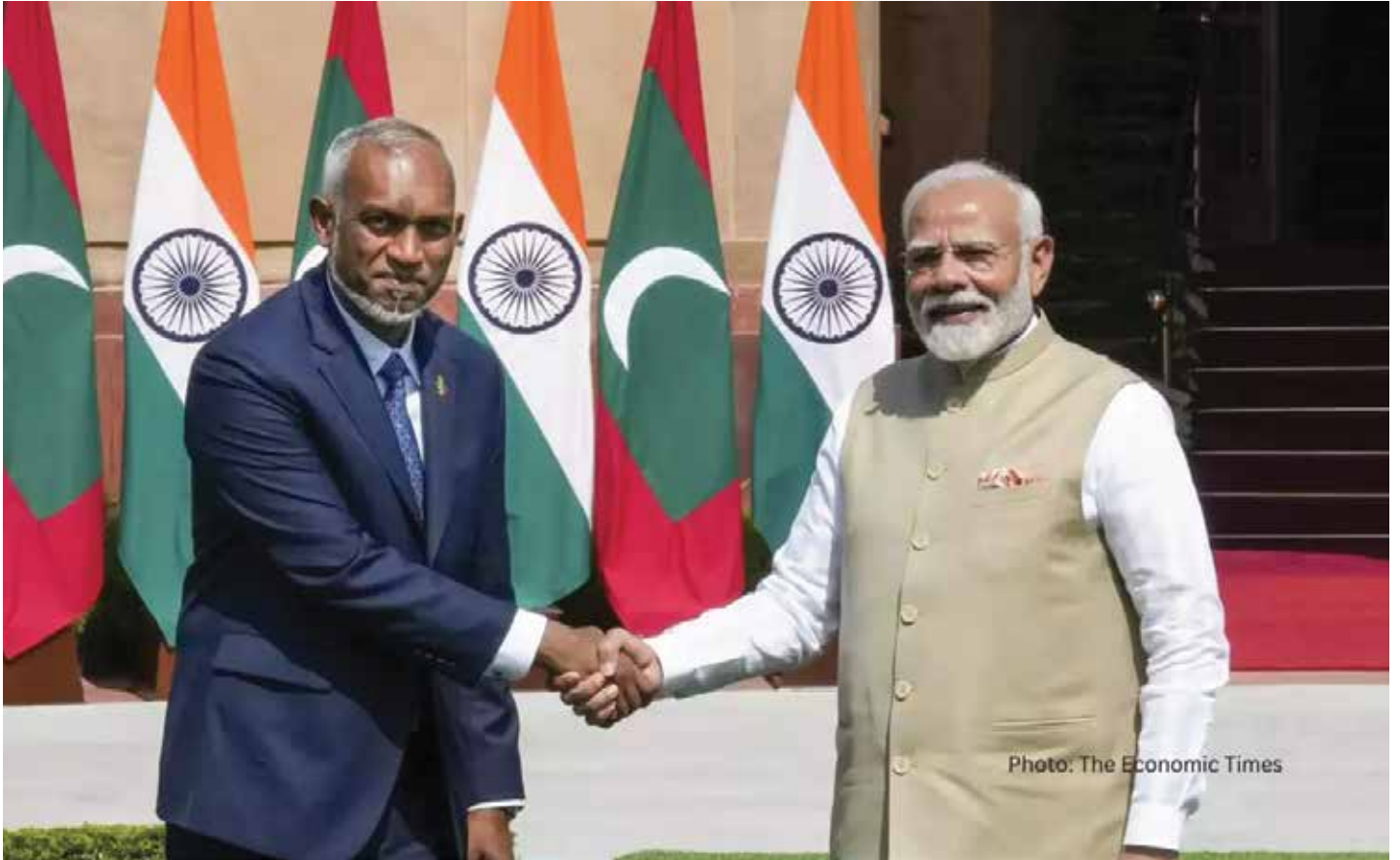
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A Conspiracy Unfolding India's Ambitions and Maldives Aspirations for Regional Dominance

Sadia Tasneem



Based on an internal document, The Washington Post reported on December 30, 2024, that opposition leaders in the Maldives and agents of India's intelligence agency allegedly conspired to depose President Mohamed Muizzu early last year. Speaking out against the accusations, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal claimed that the journal and reporter seemed to have a "compulsive hostility" toward India.

In late 2023, President Muizzu threatened to withdraw Indian troops from the Maldives, aiming to secure military aid agreements with Beijing and strengthen relations with China. In January 2024, India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), began discussing a strategy to replace Muizzu with opposition leaders, which was developed within weeks. Maldivian opposition lawmakers proposed a plan to remove Muizzu from office by bribing 40 members of parliament, including those from his party, along with three criminal groups and ten senior military and police officials. The Washington Post obtained a document titled "Democratic Renewal Initiative," which revealed that the conspirators aimed to secure 87 million Maldivian rufiyaa, or approximately \$6 million, from India to finance their efforts.

This situation sheds light on the complex rivalry between China and India over control of this strategically important region in Asia. Although extensive confidential discussions took place, the conspirators ultimately failed to remove Muizzu from office, and India did not support or pursue this effort. Both countries have provided loans, infrastructure projects, and political backing to smaller nations, complicating India's foreign policy approach amid increasing competition from China. Despite offering support for secular, democratic movements and humanitarian aid in South Asia, India often undermines elected leaders sympathetic to Pakistan and China, contributing to local sentiments of animosity. The Maldives, with a population of 500,000 Muslims, occupies a geographically and politically sensitive position due to its maritime routes.

India has played a significant role in selecting leaders and election candidates from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), raising concerns among Maldivian defense officials as polling analysts and campaign workers traveled from India to assist the party against Muizzu. A senior RAW intelligence official in Washington investigated a plot to overthrow President Muizzu, allegedly involving two Indian intermediaries with economic and political ties to the Maldives: Shirish Thorat, a former police officer, and Savio Rodrigues, a publisher from Goa. Although the Muizzu family adviser provided surveillance recordings of conversations between Thorat and an RAW officer, the means of acquiring those recordings were not disclosed. Thorat and Rodrigues acknowledged their preparations to remove Muizzu but did not clarify if they were acting on behalf of the Indian government.

Intelligence actions are often extensions of foreign policy, with various strategies for achieving success. It remains unclear whether New Delhi authorized the plot or seriously considered supporting the impeachment effort. A Maldives legislator and a RAW intelligence officer expressed skepticism about moving forward with impeachment, citing concerns about potential instability in the already politically volatile Maldives, which is vulnerable to Islamic extremism.

Due to pressing financial realities, Muizzu has had to pragmatically modify his position toward India. He now acknowledges India's crucial role in stabilizing the Maldivian economy, despite his previous hostility. In response, India has shifted its support for President Muizzu to maintain its influence. The State Bank of India has agreed to postpone \$100 million in loan payments for a year, as the Maldives grapples with a substantial debt burden exceeding \$8 billion, or 120 percent of its GDP. China and India are the Maldives' two biggest lenders.

According to a statement from India, the two governments have reaffirmed India's role in the Maldives. India will assist the Maldivian military in constructing and managing a naval harbor that had previously sparked protests, open the new Maldivian Ministry of Defense headquarters, and provide ongoing training for the country's police and military. A politician from Muizzu's party commented that India lacks justification for using secretive tactics to exert pressure on the president. The ongoing political turmoil in the Maldives reflects a deeper issue with India's foreign policy. Although India aims to foster pro-Indian leadership throughout South Asia, its methods often create resentment in the region. Analysts warn that such actions could backfire, increasing opposition movements and alienating the local population. As China and India continue their power struggle, the Maldives finds itself at a complex geopolitical crossroads.

Assad's Exit: Syria's Tumultuous Road to Rebirth

Depanjali Roy

If not in a similar way, but in the same year Bangladesh and Syria got their freedom from decade long dictatorship. Bangladesh witnessed it in the month of August and now Syria owned it in December, when Bashar al-Assad fled Syria with its family to Russia. He was in power for 24 years. During his rule the Syrian Civil War started and continued for 13 years which cost the lives of 0.5 million people and 10 million people lost their homes and belongings and had to flee the country to secure their lives. Though the people of Syria are free from fear, still the concern is to build the country through transformation with the political parties and distribute the power for the wellbeing of the general public.

For five decades the Asad family ruled Syria, as Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar al-Assad became the President of Syria in 1971, as the leader of Ba'ath Party. After coming to power Hafez al-Assad declared one political party rule, so Ba'ath Party remained the only political party in Syria. He ruled Syria for 29 years before his death in 2000. During his period human rights violation, using military power to suppress the people, suppression of political opposition, violation of freedom of expression took place. He also maintained close ties with Russia, which helped the regime in the civil war as well.

In December after the rebel group took over Damascus, Bashar al Assad and his family had to flee the country. At first they were just vanished, no speculations were received on their whereabouts. But the next day (Date), if it was confirmed that, he fled to Russia with his whole family. As an alliance of Bashar al Assad Russia gave them the security after it was a matter of fear to survive in Syrian land.



Photo: Ghaith Alsayed/AP/picture-alliance

Now, the international dynamic will change, as the stance of Russia, Iran, Turkey and USA, all have to lose something or gain out of it.

Iran can be in a very critical situation. The attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, is undertaken to be led by Iran. However, Iran never accepted any involvement in the attacks. In July 2024, Iran's influence in the region faced a significant setback when Ismail Haniyeh, the former leader of Hamas, was assassinated in an explosion during his visit to Tehran. Yahya Sinwar took his place as the next leader, but he was also killed by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in October 2024. Later Hassan Nasrallah, who was the former leader of Hezbollah, was also killed by the Israeli military through air strike. Now Iran has no other way but to think about security as the "Axis of Resistance" between Syria and Iran no longer exists. During the Assad regime, Iran used Syria as a corridor to deliver logistics and weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas in Gaza which helped the Assad regime to ensure security from its enemies, on the other side Iran could expand its influence across its border. Iran has already shifted its stance toward Syria, adopting a more conciliatory approach toward the new leadership it once labeled as "terrorists." The Iranian foreign minister has reached out to the Syrian government and recognized "legitimate opposition groups," signaling a willingness to engage in negotiations.

On the other hand, the Kurds on the North-East side of Syria are conscious about their existence even after the fall of Assad regime. During the rule of Bashar al- Assad the Kurds were tortured, so they have formed a semi-autonomous government. Though after December 9, 2024 many people from the Kurdish community left Damascus for the safety of their family. It proves that the Kurdish community is skeptical of their existence in the new Syria. Well, it's kind of similar to how the minority communities experienced after Sheikh Hasina fled from Bangladesh on August 5, 2024. The Kurdish population, historically spread across Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, has long aspired to establish an autonomous state independent of these nations. Amid the evolving geopolitical landscape, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey is likely to exploit this situation to consolidate control over Kurdish territories near Turkey's borders. In this context, Kurdish officials and analysts emphasize that maintaining their territorial hold will depend heavily on support from the United States and Western governments. Without such backing, they may face intensified conflict with rebel factions supported by Turkey.

The USA wants a ceasefire between the Turks and the Kurds. The main goal of the USA was to "make sure that ISIS was in a box", said by Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken. According to the USA, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is a Kurdish militant political organization, holds the mission similar to ISIS. His meetings in Turkey included talks with the foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, who earlier last week said that "any P.K.K. extension in Syria cannot be considered a legitimate partner.". With the help of American troops, last week, Kurdish forces and Syrian National army came to a ceasefire in the area of Manbij, which they had conquered from Islamist groups in 2016. Still the Kurdish commander expressed his concern on the existence of their community. To keep a balance General Abdi, the Kurdish commander, wants to build up a good relation with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) to mend the gaps.

In this scenario, Turkey is likely to closely monitor the dynamics between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Kurdish community. Ankara's "conflict of interest" could potentially escalate into a full-scale military offensive against Kurdish forces. Such a move, however, would risk triggering international sanctions and complicate Turkey's relations with the U.S. administration, presenting significant diplomatic and economic challenges.

Crisis in the Blue House: South Korea's Impeachment Drama

Nuzhat Tabassum



Photo: Jung Yeon-je

The world has been shocked by South Korea's three-president change in a single month. President Yoon Suk Yeol was impeached on December 14, 2024 due to his sudden declaration of martial law on December 03, 2024 by the South Korean parliament. Later, on the same day, Prime Minister, second-ranking official of South Korea Han Duck-soo, a conservative became the acting president after Yoon's powers and responsibilities were suspended. The Constitutional Court has 180 days to decide if they will remove Yoon from the office or if they want to reinstate Yoon in his position. A national election will be held within 60 days if Yoon is removed from office.

Even though his martial law lasted only for six hours. Nonetheless, it created political unrest, stalled diplomatic efforts and shook financial markets. President Yoon reasoned his martial law declaration that the opposition had taken control of the parliament that was impeding government operations. He also called the opposition party, the Democratic Party, 'anti-state forces' that has links to North Korea, though he provided no evidence for his bold claims. Yoon has yet to be formally removed from office. After Han Duck-soo took his position, he worked to stabilize the market and reassure important diplomatic allies. But he was soon embroiled in a political conflict with the opposition party. In order to improve justice and public confidence in the court's ruling on Yoon's impeachment, the DP demanded that Han immediately fill the three vacant justice seats at the Constitutional Court. Han refused to comply. For a court to remove Yoon from office, at least six justices must support the decision. A full nine-member bench is likely to increase the chances of Yoon's removal, making it crucial for the court's entire panel to be reinstated. Critics argue that Han, despite his claim of refraining from appointing justices without bipartisan agreement, appears to align with Yoon's supporters within the ruling People Power Party (PPP), who aim to see Yoon return to power. Acting President Han was impeached on 27 December 2024. Since South Korea became a democracy, this is the first time an acting president has been removed from office almost after 40 years.

Yoon has been a vital diplomatically in tackling shared concerns like China's aggressiveness, North Korea's nuclear threats, and vulnerabilities in global supply chains. Yoon did carry out a number of highly appreciated programs that improved his country's relations with the rest of the world, particularly the West. Under president Yoon, South Korea joined the Chips 4 Alliance for semiconductor supply chains and export controls, bolstered connections with Japan, promoted trilateral cooperation with the U.S. and Japan, and invested in U.S.-based electric car and battery manufacturing, and backed Ukraine. His impeachment and political attacks will now tarnish these and other initiatives, and Seoul is likely to make cuts elsewhere. Policymakers in the US, Japan, and Europe were baffled by his martial law farce. Just as Acting President Han was reassuring the world that South Korea has returned to normalcy, following the martial law incident, he was impeached, further destabilizing the political and economic situation of South Korea. With his impeachment, South Korea is facing a lack of good governance and credible leadership. Due to political turmoil, the South Korean won fell 0.53 percent to 1,475.4 per dollar. In stark contrast to several major indices, both in Asia and worldwide, the benchmark Kospi index of the stock market lost 1.5% and slid more than 1% to close at 2,404.77. The events after the declaration of martial law on December 3 have resulted in the biggest political crisis to affect South Korea since 1987. Due to the situation, Seoul is terribly unprepared to handle Donald Trump's return as president of the United States and all of the security risks he poses to Korea.

Currently, Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok is serving as the acting president. As soon as Choi took office, he gave the military orders to strengthen readiness to repel any North Korean aggressions and directed diplomats to provide assurances to key allies including the US and Japan. Some analysts speculate that Mr. Choi is less qualified to be an acting president than Mr. Han. It might make the country's enemy exploit the internal turmoil.