

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

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

25 November 2021, Vol.2, No.34

## Anti-lockdown protests in Europe, Farmers' protests in India, and Continuing instability in Sudan

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Across Europe, a series of protests continued over lockdown and vaccination. (Image Source: OlivierMatthys/APphoto/DW)

### Europe: Restrictions lead to Widespread Protests

#### In the news

On 23 November, the WHO, on assessing Europe's declining coronavirus situation, warned: "Cumulative reported deaths are projected to reach over 2.2 million by spring next year, based on current trends."

On 22 November, Austria declared its fourth nationwide lockdown, forcing 8.9 million Austrians to be home-bound for all but essential reasons. Following this, Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said: "It's a problem for the whole society because even those that are vaccinated, if they don't have access to an intensive care unit because they're blocked by those who are not vaccinated and got sick, so then they are affected as well." Following this, demonstrations were held in Vienna that saw a turnout of 35,000 people.

On 22 November, the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte condemned the rioters in Rotterdam who pelted stones and set fire to vehicles, saying: "There is a lot of unrest in society because we have been dealing with misery of corona for so long. But I will never accept idiots using pure violence just because they are unhappy."

On 21 November, Belgium's Home Affairs Minister Annelies Verlinden responded to the violent protests in Brussels, saying: "A mature democracy respects the opinion of a minority but does not accept that a few abuse their protest vote by force. Vaccinated or not: it is important that we continue to follow the measures."

### Issues at large

First, a regional mapping of protests within Europe. The pandemic's fourth wave has led to the imposition of tighter restrictions across Europe. These have been followed by large-scale protests. In terms of the surge in infections and the protests, the hardest-hit countries include Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. Countries such as France, Italy, Romania, and others have seen an increase in cases. However, they are yet to witness widespread violent protests.

Second, the multiple 'waves.' Similar to the pandemic waves, the protests seem to be occurring in waves. The initial waves of unrest due to the pandemic were seen in Spain, and Italy followed by the UK. The latest wave of opposition is primarily being witnessed in Western Europe where quiet periods are ensued by chaos.

Third, the multiple actors. The protesters are a mixed bag with members from far-right groups, anti-vaccine and anti-mask parties, and apolitical people refusing vaccinations. The Netherlands also saw antisemitism supporters comparing the government to a "Nazi regime", while the Austrian government was called a "coronavirus dictatorship." The diverse crowd is united by their "common mistrust in the system and politics, especially in the area of coronavirus." Further, there is a demographic divide in participation as the vulnerable groups of society, such as senior citizens and children, largely refrain from protesting.

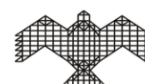
Fourth, the multiple reasons. The freedom of choice is another reason for the opposition. Countering the argument of 'my body, my choice' is complicated. On 19 November, Austria declared vaccinations to be a legal requirement from February 2022. Propagated primarily by anti-vaccine groups, mandatory vaccinations are termed as a "restriction of human rights." The restrictions are set to severely impact the economy with small businesses bound to run into financial difficulties as their livelihoods, based on shoestring budgets, will leave them unable to repay loans. Many others' grounds for protesting relate to their frustration on being restricted from free movement. A general dissatisfaction regarding the government's ineffective measures has sabotaged the citizens' trust. In line with this sentiment, protesters in Belgium condemned the officials of acting in desperation as declining immunity meant they "no longer knew what to do."

### In perspective

First, the immunity test. After more than a year of vaccination efforts, Europe's move to attain herd immunity has failed. The forthcoming winter only provides an enabling ground for the already rampant virus to spread. It seems the worst is yet to come.

Second, coercion is detrimental in the long term. According to scientists, mandatory vaccinations could be a 'double-edged sword' as it could trigger hostility to future vaccination campaigns. Vaccine skeptics may end up completely rejecting it. Dabbling on consent will undermine the people's trust in their governments.

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## India: Electoral calculations prevail over farmers' concerns

### In the news

On 19 November, on the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the three farm laws would be repealed. The decision came after one year of massive protests by different farmers' organizations (especially from Punjab and Haryana) in and around Delhi, under the umbrella of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), since 26 November 2020, calling for the repeal of those laws. Modi claimed that though the farm laws were meant to strengthen the small farmers, all efforts of the government to convince them about the benefits had failed.

On the same day, the SKM welcomed the repeal but indicated that it would raise the other pending demands like legalization of Minimum Support Price (MSP). Meanwhile, those who supported laws called it an 'unfortunate decision' influenced by political considerations.

### Issues at large

First, repeal as a tactical retreat. The announcement was a complete surprise as the government did not take any initiative over the recent past months. Eleven rounds of negotiations were held between the 29 representatives of farmer's unions and government ministers, in the initial stages of the protests; however, a stalemate continued after the last round in January 2021. Therefore, the government's announcement of annulment after nearly ten months, smacks of political compulsions and a strategic move rather than concerns for farmers' interests.

Second, confusing signals from and within the government. Especially when all the satraps of government were steadfastly insisting that the laws were good for farmers and would never be rolled back. How could government intentions melt from a tough stand? It means the government also knew that the laws were tuned more to protect interest of agri-businesses rather than farmers. Hence, they stand to lose before the farmers.

Third, protests and the political cost. The roll-back has been announced amidst impending elections in five States over next year. Elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh are already heating up which may have forced the government to take a U-turn. Punjab and UP are states with huge base of farmers, with the former being the core driving force of the agitation. Farmers from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, also participated in the protests, and those from other states lent their support. Guru Nanak Jayanti was chosen to underline concessions to Sikh communities. Hence, roll-back is motivated by escalating political costs.

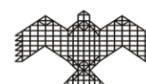
Fourth, the government's efforts to decimate the protest. The government roped in police to remove the protestors unsuccessfully from Delhi-UP borders. Farmers, too, went on the back foot when internal dissensions erupted owing to the storming of Red Fort on 26 January 2021. All divisive political efforts were made to liquidate the protests. However, the farmers galvanized themselves with fresh energy to sustain the protest further. Roll-back of laws thus is more on account of electoral imperatives than concerns for farmers.

Fifth, the suspension of the laws. The Supreme Court had placed a stay on the implementation of the three laws on 12 January, which were promulgated as an ordinance on 5 June 2020. Hence these were in force for only 221 days. The government then imposed a stock limit under the Essential Commodities Act 1955. Hence, the announcement is immaterial as the laws were under suspension; yet a U-turn will help the government towards smooth conduct of the winter session of Parliament; and ensure mitigation of calculated electoral loss in the immediate future.

### In perspective

Repeals seem to be a huge jolt to the government and cudgels into the hands of the opposition. First, agricultural marketing reforms have been pending for a long to facilitate farmers their due. The central government legislated on a state subject. Erstwhile attempts at reforming Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Acts of the state had failed, which prompted the Centre to enact. Once again, the laws have been rolled back. Second, this is the second roll-back of this government, the first being the Land Acquisition Reforms of 2015. Both were related to farmers. It may motivate CAA and Asset monetization. Third, these laws were the third tranche under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan to support ailing economy during COVID 19, according to the government. Hence, a big jolt to Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan too. Congress-I, Trinamool, AAP, and others who lent their support were being castigated as against national interest will now use their narratives of the ruling party being anti-farmer to capitalize on popular sentiments.

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## Sudan: Uncertainty looms as military reinstates PM Hamdok

### In the news

On 22 November, Abdalla Hamdok was released from house arrest and reinstated as the Prime Minister to lead a technocratic Cabinet until elections are held in 2023. The reinstatement came after Hamdok signed a 14-point deal with the military; this includes a transfer of power to elected civilian leadership at the end of the transitional period, a probe into the killing of anti-coup protesters, and release of all political prisoners.

On the same day, the US Embassy in Khartoum tweeted a statement by the US, EU, UK, Switzerland, Norway, and Canada, stating that they were encouraged by the development. On 23 November, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken welcomed the reinstatement. Blinken's spokesperson said that he saw the move as an "important first step."

On 23 November, the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), which consists of political parties and pro-democracy groups, said it would not accept the deal, terming it a move to legitimize the coup. Twelve ministers from the FFC who were part of the transitional government prior to the coup submitted resignations in protest of the deal.

### Issues at large

First, the pressure on the military. The decision to reinstate Hamdok came amid external pressure. Following the coup, on 25 October, the US suspended aid worth USD 700 million to Sudan. The World Bank too, paused all its disbursements to Sudan. Similarly, the African Union suspended Sudan, calling for the restoration of the transitional rule. The UN Secretary-General had urged coup leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to bring back constitutional order.

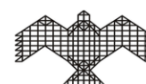
Second, the widespread unrest. Sudan is witnessing one of the largest uprisings since the 2019 protests, which led to the ouster of dictator Omar al-Bashir. The people have maintained their stance that they would not settle for anything less than a democracy. There has been a shift in the goals of the protesters, who initially pushed for an end to military rule. Yet, the reinstatement of Hamdok has not satisfied their demands, as they claim to have lost in him.

Third, the clampdown on movement and internet. Sudanese police have accused protesters of instigating violence and have refused to take responsibility for the casualties caused since the coup. Similarly, communication channels were cut off after the coup when the military announced an internet shutdown. Following the coup, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to condemn the coup and assign an envoy to map these alleged violations.

### In perspective

The details of the deal signed recently are unclear regarding the power-sharing between the transitional PM and the military. The military is likely to find it challenging to win the people's confidence until the transitional period ends. Furthermore, Hamdok is likely to face trouble bringing the rest of the political parties on board, given their reluctance to accept the deal with the military. Despite this, the international community, including the major powers, seems to have accepted the ongoing political scenario in Sudan.

The ouster of al-Bashir gave new hope to Sudan. However, the October coup, which followed a similar attempt in September, signals that the transitional period in 2019 had a fragile foundation.



## Also, from around the world

By D Suba Chandran

### [Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia](#)

#### **China: 11.6 million children born during 2000-10 were not counted, says Bloomberg**

On 24 November, Bloomberg, in a report titled, "China Finds 12 Million Children That It Didn't Know Existed" referring to a latest statistical yearbook released by the government, says that nearly 11.6 million children born during 2000-10, were not counted. According to the Bloomberg report: "The difference could be the result of some parents failing to register births to avoid punishment if they breached the one-child policy."

#### **China: Peng Shuai assures the International Olympic Committee about her safety**

On 22 November, the South China Morning Post reported Peng Shuai, the tennis star from China, assuring the President of the International Olympic Committee about her safety in a video meeting. Peng Shuai's disappearance in China after accusing a government official of sexual harassment, has created a storm at the global level. Earlier, a spokesperson of the UN Human Rights office stated: "What we would say is that it would be important to have proof of her whereabouts and wellbeing, and we would urge that there be an investigation with full transparency into her allegations of sexual assault." "This is not a diplomatic matter," Zhao said when asked about Peng during a regular press conference on Tuesday. Zhao Lijian, China's foreign ministry spokesperson, after the above video said: "I believe everyone will have seen she has recently attended some public activities and also held a video call with IOC president Bach. I hope certain people will cease malicious hyping, let alone politicisation."

#### **Myanmar: 21 activists sentenced to death by a military tribunal; fighting reported in Shan state between the military and armed groups**

On 23 November, a military tribunal in Myanmar handed death sentences to 21 activists for their role in attacking military targets. According to Irrawaddy: The death sentences have been handed down to anti-regime protesters in townships currently under martial law. The military regime has imposed martial law in Hlaing Tharyar, Shwepyithar, South Dagon, North Dagon, Dagon Seikkan and North Okkalapa townships in Yangon, as well as in townships in Mandalay." On 25 November, the Irrawaddy also reported of fierce clashes between "Myanmar's junta and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)" in the northern Shan State. In another report, Irrawaddy said: "Nearly 200 junta-appointed local administrators have been killed in targeted attacks in the nine months since the military's coup, while another 135 have been wounded, according to regime-controlled media."

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## Peace and Conflict from South Asia

### **Sri Lanka: The trial begins over the Easter Sunday bombings in 2019**

On 23 November, the trial of 25 men accused of 2019 bombings in Colombo began. In April 2019, three churches and three luxury hotels in Colombo were targeted in a coordinated attack involving suicide bombers that killed around 270 people, mostly the Christian minorities. According to available reports, more than 23,000 charges have been filed against the suspects. According to Noordeen M. Shaheed, the attorney representing six suspects: "As things are now it is impossible to identify which specific charges match with which suspect. We are hoping there will be more clarity on this. We are concerned that this case will drag on and it will be a futile exercise."

## Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

### **Lebanon: Australia lists Hezbollah as a terror organization**

On 24 November, Karen Andrews, Australia's Minister for Home Affairs, in a media release said: "The Morrison Government continues to keep Australians safe from terrorism and violent extremism, by announcing today the intention to list The Base and the entirety of Hizballah as terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code." She also said: "The Government has zero tolerance for violence, and there is no cause – religious or ideological – that can justify killing innocent people... The listings will enable the application of terrorist organisation offences to these groups, and align Australia with international partners such as the United Kingdom and Canada."

### **Syria: The State media claims Israeli airstrike killing two people**

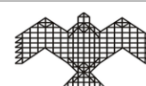
On 24 November, Reuters, referring to Syrian state media, claimed the killing of two people in an Israeli airstrike. According to the Reuters report: "Israel has mounted frequent attacks against what it has described as Iranian targets in Syria, where Tehran-backed forces including Lebanon's Hezbollah have deployed over the last decade to support President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's war."

### **Yemen: Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition intensifies**

On 24 November, Reuters reported the Saudi-led coalition launching airstrikes on drone sites of the Houthis in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. On 23 November, in another news report, Reuters mentioned: "The Saudi-led military alliance in Yemen said... it had destroyed a ballistic missile launch site in overnight air strikes in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa, where residents reported big explosions." Earlier, on 20 November, there was another report, mentioning the Houthis firing "14 drones at several Saudi Arabian cities, including at Saudi Aramco facilities in Jeddah."

### **Iraq: More than 400 return from Belarus**

On 18 November, more than 430 Iraqis, who tried to cross into Poland from Belarus returned. According to a report published by Al Jazeera, they "returned from Belarus to Iraq last Thursday on a government-mandated repatriation flight, as part of the Iraqi government's bid to ease the tensions that have been flaring by the Belarus-Poland border for the past few months."



### Africa: "57.5 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance" in West and Central Africa region, says the latest UNICEF report

On 23 November, in its recent report titled, "Protecting children in West and Central Africa," the UNICEF mentions: "Major humanitarian crises continue to unfold across the West and Central Africa region (WCAR). 57.5 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance, a figure that has almost doubled since 2020, due to a surge in armed conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic." According to the finding: "Between 2005 and 2020, 1 out of 4 United Nations verified grave violations against children in the world was committed in West and Central Africa. In 2020 alone, over 6,400 children were victims of one or more grave violations in the region. One in three victims was a girl."

### Ethiopia: PM Abiy Ahmed in the front lines to lead State troops against Tigrayan forces;

France and Germany ask their citizens to leave Ethiopia immediately

On 23 November, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed went to the battleground, where the State forces were fighting the separatist Tigrayan forces. Al Jazeera quoted his tweet: "The time has come to lead the country with sacrifice... Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the battlefield." Ethiopia's forces have been fighting the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) amidst fears of famine. In a related development, France and Germany had advised their citizens to leave Ethiopia.

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### Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

#### Poland: Defence ministry reports of multiple attempts by migrants to cross from Belarus

On 18 November, the DW quoted the Polish Defense Ministry reporting "numerous attempts to cross the border from Belarus." The news report also referred to a Twitter note, "around 100 migrants had been detained." It also referred to the ministry's note saying: "the Belarusians forced the migrants to throw stones at Polish soldiers to distract them. The attempt to cross the border took place several hundred metres away."

#### France: Thousands protest over violence against women

On 20 November, protests were held across France, asking the government to "do more to prevent violence against women." According to a DW news report: "The demonstrations come amid growing anger and discussions surrounding domestic violence. A woman is killed approximately every three days by their current or former partner in France. The protesters marched through the streets of Paris and other cities. In the capital they walked behind a banner reading: Stop sexist and sexual violence."

#### Greece: Trial of 24 activists who helped migrants

On 18 November, Greece started a trial, accusing 24 people of helping the migrants arrive in Greece. According to a DW report: "The 24 activists are alleged to be affiliated with Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI) which is a non-profit search and rescue team that took part in operations in Greek territorial waters between 2016 and 2018. They face

charges of human trafficking, money laundering, being part of a criminal group, and espionage."

### Haiti: Two hostages amongst the 17 released

On 21 November, two hostages, amongst the group of 17 belonging to an American missionary, were released in Haiti. On 16 October, 17 people belonging to a missionary group were kidnapped by a gang in the Haiti capital – Port-au-Prince. According to a New York Times report: "The group of hostages, which included 16 Americans and one Canadian, had been working with Christian Aid Ministries before being abducted by a gang called 400 Mawozo, which is infamous for orchestrating mass kidnappings." The same report also said: "The gang initially demanded a ransom of \$1 million per person, but that was widely viewed as a start to the negotiations that are common in kidnappings in Haiti. It was not immediately clear how much money, if any, was paid."

### The US: A jury in Georgia finds three men guilty of killing an African American jogger in 2020; another jury in Wisconsin acquits a young man, who killed two men

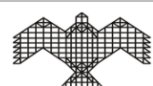
On 24 November, a jury in the state of Georgia found three men accused of murdering Ahmaud Arbery, an African American, in 2020. The prime accused, according to the jury, was found guilty on all counts. The other two were found guilty of four and three counts of felony murder, respectively. Arbery was confronted by the three men when he was jogging in a "white residential area." According to a Wall Street Journal report: "Mr. Arbery's death drew national attention after a video showing the fatal shooting circulated, with many Black civil-rights groups and leaders calling it an example of racist vigilantism. The Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Rev. Al Sharpton both attended the trial in support of the Arbery family. The case put laws authorizing citizen's arrests under scrutiny and led to the passage of a hate-crime law in Georgia."

On 19 November, another jury in the state of Wisconsin, acquitted a young man Kyle Rittenhouse, for shooting three men (of which two died), during the Kenosha protests last year. Rittenhouse was charged on six counts including homicide, when he was a part of the anti-protestors, who were demonstrating against the killing of Jacob Blake, an African American by a police officer in August 2020.

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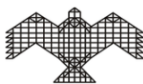
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### About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI)

The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI research are published as briefs, reports and commentary.



### About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible

### About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.



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