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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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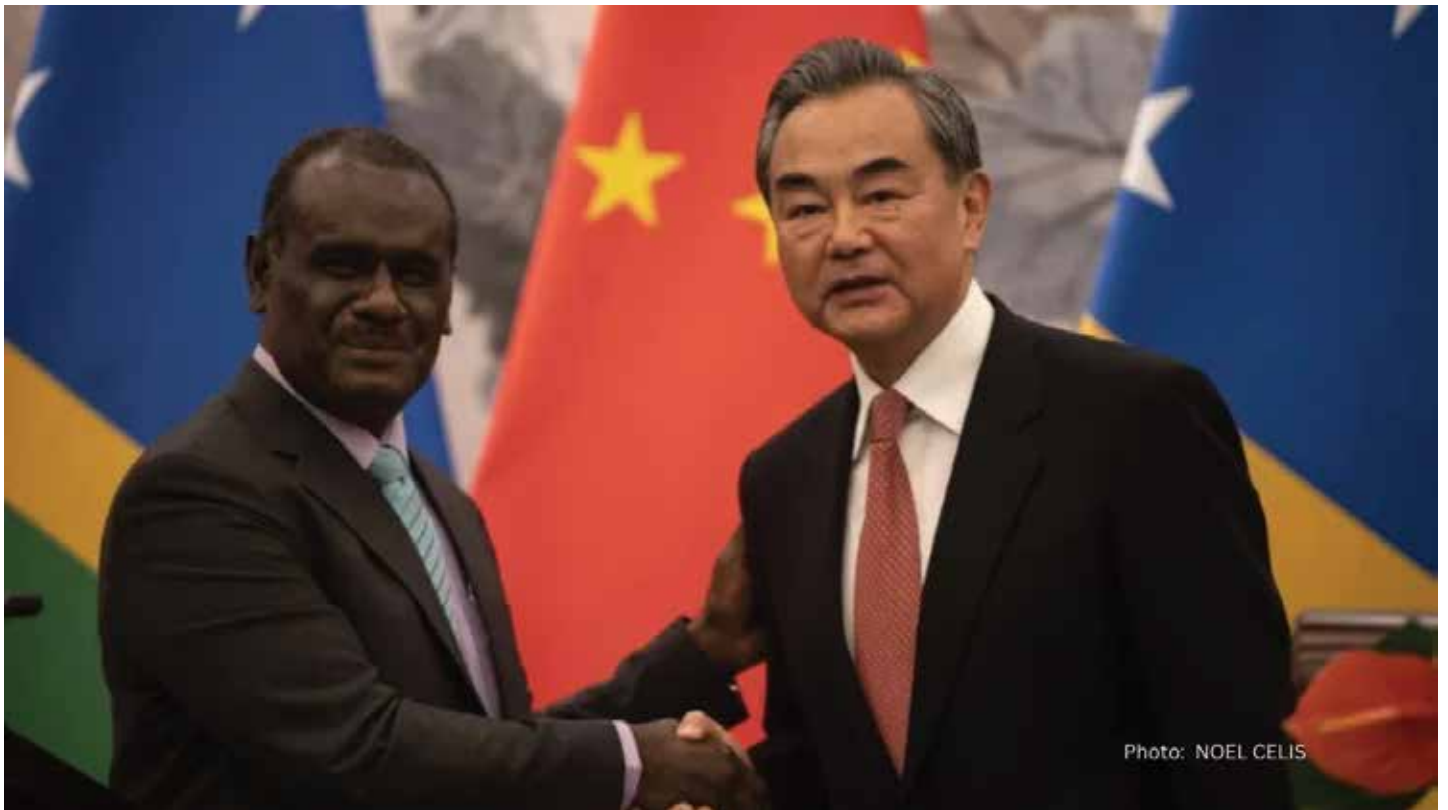
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Solomon Islands Election: China Scores Strategic Victory in South Pacific

Debi Karmakar



"The South Pacific region should not become an arena for great powers to play games, and no country should treat the island countries as its own 'backyard' or engage in zero-sum games and exclusionary arrangements," stated China's Foreign Minister Wang during a joint press conference with his Papua New Guinea counterpart while visiting the country. He called for all parties to respect the choice of the people of the Solomon Islands and discourage interference in their internal affairs.

In the parliamentary election of the Solomon Islands 2024, Sogavare is a prime ministerial candidate. In 2022, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare forged a security agreement with China and invited Chinese police into the Pacific Islands archipelago, drawing the Pacific Islands nation closer to Beijing. Although Sogavare has held the position four times before, he has never served consecutive terms. Previously, after becoming Prime Minister in 2019, Sogavare switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to Beijing and has since strived to strengthen relations with China. This included various infrastructure projects such as ports, roads, and a telecommunications network developed by China in the Solomon Islands. As the current leader of the Ownership, Unity and Responsibility Party (OUR), Sogavare has reiterated his intentions to foster deeper ties with China. However, opposition parties are skeptical about the security pact with China. They argued that the general people of the island are more concerned about poor health services, education, and infrastructure development.

The powerful opposition figure Daniel Suidani has expressed grave concern over China's gaining a foothold in the Solomon Islands, preceding the election period. He believes that a pro-Chinese government could further strengthen Beijing's presence in the region. Suidani, who served as the preceding premier of Malaita province, has accused China of erosive impacts on democracy. He alleges that the Chinese Communist Party is diplomatically supporting pro-Beijing parliamentarians. Suidani's concerns revolved around Chinese aid and investments, including a development fund that has been criticized as a way to curry favor with politicians. He has warned against Beijing's heavy clout and has highlighted his province's decision to block Huawei's telecom project. The decision reflects concerns about reflecting fears over China's expanding power in the Pacific nation.

The Solomon Islands archipelago has a population of 700,000 people and it is strategically located 1,600 km (990 miles) northeast of Australia. The Islands have faced turmoil in the past, including seditious riots in 2021 and inter-communal violence. Due to its location, Solomon Island's stance in the US-China Rivalry is crucial. It has the potential to impact sea and air access, affect Taiwan contingencies, and complicate defense planning for the US and its allies including Australia. The decision not to participate in the Pacific Summit, 2022 led by the USA was seen as a setback for the US in its regional competition with China for influence in the Pacific islands. The US is taking steps to counter China's expanding influence in Oceania by reopening embassies, strengthening bilateral ties with island nations, and collaborating with allies like Australia on military infrastructure upgrades. The Pacific islands play a vital role in the US integrated deterrence strategy against China because of their strategic locations for maritime trade, potential military basing and logistics, intelligence gathering, and diplomatic partnerships.

The national parliament consists of 50 members, elected for a four-year term. The result of the election will determine if any party has secured a majority or if coalition negotiations will be necessary to select a prime Minister. In the 2024 election, the two major opposition parties, CARE and the Democratic Alliance Party, struck a coalition deal to vie against Sogavare's OUR party. CARE won 20 seats, while OUR party won 15 seats in the election but there was no clear winner. To form a government, it will be crucial for these parties to court independent candidates and secure 26 seats. The incumbent Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, announced that he would not run for prime minister in the upcoming vote of May 2, instead, his political party will support former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele.

National elections held on April 17, 2024, delivered no clear winner. It became necessary for weeks of back-room negotiations to form a government. Lawmakers, who are not bound to political parties cast their votes for prime minister in a secret ballot. The nomination vote for the new prime minister took place on May 2. The Solomon Islands will look forward to deepening strong ties with China as Jeremiah Manele becomes the new Prime Minister. He wins the backing of 31 legislators in 50 seats house in a secret ballot. Manele, a far less strident and polarizing political figure will continue to provide China the privileged political access to Solomon Island but in a less rubble-rousing manner.

Taiwan's Crossroads: New President, Old Rivalry

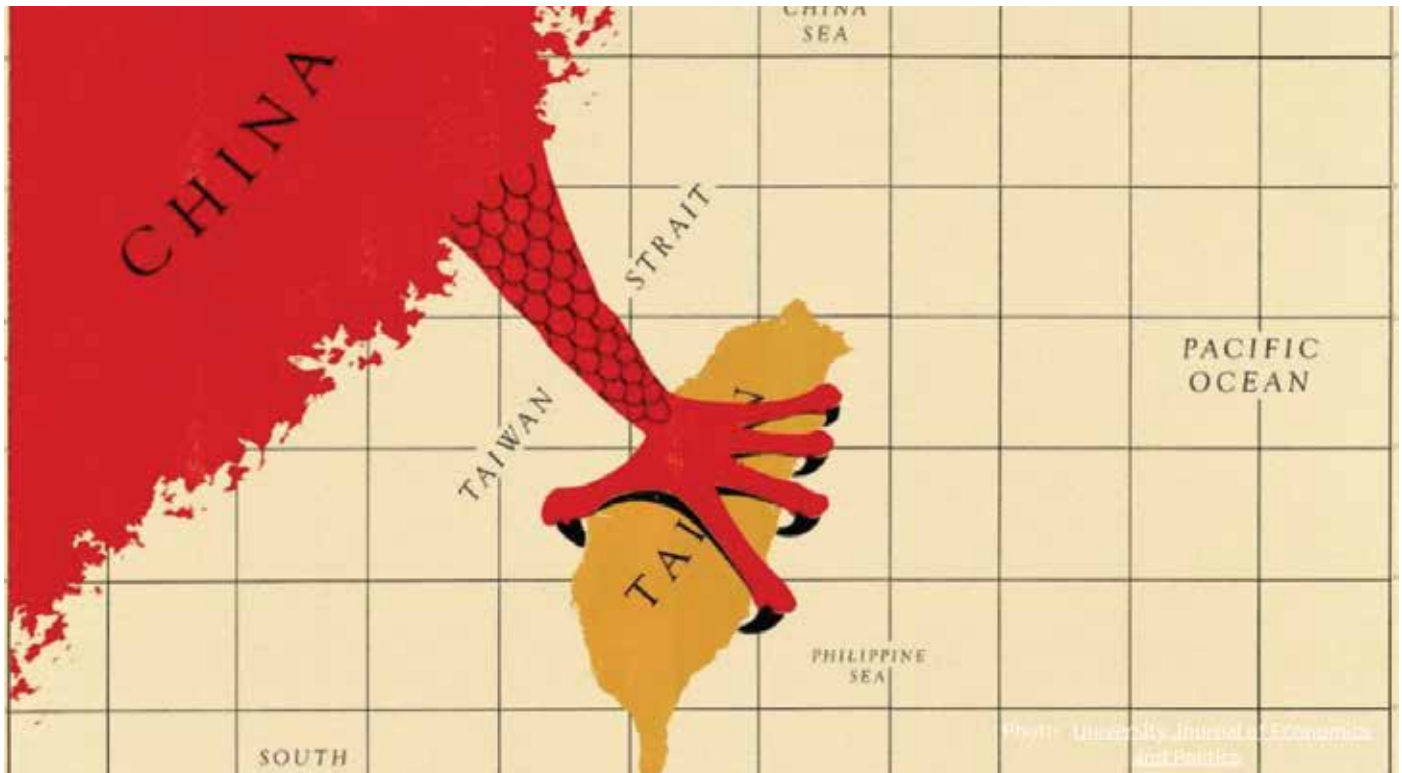
Depanjali Roy

"I also want to call on China to stop threatening Taiwan politically and militarily, and take on global responsibility of maintaining peace and stability, to ensure the world is free from fear of war"

This is what Lai Ching Te aka William Lai said in his inaugural speech on May 20, 2024 while taking the responsibility of the president of Taiwan. In his speech it is seen that Lai wanted to be the flag bearer of peace. He does not encourage or instigate any kind of war or invasion by China.

We all know about the history of Taiwan and China, as after getting separated in 1949. However, China still wants Taiwan to be a part of the mainland and showed full determination to annex the island in the future by force. Though the people of Taiwan do not think alike. They want freedom and democracy to make their decision and come out from the shackles of China. To maintain their influence over Taiwan, China formed ties with another political party of Taiwan, The Kuomintang (KMT), who perceived the same ideology as China.

This year things got uptight when in the elections of Taiwan, The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)'s Lai Ching Te won the presidential election but DPP could not win the majority seats in Legislative Yuan. The majority seats were won by the KMT (52 seats out of 113 seats) as the main opposition party and the other 8 seats were won by Taiwan's Peoples Party (TPP). In this complex scenario president Lai Ching Te had to face more internal challenges than the external ones. In the matter of policy and law change, the majority of the legislative KMT and TPP can easily overshadow DPP's opinion as DPP does not have the majority votes in the parliament.



On the other hand, before the inauguration day, on May 17 2024, a brawl started in the parliament by the lawmakers of DPP and KMT on matters of policy reform. The opposition political party wanted to have the Legislature Yuan to have greater power over the government and also wanted to criminalize the officials who make false statements in the parliament. As the other lawmakers of DPP was not agreeing to it, other than proceeding the discussion the chaos started and the lawmakers were throwing chairs on each other, physical violence took place and the parliament environment got messy.

Even before that incident, Taiwanese youth carried out protests against the KMT members in the parliament. According to them, Taiwan will not adopt any policy which will favor China and hollow the democracy of Taiwan. This Protest by the youth shows how determined they are on the issue of freedom. We can see the power of the Taiwanese people back in 2014 in the "Sunflower Students Movement". In that year KMT was in power and they proposed the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) which will enhance trade, banking, healthcare, tourism, film, telecommunications, and publishing exchange between China and Taiwan. This agreement was sent to the Legislative Yuan for ratification. As the then opposition DPP was against it as well as the student, civic community and academics were opposing this agreement as this agreement with China will make Taiwan vulnerable by making them economically dependent on China. The Sunflower Movement took place and wanted a "clause-to-clause" review. Later because of the long delay, the agreement was never ratified by the Legislature. So, even by forming the government, KMT was unable to exercise their power to ratify the agreement. Analyzing the past incidents, it is observed that Taiwanese people are vocal about their democracy, can exercise their rights and do not have any intention to bow down to China.

However, this year the scenario is different. Despite the protests, on May 28, 2024, the legislature passed the reform which allows the lawmakers to ask military, private companies and individuals to reveal their information for parliamentarians. This reform also criminalizes the public officials, including making the president present reports to answer lawmakers' questions. This reform will provide too much power to the KMT members to exploit democracy by favoring China. Though the reform can be vetoed by the Executive Yuan by the president, this nature of political turmoil will be difficult to handle for president Lai Ching Te.

Talking about the external matters, on May 19 and May 20 (inauguration day of Lai Ching Te as president) China carried out military drills and justified their action by saying its "punishment" for Taiwan for carrying out the election and inauguration of president Lai Ching Te on the 20th. They did not just stop over here. After the inauguration on 23 and 24 May, the PLA (People's Liberation Army) announced joint military action, called Joint Sword-2024A, on the islands near Taiwan. Through this operation China focused to separate the Taiwan outlaid islands (Kinmen, Wuqiu, Matsu, and Dongyin) from its mainland and break down all communication or help among them. Apart from that, on May 21, 2024, China has banned U.S. lawmaker Mike Gallagher from entering the country as he is interfering in the internal matters of China and supporting Taiwan's independence. As it was not enough on May 22, 2024, as retaliation, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced sanctions on 12 U.S. defense companies and 10 defense company executives.

Lastly, Taiwan should gear up their game in the international area by making alliances with western countries other than the USA. After the inauguration of the new president, China's military drills increased. As a result, Taiwanese people are getting trained in war tactics and paramedic for the possible invasion by China. Other than preparing themselves, Lai Ching Te should focus on building alliances and getting military and financial help to overcome the aggression of China. Further, the issue of the South China Sea will make the rivalry sour than ever.

GPT-4o, and Then What?

Aong Cha Ching Marma



AI world is taking another hit by storm with the launch of the GPT-4o, the latest Chat GPT model by Open AI. In GPT-4o, "o" refers to omni which displays the multimodal capabilities of the new model. Unlike earlier versions, it's capable of handling not only text and images but also video and audio. Open AI's Chief Technology Officer, Mira Murati, live-streamed the new features of the latest model on May 13. She said that the new model comes with a "much faster" speed along with it emphasize on "ease of use". Open AI intends to expand the use of its popular chatbot by introducing those new features.

Sam Altman, Greg Brockman, Elon Musk, Ilya Sutskever, Wojciech Zaremba, and John Schulman founded Open AI in December 2015. The founding team formed the company with the goal of developing artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity by combining their various backgrounds in software engineering, machine learning, and technology entrepreneurship. However, Elon Musk left the company saying that Open AI doesn't serve the non-profit mission anymore. Sam Altman is the current CEO of Open AI. Many significant capital rounds have been drawn to Open AI, with Microsoft investing \$10 billion in January 2023. Open AI was also financed by the company in 2019 and 2021. The firm is now valued at over \$80 billion after the last deal took place in January 2024.

Open AI spurred the AI boom with the launch of its artificial Intelligence chatbot, Chat GPT in late 2022. It broke nearly every record in terms of the timeline for gaining active users. Chat GPT crossed 100 million users at a record pace in just 60 days, surpassing TikTok and Instagram. With the advent of this chatbot, it posed a direct threat to Google's search engine business. The risk became more perceivable when Microsoft started integrating Chat GPT into its various products and its major search engine, Bing. By seeing the initial potential of the Chat GPT, Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella said "This new Bing will make Google come out and dance, and I want people to know that we made them dance."

Google officials were taken aback by Open AI's Chat GPT launch and its subsequent success, which caused them to become extremely alarmed and prompted a comprehensive response in the months that followed. Following personnel mobilization, the business introduced Bard in February 2023, which was upgraded to the Gemini LLM in December and featured prominently during the 2023 Google I/O presentation in May. February 2024 saw the unification of Bard and Duet AI under the Gemini brand, along with the release of an Android app.

Chat GPT's release also instigated the release of competing products, including Claude, Llama, Ernie, and Grok. Anthropic's Claude has now become the major rival of Chat GPT. According to Pitch Book, a record \$29.1 billion was committed across roughly 700 generative AI deals in 2023—a rise of more than 260% from the previous year. Within ten years, the market is expected to generate more than \$1 trillion in sales. Therefore, the race to capture the AI market is fierce. However, the speed at which untested new services are being introduced to the market has alarmed some in the sector, and researchers and ethicists are alarmed by the technology's propensity to reinforce prejudice.

As the livestreamed event came to an end, Murati expressed gratitude to Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang and his team for supplying the graphics processing units (GPUs) required to run Open AI's technology. Despite the smooth presentation of the GPT4o model, it didn't end without any controversy. One of GPT4o's voices named "Sky" was similar to the voice of actress Scarlett Johanson. In response to this issue, Open AI says that it will remove the voice soon and claims it wasn't an intentional imitation. A few days after the GPT4o presentation, Google showcased a model called "Project Astra" similar to the GPT4o AI assistant, and a video creation model "Veo".

The quick development of AI technologies promises revolutionary effects across industries, despite the debates and ethical issues. This emphasizes the significance of responsible invention and application. But the question remains "Can the GPT4o like models, and the upcoming models meet the standard of responsible use of AI?".

Climate Change: A Global Tapestry of Extremes and the Tale of Cyclone Remal

Kazi Rhid



Climate change, an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon, casts its shadow across every corner of our planet. Its impact reverberates through a tapestry of extreme weather events, serving as an urgent call to action. The past year stands as a stark reminder of the relentless nature of this global crisis, as it shattered records and disrupted lives. On a global scale, we bear witness to an alarming pattern of climatic extremes. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has sounded the alarm: the past seven years are poised to become the warmest on record. Simultaneously, sea levels surge to new heights, and ocean acidification persists unabated. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) echoes these findings, emphasizing the rapid and intensifying changes across the entire climate system. From unprecedented rainfall events in China and Europe to the devastating wildfires that ravage the landscapes of the USA and Australia, the unmistakable fingerprints of climate change are etched upon our world.

In South Asia, the situation is particularly dire. The region is grappling with the brunt of global warming, which is expected to reach the perilous 1.5°C level as early as the 2030s. This rapid rise in temperature is predicted to exacerbate extreme weather events such as flooding and droughts, posing a significant threat to the region's biodiversity, food security, and human health.

In Bangladesh the recent Cyclone Remal is a stark example, described by experts as one of the quickest-forming and longest-lasting cyclones they have seen, with its rapid formation and extended duration attributed to the changing climate. The cyclone, which also affected neighboring India, caused widespread destruction, including at least 23 deaths, the destruction of thousands of homes, and significant agricultural and infrastructural damage. The storm's longevity and intensity, with some areas receiving at least 200mm of rain, led to breached embankments and flooded farmlands, exacerbating the vulnerability of the affected populations. This severe cyclonic storm that has been linked to the broader narrative of climate change. The cyclone's persistence and intensity have been attributed to atmospheric conditions shaped by the changing climate. Experts have noted that Cyclone Remal was one of the quickest-forming and longest-lasting cyclones they had seen. The connection between Cyclone Remal and climate change is not coincidental but rather indicative of a larger pattern of increasing frequency and intensity of such events.

The city dwellers of the capital who weren't directly impacted by the cyclone were sort of hoping for the storm to hit the city so they would get a relief from the scorching heat in the recent weeks. The hope was soon squandered as the storm died down the heat started getting back up within a day. The humidity had risen to be very uncomfortable, there were no relief that the residents had hoped for. The use of air conditioning started back up within two days. The heavy winds and the calamities of trees falling all over the city had taken a toll on average commuters. Many people didn't have an option but to go to work within this hostile environment. The drainage system couldn't take the sudden heavy rainfall which resulted in waterlogging at several parts of the city. The power outage was prominent throughout the country, it didn't spare some parts of the capital as well. Millions of dollars' worth of damage was done to infrastructure and the productivity shrunk significantly all across the country because of the weather.

The story of Cyclone Remal is a microcosm of the broader climate crisis. It serves as a poignant reminder that climate change is not a distant threat but a present reality. The events unfolding around the world and the devastation brought by Cyclone Remal in Bangladesh are a clarion call for immediate, rapid, and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. As the planet warms, the window for action narrows, and the imperative to act becomes ever more pressing. The need for environment friendly policies goes beyond just the tagline of going green but a necessity for most of the population in South Asia. The tapestry of climate change-related events around the world, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia and Bangladesh, paints a picture of a planet in distress. The narrative of Cyclone Remal is a testament to the interconnectedness of regional events and global climate patterns. It underscores the need for a unified and concerted effort to address the root causes of climate change and mitigate its impacts. The time for action is now, and the world must come together to forge a sustainable and resilient future for all, the local government and private sectors need to work hand in hand to make sure that we can control the ongoing damage as much as possible. Promises of shiny new electronic vehicles are good to look at but we need policy level action that would be advantageous to not only the elites but to the mass of average income and lower income communities.