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Al-Nahda

current developments and legacy of the Arab World



FAMINE DECLARED IN GAZA - UN

IDF uses hunger as a tool against Gazans

GHOUTA CHEMICAL ATTACKS

A chemical attack carried out by the Assadist forces, in the early hours of 21 August 2013

HASAN HANAFI

Voice of the Islamic left

SYRIAN DRUZE

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THE 12-DAY WAR

A turning point in West Asian geopolitics

INDIA - OMAN RELATIONS

A journey of Commerce, Culture and Connectivity

IRAQ'S AUGUST BLACKOUT

A sudden failure in Iraq's power transmission lines on Monday triggered a nationwide blackout



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AL - NAHDA

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Al-Nahda Editorial Team

Centre for West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

The Centre for West Asian Studies is proud to present the Al-Nahda Editorial Team a vibrant ensemble of students and faculty united by creativity, passion, and a deep curiosity for the world around them. Guided by the Subject Association, this team transforms Al-Nahda into far more than a newsletter; it is a dynamic stage for fresh perspectives, thoughtful dialogue, and imaginative expression on the diverse issues shaping West Asia and beyond.

Each edition reflects their unwavering commitment to insightful analysis, cultural exploration, and the joy of learning. From in-depth articles and interviews to reflections on art, history, and society, the team brings the region's stories to life with clarity, nuance, and flair. Al-Nahda is not just a publication it is a celebration of ideas, a forum for intellectual engagement, and a space where curiosity meets creativity, inspiring readers to think, question, and explore.

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THE 12-DAY WAR: A TURNING POINT IN WEST ASIAN GEOPOLITICS.

***By, Sadiya Inam ,Centre for West Asian Studies,
Jamia Millia Islamia***



Barbara Tuchman noted, "War is the unfolding of miscalculations." This has never been more true than in West Asia. Since Hamas attacked Israel in October 2023 and Israel struck Gaza, tensions in the West Asian region have been high. On the other hand, Iran and Israel have been enemies for decades. Israel has always said it won't let Iran make a nuclear weapon because it sees it as a danger to its existence. Iran says that its nuclear program is benign and purely for civilian use. Before the 12-Day War, Iran and Israel had been fighting a "shadow war" for more than ten years.

This unofficial fight grew in Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf through secret operations, hacking, the deaths of famous people, and proxy wars. Iran responded to the targeted killings of scientists like Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Israeli strikes on Iranian weapons convoys destined to Hezbollah, and damage to nuclear facilities in Natanz by attacking ships linked to Israel and regional militias. This secret battle was going on in the gray region and was meant to hurt people without starting a fight. That is, until the veil came off in June 2025. A risky cycle of provocations started the war. After Israel hit Iranian military targets in Syria, there was an attack on ships tied to Israel that was thought to have been planned by Iran.

The battle gave Israel a chance to show off its military and technological superiority. It used its powerful missile defense systems to protect its cities and hit deep into Iranian-linked infrastructure. For Iran, just being able to keep fighting a technologically better enemy was seen as a sign of strength and patriotic spirit. But under these strategic stories was the war's quieter, more terrible truth: the toll on people. Families in Tel Aviv and Haifa slept in bomb shelters at night. In Iran's Khuzestan province, residents hid in cellars while anti-aircraft fire lit up the skies. Homes in villages in southern Lebanon and western Syria were destroyed. It turns out that "limited" wars are never really limited for the people who live through them.

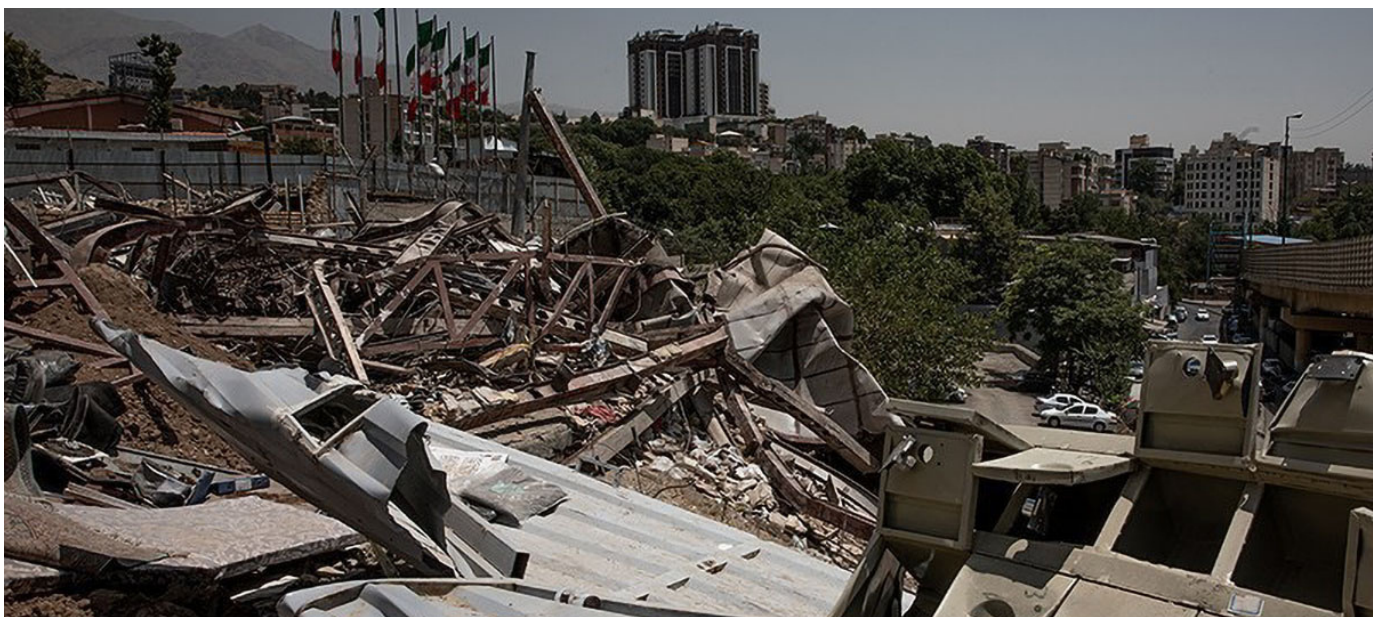
The battle had immediate impacts. Saudi Arabia, which had just calmed things down with Tehran, publicly asked for things to calm down while secretly looking at its own security situation. The UAE and Bahrain, both linked to Israel by the Abraham Accords, had to face the harsh truth that alliances in West Asia aren't only diplomatic deals; they can also be problems in times of crisis. Outside of the region, the US used urgent shuttle diplomacy to stop the conflict, while Russia and China looked for ways to increase their power in post-war mediation. When the truce came, it wasn't simple. It was put together through secret channels and public pressure. Iran and Israel both said they achieved strategic victories, but neither had changed the real reasons for their rivalry.

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The war may have set a hazardous example in some ways: the idea that a short, sharp fight may be used as a vehicle for politicians to send messages without starting a full-blown war. Tuchman's warning is still relevant today because people still believe that escalation can be managed.

The lessons from the 12-Day War are not good. It demonstrated that even short wars may have huge human and geopolitical costs, that deterrence in West Asia is far weaker than it seems, and that in a region where everything is connected, no battle stays between the people who are fighting it. It reminded us that making mistakes is the most common thing in international politics, and that being careful, not brave, is the best sign of strategic acumen. Will Durant, a historian, famously said, "In my youth, I stressed freedom, and in my old age, I stress order." I have made the important discovery that order leads to freedom. As always, West Asia's biggest problem is finding that illusive order before the next mistake happens.



A PEN AGAINST POWER THE LEGACY OF KHASHOGGI

*By, Mohammad Zafar Iqbal,
Centre for West Asian Studies, JMI*

A child born on 13 October 1958 in Medina, Saudi Arabia, who is now known as Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi, worked for a long time in Saudi and Arab media, including well-known newspapers such as Arab News, Asharq Al-Awsat, and Al-Watan. There was a time when he was considered close to the Saudi royal family, but later, when he began to raise his voice for freedom of expression and democracy, he was forced into self-exile in 2017 and later moved to the United States, where he used to write columns for The Washington Post.

On 2 October 2018, Jamal Khashoggi entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul for some personal paperwork and never came out again. It became one of the most shocking political assassinations of the decade. According to Turkish authorities, a 15-member Saudi consulate team first killed him and then dismembered his body. At first, the Riyadh government distanced itself from the incident but later called it an unauthorized operation (BBC). Investigations by international media and Turkey exposed contradictions in the Saudi narrative. Later, Saudi authorities sentenced five people to death and others to prison, but many believed this was an attempt to protect senior officials. The case became even more complicated when, in 2021, a CIA report stated with “high confidence” that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had approved the killing though he denied any involvement.

The killing of Jamal Khashoggi left many with so many questions still unanswered. We cannot define the incident as just a crime, it is a symbol indicating the extent to which independent and truth-telling reporters are exposed to serious risks. It also shows the way diplomatic immunities can be abused in pursuit of personal or political gains.



International justice and law whenever we mention them tend to yield to political and economic considerations and keep doing so. Years have gone by, but the body of Jamal Khashoggi has never been recovered, and most questions remain unanswered. So long as international institutions continue not to enforce these laws, there will be thousands more such questions in the future, with no answers.

This incident reminds us that the struggle for truth and freedom of expression is still ongoing and it is our responsibility to keep it alive.

Ghouta Chemical Attacks: 12 Years Later

By Moin Aftab West Asian Studies Centre ,
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On August 21, 2013, in the still hours before dawn, the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta witnessed one of the most horrifying atrocities of the 21st century. Rockets carrying the deadly nerve agent sarin struck opposition-held neighbourhoods, killing over 1,000 people in their homes. Twelve years later, the memory of that night remains raw, not only for survivors but for Syrians across the country who continue to seek justice for the massacre.

"There had been no sound of shelling. A dull hiss was the only warning," recalled Mohammed Zarba, a survivor from Zamalka, in an interview. "I'll never forget what Bashar al-Assad did to us. He killed and poisoned his own people with sarin, there is no other word to define him than 'butcher'".

According to investigations by Human Rights Watch, at least eight 330 mm surface-to-surface rockets hit residential areas that night. The rockets dispersed sarin gas, invisible and odorless, which crept into rooms where families lay sleeping. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported that at least 1,144 people died, while thousands more suffered breathing difficulties and convulsions. "The weather had been forecast to be relatively cool and calm, meaning those responsible knew that the heavy poison gas would naturally drift downwards and settle at ground level rather than blowing away," the SNHR noted at the time.

Paramedics arriving on the scene were overwhelmed. "Death was everywhere," recalled Mohammad Ahmed Suleiman, a first responder, said to New Lines,

"There wasn't a door in Zamalka that we opened without finding entire families dead. Most of them died while they were fast asleep. Others lay dead on the floor with pinpointed pupils and foam still visible around their mouths". The United Nations later confirmed the use of sarin, calling the attack "the most significant confirmed use of chemical weapons against civilians since Saddam Hussein's Halabja massacre in 1988". For many survivors, twelve years have not dulled the trauma. "Being awake saved me," said Mohammed Barakat Khalife, who still struggles with shortness of breath and blurred vision. "That night, even the narrow streets were packed with bodies. It was impossible not to step over the dead".

As per reports from New Lines, people can never forget the sounds and images of the dying. "I can't forget the gasps of the people rasping with distressed breaths, the foam coming out of their mouths, the terrified look in their eyes," Khalife recounted. One woman, Umm Nabil, lost 22 relatives that night. "No one on the ground floor came out alive," she said. It's further reported that she was too afraid to tell the truth. "Afraid of reprisal, we had to lie, saying people died from dust inhalation. But the truth is quite different. They were choked to death by sarin".

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented more than 220 chemical attacks since 2012, nearly all attributed to government forces. In total, at least 1,514 people, including 214 children, are believed to have died from chemical weapons in Syria.

In the years following Ghouta, survivors and human rights organizations launched campaigns to hold perpetrators accountable. The Berkeley Human Rights Center described the attack as a “crime against humanity that remains unpunished.” Similarly, exiled activists continue to lobby for war crimes prosecutions. As one survivor told *France 24* in 2024: “Until Assad stands on trial for this massacre, our pain cannot fade.” Still, international accountability has been elusive. As the UN Secretary-General also acknowledged, “The Syrian people continue to bear the scars of impunity. Justice delayed is justice denied”.

Assad’s ousting in December 2024, after a lightning rebel offensive that drove him into exile in Russia, ended a dynasty of repression that had lasted more than five decades. Yet for many Syrians, his fall from power was not enough. Survivors insist that justice requires accountability, “It was clearly a deliberate and criminal act. But no one gave us justice. Assad is gone, but until he is tried for what his bloodstained hands have done, our pain will not go away.”.

Today, Eastern Ghouta remains both a graveyard and a symbol. Once besieged and bombarded, it serves as a reminder of the lengths to which a regime went to preserve its power. Syrians continue to mark anniversaries of the attack with vigils and testimonies, despite displacement and lingering fear. As Al Jazeera wrote on the 10th anniversary: “The images of children foaming at the mouth and rows of bodies wrapped in shrouds ensured that Ghouta would forever be synonymous with the horror of chemical warfare.”

Syrian Druze: Between Secessionism and Nationalism

By, Ali Ahmed,

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The Druze are an ethno-religious group numbering approximately 1 million people and largely concentrated in the Levant, specifically in Lebanon and Syria, with roots in Fatimid Egypt. This minority group, although small in number, has illustrated an impressive ability to survive and prosper over the preceding millennium through vicissitudes of war, imperial domination and colonialism. Initially a community largely centered in Lebanon, in the 19th century a major migration of the community occurred to areas in southern Syria, and now the largest population of the Druze is located in the southern Syrian province of As-Suwayda. Over the years since, this miniscule minority has had an outsized impact on the history of the country: the first uprising against French colonial rule was started by a Druze leader, Sultan al-Atrash, who has since solidified his status in the national consciousness.

In the advent of the Assad regime the Druze found a symbiote; with the Assad regime finding a ready and trustworthy minority to man its armed forces and bureaucracy, and the Druze being generally left with greater autonomy than the neighbouring sunni communities. Unlike the case with Sunni communities, like in Hama in 1982, the response from the regime against acts of dissent wasn't indiscriminate and limited to the individuals involved. The regime strategy of allying with the minorities characterised this period. However, as the Syrian revolution came about the cracks began to show: the economic insecurity created by the regime engendered resentment which led to popular displays of dissatisfaction from communities in the south; but larger insecurity felt by the Druze, a vulnerable minority in the Syrian civil war landscape, meant that the major Druze factions played a balancing act and tried to maintain autonomy amidst a fractured rump state neither allying completely with the Assad regime nor with any major opposition group.



A new chapter commenced with the sudden fall of the Assad regime in the 2024 December Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) offensive wherein skepticism reigned amongst the Druze communities of southern Syria owing to the past credentials of the Interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa as well as the HTS. The Druze militias were organised under the banner of Suwayda Military Council (SMC) in February 2025 led by Tariq al-Shoufi, an ex-SAA (Syrian Arab Army) officer, which prevented the establishment of state control in the region. While there were some clashes in February and April, things came to a head in July when a long standing regional rivalry between local bedouin clans and Druze communities took a violent turn with reciprocal kidnappings and violence. The government in a bid to impose control amidst the fraught circumstances prevailing in the area sent its security forces, who despite facing some initial assaults from local armed factions, were able to impose control, though not without controversy with various reports of human rights violations taking place under government forces' oversight.

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The government forces and linked militias were credibly accused of perpetrating summary executions of Druze civilians and filming themselves assaulting Druze civilians. In the ensuing days Israel conducted several airstrikes over Syria in a bid to pressure the government forces to withdraw, which they did, unleashing another round of reciprocal violence between the southern druze and bedouin communities with a flimsy and frigid peace existing to this day in Suwayda. This latest round of sectarian conflict, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, left more than 1000 civilians dead and thousands more forcibly displaced. These events have cleaved the Syrian druze community in two: with a section recognising the Israeli intervention as attempts by an outside power to engender instability in the country to carve out an area of influence, with Yousef Jabrou, a Druze spiritual leader, condemning the Israeli attack as an “attack on the Druze community” and Syrian sovereignty. Another section, led by a powerful but controversial Druze leader, with accusations of drug-peddling against him, Hikmet al-Hijri tacitly welcomed the Israeli air raids and arm supplies into Suwayda.

These Israeli violations of Syrian sovereignty and calls for open secessionism raise serious questions over the grand strategy being pursued by the new Syrian government which looks astounded amidst Israeli attempts to carve out a demilitarised no-fly zone on its border with Syria, paving an uncontested road to threaten Damascus, and its sterility in the face of willingness of elements within its armed forces to conduct massacres of minority civilian populations.

These sectarian divides, engendered during the assad-regime and coming to fruition today, constitute a grave danger to the territorial integrity and societal fabric of Syria.

The government would be well advised to adopt a more reconciliatory and inclusive approach to minorities who feel sidelined and threatened and build trust within these communities whilst instilling greater discipline within the ranks of its own fighters.

A new roadmap aimed at solving this crisis was unveiled by the governments of Syria, Jordan and the USA on the 16th of September that commits the Syrian government towards holding to account all perpetrators of human rights violations, taking steps to facilitate the return of displaced civilians, rebuilding damaged villages and settlements, adopting a more inclusive national narrative celebrating “unity, pluralism, equality among all Syrians, and the rule of law” and establishing a local police force. It also delineates mechanisms of aid delivery in the governorate of as-Suwayda and the construction of a local council that’ll interact with the government. This is a promising step, in an otherwise gloomy scenario, even as it remains unratified by all Druze factions



Iraq's August Blackout: Power Sector at a Crossroads

By, Abu Horairah,

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Jamia Millia Islamia

Iraq announced a nationwide power outage in second week of August as rising temperatures pushed demand on the electricity grid to unprecedented levels.

when Iraq experienced an almost nationwide power outage, the streets of Baghdad and other major cities went dark, leaving millions without electricity at the peak of one of the hottest summers on record.

Iraq has been hit by a severe heatwave in last few month's temperature goes around 50°C in several provinces further straining the country's power supply. This heatwave hunge impact on the Arbaeen pilgrimage a period of massive public gatherings that places extreme pressure on water and electricity systems across the country. This combination of raise in demand and outdated infrastructure created the conditions for a successive failure.

The collapse of Iraq's national power grid in August 2025 triggered by a cascading failure in southern provinces during the Arbaeen pilgrimage has exposed the fragility of energy systems inclimate vulnerable emerging markets. This crisis however is not merely a technical breakdown but a symptom of a broader systemic failure a grid strained by aging infrastructure

inefficient fuel use and a lack of investment in modernization. The outage affected residential neighborhoods industrial areas and even key government facilities illustrating how deeply dependent modern Iraq is on a single fragile grid. For investors

this collapse represents a pivotal moment. Iraq's energy sector now at a crossroads offers a unique opportunity to capitalize on the global shift toward resilient infrastructure and renewable energy adoption.



The blackout has prompted renewed calls for diversification into solar power, which is increasingly viable given Iraq's abundant sunlight and growing interest in decentralized generation systems. government are now under pressure to speed up investment in renewable projects and upgrade transmission technology to prevent wide failure in future Electricity ministry sources had told Reuters sudden shutdown at the Hamidiya power plant in the western province of Anbar led to a fault in the electricity transmission network that caused a power outage in the central and southern regions of the country. Officials from the Ministry of Electricity said emergency teams were immediately deployed to repair the lines and restore power, and gradual reconnection began within hours. The incident has sparked debate over Iraq's long-term energy strategy, with experts warning that climate change will make such outages more frequent unless structural reforms are implemented.

This blackout serves as both a warning and a call to action wiurgent upgrades Iraq risks further economic losses, social unrest, and public health crises during extreme weather events. As climate extremes intensify, Iraq's challenge will be not only to keep the lights on but to build an energy system that can withstand the hotter, more volatile decades ahead.

India–Oman Relations: A Journey of Commerce, Culture, and Connectivity

By, Istekhar Alam

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India and Oman have shared a profound and enduring relationship rooted in trade, culture, and maritime connectivity. This connection dates back over 5,000 years, to the days of the Indus Valley Civilization and the Magan (modern Oman) civilization, when merchants exchanged goods such as copper, spices, and textiles through ancient maritime routes. Over time, these trade relations evolved into deep cultural and economic ties that continue to shape the bilateral relationship between the two nations. Today, India and Oman maintain strong diplomatic, financial, and strategic engagements, further strengthening their historical bond.

Trade between India and Oman has been a cornerstone of their relationship for centuries. The Indian Ocean, serving as a vital corridor of commerce, facilitated the movement of Indian traders to the Omani ports of Muscat and Sohar. Oman's strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East made it a crucial hub for maritime trade, linking India with the Arab world and beyond. Commodities such as frankincense, dates, pearls, and copper from Oman were exchanged for Indian textiles, spices, and precious stones, fostering economic interdependence. The influence of Indian traders and artisans in Oman is evident even today in the country's commercial sectors and architectural heritage. Beyond commerce, cultural interactions between India and Oman have been equally significant. Indian influences are evident in Omani cuisine, language, music, and traditions, reflecting centuries of interaction. The Indian diaspora in Oman, one of the largest expatriate communities in the country, has played a vital role in shaping Omani society. Indian traders, labourers, and professionals have contributed significantly to Oman's economic and infrastructural development, particularly in the fields of trade, construction, healthcare, and education.



Familial ties, shared traditions, and mutual respect for diversity further reinforce the cultural affinity between the two nations

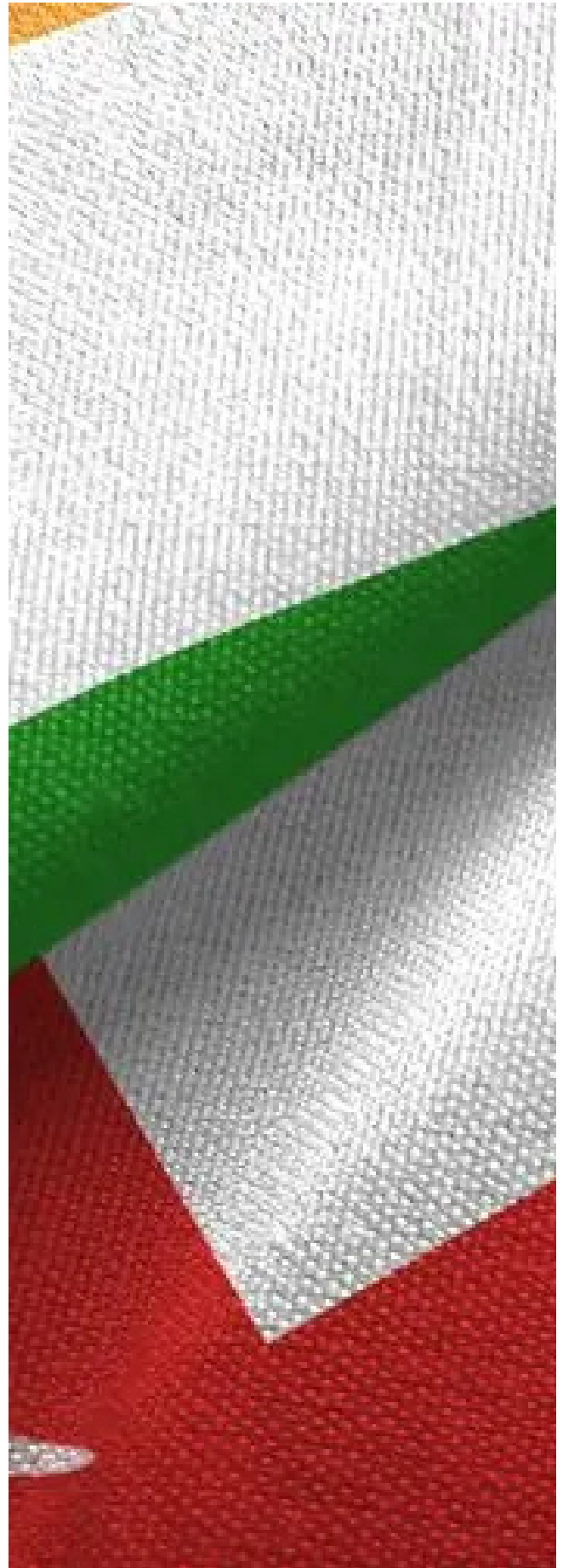
In the contemporary era, India and Oman have expanded their trade and economic engagements through formal agreements and strategic collaborations. Oman is India's key trading partner in the Gulf region, with bilateral trade spanning energy, infrastructure, healthcare, and technology. India imports crude oil and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Oman, while Indian exports to Oman include machinery, electronics, automobiles, and pharmaceuticals. The India-Oman Joint Commission and other economic forums have facilitated investment opportunities, joint ventures, and technology transfers, further enhancing their economic partnership.

Beyond trade and culture, India and Oman share strong diplomatic and strategic ties. Oman has been a crucial defense partner for India, with bilateral security cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism, maritime security, and intelligence sharing. Joint naval exercises and defense agreements have strengthened mutual security interests, given Oman's strategic position along the Arabian Sea. Additionally, Oman has been a gateway for India's engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), reinforcing India's broader economic and geopolitical objectives in the region. Despite their long-standing relationship, the full extent of India-Oman trade and cultural ties remains an area of academic interest.

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This research seeks to analyse the historical trajectory of these relations, their economic impact, and the evolving dynamics of bilateral cooperation in the modern era. By exploring archival records, trade data, and cultural interactions, this study aims to provide insights into the enduring legacy and future potential of India-Oman relations.

Through this analysis, the research will highlight how commerce, culture, and connectivity have been central to fostering a unique and mutually beneficial partnership between India and Oman, contributing to economic growth and cultural exchanges. Another key objective is to evaluate the significance of bilateral trade agreements and strategic collaborations in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and technology. Furthermore, the research intends to highlight the influence of cultural interactions, including shared traditions, linguistic exchanges, and culinary influences, in strengthening diplomatic and people-to-people ties. Lastly, this study aims to provide policy recommendations for enhancing trade and cultural cooperation between India and Oman, ensuring a sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership in the future.



Famine declared in Gaza: Man made or Byproduct of war?

**By, Umar Nasir,
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On August 22nd, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) confirmed Famine (IPC Phase 5) – with reasonable evidence, in Gaza Governorate and projected the spread to Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah till mid-September. North Gaza Governorate, due to lack of available data, was not analyzed but likely faces similar or severe conditions as Gaza Governorate. Rafah was not studied given its near-total depopulation.

Famine is declared when three conditions occur: at least 20% of households face extreme food shortages, over 30% of children under five are acutely malnourished, and the daily death rate exceeds two people per 10,000. This is determined using the IPC framework, which defines famine (Phase 5) as the most extreme level of food insecurity, characterized by widespread starvation. More than 500,000 people in the Gaza Strip including children under age 5 and pregnant women are facing an undeclared death sentence in the form of hunger, destitution and eventually, death.

Another 1.07 million stand on the edge, weeks away from facing famine. Terrifying visuals of malnourished children with wasted bodies, numb faces, too weak to cry; Kids rushing for food, crying out, begging have become devastatingly common. According to UNFPA, one in five babies are born prematurely with their mothers being forced to give birth while they themselves are malnourished. Save the Children reported that cases of acute malnutrition among children under age 5 have tenfold in four months. Since the end of ceasefire in March, Palestinians have faced unaccounted violence with 3700 people killed in July alone (IPC). 875 people were confirmed dead trying to fetch food (UN). Over 317 hunger-related deaths had been reported by August 28th, including 121 children. The situation in Gaza is far from the brutal reality of war – it is unmerciful, and challenging situations are imminent as its byproduct. Here we would argue that the current catastrophic shortage of basic food is not a natural outcome of war but a manufactured crisis, weaponized against Gaza.

evident that this famine is a direct outcome of three main factors:

- (i) Destruction of domestic food production systems with over 98% of cropland slashed.
- (ii) Entry restrictions – no food entered Gaza between 2nd March and 19th May.
- (iii) Continuous displacement of populations away from available food sources.



"It is a famine within a few hundred meters of food, in a fertile land. It is a famine that hits the most vulnerable first. Each with a name, each with a story. That it strips people of dignity before it strips them of life. Parents are forced to choose which child to feed. It is a famine that we repeatedly warned of, but that international media has not been allowed to cover. It is a preventable famine." said Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator - UN.

On Wednesday – 27th August, all UNSC members, except the US, issued a joint statement saying the famine in Gaza was a "manmade crisis". They stated, "The use of starvation as a weapon of war is clearly prohibited under international humanitarian law."

The reality on ground is alarming. A man-made famine is a question on humanity. Short-term improvements are not affordable, the situation demands a large-scale, multi-sectoral response.

There should be no doubt, no excuse for inaction. Global agencies have iterated: food alone will not suffice. What Gaza needs is the restoration of health,