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DIPLOMATIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TRUMP'S FIRST FOREIGN TRIP - VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA

By Ayan Akhtar (M.A, Sem-IV)

Donald Trump, who has been re-elected as President of the United States, succeeding Joe Biden on January 20, 2025, announced on March 31, 2025, his intention to visit Saudi Arabia as early as May. Trump has selected Saudi Arabia for his initial foreign visit for the second time, having previously visited the country alongside Israel during his first term as president in 2017.

During this upcoming visit, one of the primary goals is to sign a \$1 trillion investment agreement with Saudi Arabia, aimed at enhancing the U.S. economy through military equipment purchases and other goods. This initiative aligns with Trump's broader strategy to create jobs in America and strengthen economic relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Additionally, President Trump indicated that he is likely to visit the UAE and Qatar, among other nations, to further develop economic ties with the Middle East and attract foreign investment.

"I am going to Saudi Arabia. Normally you would go to the UK first. Last time I went to Saudi Arabia. They put up 450 billion dollars. This time I said I will go if you put up a trillion dollars to American companies. Meaning the purchase over four years of a trillion dollars. They agreed to do that. So I am gonna be going there," Trump said.

This visit holds significance for several reasons, including:

- The potential to advance the Abraham Accords by promoting normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- There is a possibility of discuss Russia Ukraine war and US military actions against Iran backed militant group Houthis in Yemen.



CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE WITH SAUDI ARABIA. A CHALLENGE TO U.S INFLUENCE IN MIDDLE EAST.

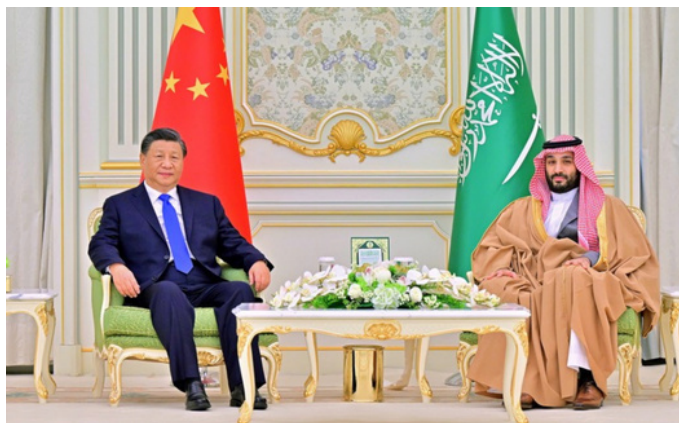
By Subia Minhaj (M.A, Sem-IV)

China has been expanding its influence in the Middle East through economic partnerships, energy investments, and diplomatic initiatives. Since 2005, it has entered into numerous agreements with Arab countries, especially after launching the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) in 2013. The actions taken by Saudi Arabia in the 2020s signify a major transformation in the global landscape. A significant arms deal, which includes the \$4 billion purchase of over 300 CH4 Chinese drones, was revealed at the Zhuhai Air Show in October 2022.

Historically, the arms export market has been dominated by the United States and Europe; however, China is quickly making strides in this area, successfully attracting some of America's key clients. In the 2020s, Saudi Arabia has formed agreements with China for arms and technology

that the U.S. has previously condemned and deemed dangerous, including collaborations with Chinese tech giant Huawei and a \$207 million contract with SenseTime, a prominent artificial intelligence company. Saudi Arabia's influential position in OPEC allows it to significantly impact global oil prices. Recent cuts in oil production have resulted in price hikes, benefiting both Saudi Arabia and Russia while undermining U.S. sanctions against Russia, thus straining U.S.-Saudi relations.



The U.S. has long been a crucial ally of Saudi Arabia, providing military support and arms; however, increasing tensions due to U.S. criticisms and interference in Saudi matters have led Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries to seek alternative strategic partners, as they are wary of American oversight. As China seeks to reshape the U.S.-dominated global order, it aims to gain the backing of regional powers in the Middle East, which are vital for destabilizing the existing world order. China is taking advantage of the vulnerabilities of Arab nations, recognizing that the future of oil production is uncertain, creating a precarious situation for Gulf Arab countries eager to adapt. They believe that the future of oil production appears rather grim, which poses a significant challenge for the Gulf Arab nations. These countries are eager to transform their economies at this juncture, aiming to transition towards industries that do not rely on oil. This shift is essential for them to preserve their status and influence. In April 2023, China's diplomatic efforts to facilitate an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia marked a notable departure from the traditional role of the United States in the Middle East. In the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel, China has positioned itself as a neutral entity, skillfully managing its relationships with the key nations in the region. Notably, China has made substantial investments in Israel, reportedly more than in any other country in the region, as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. Additionally, China has entered into a \$400 billion strategic agreement with Iran, spanning 25 years, which encompasses energy and defense collaborations. Despite this, it is important to note that China cannot serve as a substitute for the United States in terms of defense for Arab nations; it may only offer an alternative in technology to a certain degree. The Arab states cannot afford to lose the United States as an ally, as they remain reliant on U.S. military support to counter rival states, including Iran. Should the U.S. withdraw for any reason, China is unlikely to provide the necessary security against Iran. Therefore, it cannot be asserted that China has supplanted the U.S. as the primary strategic diplomat in the Middle East.

SYRIA'S NEW TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

By Shad Alam (M.A, Sem- II)

December 8, 2024, marked the conclusion of 13 years of civil conflict in Syria, as the Free Syrian Army, led by interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa, entered Damascus, ultimately resulting in the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime that had been in power for fifty years.

While many Syrians celebrated the departure of Assad, observers of the power dynamics in West Asia expressed concerns about the implications of this transition, given Syria's rich diversity and the varying interests of its

different groups under a new governance structure. These concerns were alleviated in late March when the "second Syrian transitional government" assumed control, with Ahmed al-Sharaa at the helm and a cabinet that included representatives from Alawite, Druze, and Christian communities.

In addition to managing the governance of the populace, this transitional government is charged with drafting a new constitution that will be acceptable to all factions, aiming to restore Syria to a state of peace and prosperity reminiscent of its past. Furthermore, President al-Sharaa is seeking international recognition of his administration in Damascus, a necessity in the current geopolitical landscape.

Responses to the new government emerged from both domestic and international fronts. Within Syria, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), which holds significant influence in the Kurdish-majority region, announced its refusal to comply with the new regime's decisions, citing concerns over the dominance of a single faction. Conversely, figures like Sheikh Hammoud al-Hinnawi, a notable Druze leader, expressed support for the establishment of the government.

On the international stage, Western allies and Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Palestine, and Turkey, welcomed this development and issued statements indicating their willingness to cooperate with the new regime. The U.S. State Department, represented by Tammy Bruce, described the formation of the government as "a positive step," while also emphasizing that sanctions will not be eased until progress was made on key priorities, including counterterrorism.

This signifies a symbol of hope as Syria embarks on a new chapter marked by unity and rebuilding. The inclusive leadership under President al-Sharaa offers a chance for lasting peace and national rejuvenation. There are, however, concerns among Syrians about the future of Syria, particularly concerning the nature of democracy within the country, the direction of Syrian foreign policies, the separation of powers, and the role of Islam in the socio-political landscape.



GAZA "AN ONGOING HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE"

By Md. Arif (M.A, Sem-II)

Since October 2023, a humanitarian crisis has been unfolding in Gaza, drawing global condemnation yet insufficient action. By April 2025, over 50,000 Palestinians have lost their lives due to Israeli attacks. The tragic loss of lives has been reduced to mere statistics. In November, the UN's Human Rights Office said its analysis showed close to 70% of verified victims over a six-month period were women and children. Gaza holds the highest per capita rate of amputated children globally. There have been numerous reports of casualties resulting from diseases, insufficient access to essential resources, and inadequate medical care.

Following the collapse of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas on March 18, military operations and assaults by Israel have escalated, resulting in the brutal deaths of over 1,000 Palestinians since the breakdown of the truce. This surge in violence has drawn condemnation from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who has expressed concern over the extensive hostilities.

The attack on an emergency convoy by the Israeli army on March 23, resulting in the deaths of fifteen medics and humanitarian personnel, later referring it to as professional mistake, has highlighted the risks faced by emergency workers in crisis situations. As reported by the United Nations, at least 400 humanitarian aid workers, including those from UNRWA, have lost their lives since the onset of the conflict. Gaza, once a vibrant city, has been transformed into a state of devastation marked by infrastructural damage, loss of innocent lives and mass displacement. The destruction of infrastructure in Gaza is occurring at an alarming pace, with more than 60% of buildings either destroyed or significantly damaged, compelling many Palestinians to seek shelter in tents. On April 21, Israeli forces launched an attack on tent camps, leading to the deaths of 29 displaced Palestinians. There have been clear facts about brutal killing of thousands of Palestinians, the plight and horrifying conditions of Palestinians is witnessed by the entire world while sitting comfortably at their homes. Condemnations and concerns are futile when they are not substantiated with actions. The action that has to be taken by the world institutions which have proved inefficient and political leaders who are grappling with power politics rather than giving importance to long term peace and commitment to end war. Consequently, the future of Gaza remains uncertain and the situation remain agitated.

INDIA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN WEST ASIA: FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING AND HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES?

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India's cultural diplomacy in West Asia, particularly through yoga and Bollywood, has become a significant tool for fostering cross-cultural understanding and subtly promoting values like tolerance, pluralism, and human rights in a region often marked by political and religious tensions. Historically, India and West Asia have shared deep-rooted connections through trade, migration, and cultural exchanges, with ancient trade routes facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and traditions, such as the adoption of Arabic numerals from India and the influence of Persian art on Indian architecture (Abhyankar, 2014). In modern times, India has strategically leveraged its soft power—non-coercive influence through culture and values—to strengthen ties with West Asian nations, focusing on initiatives that emphasise shared heritage and universal values. Yoga, an ancient Indian practice of physical and mental discipline, has been at the forefront of this effort. Since the United Nations declared June 21 as the International Day of Yoga (IDY) in 2014, India has promoted yoga globally as a secular practice focused on health and well-being, which has been widely embraced in West Asian countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, where large-scale yoga events are organised annually (Sharma, 2023).

These events, often attended by diverse communities, highlight yoga's potential to transcend religious and cultural boundaries, fostering a sense of unity and mutual respect. For instance, UAE's Minister of Tolerance has publicly endorsed yoga as a means to promote social harmony, reflecting its acceptance even in conservative societies (Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 2019). However, challenges remain, as some groups in West Asia associate yoga with Hinduism, leading to occasional resistance, prompting India to emphasise its health benefits over spiritual roots to avoid friction (Black, 2025). Alongside yoga, Bollywood—India's prolific film industry—serves as another pillar of cultural diplomacy. Bollywood films, dubbed in Arabic and Persian, enjoy immense popularity in West Asia, with their themes of love, family, and social justice resonating across cultures. Movies like *Lagaan* (2001), which depicts unity against colonial oppression, and *My Name Is Khan* (2010), addressing Islamophobia, subtly challenge stereotypes and promote messages of inclusivity and empathy (Shailo, 2016). These narratives align with India's pluralistic identity, where diverse religious and ethnic communities coexist, offering a model for multicultural harmony. However, critics note that some Bollywood films still perpetuate regressive norms, such as gender inequality or caste bias, undermining their potential to advance progressive values (Asma, 2013). Beyond yoga and films, India's cultural diplomacy includes festivals, educational exchanges, and diaspora engagement.

The Indian diaspora in West Asia, numbering over 8 million, acts as cultural ambassadors, organising festivals like Diwali and Holi that showcase India's diversity while integrating local traditions (Abhyankar, 2014). Educational initiatives, such as scholarships for West Asian students to study in India, expose them to democratic ideals and pluralism, fostering long-term people-to-people connections (Sahai, 2019).

The UAE's "Year of Tolerance" (2019) exemplified this synergy, featuring Indian cultural events and the construction of Abu Dhabi's first Hindu temple, symbolising mutual respect (Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 2019). Despite these successes, India's approach faces challenges, including geopolitical tensions, such as balancing relations with Arab states and Israel, and navigating conservative societal norms in West Asia that may resist foreign cultural influences (Sharma, 2023). Moreover, while cultural diplomacy can create an environment conducive to human rights values, its impact is indirect and gradual, relying on sustained engagement rather than overt advocacy. Scholars argue that India's emphasis on shared heritage and universal wellness through yoga, combined with Bollywood's emotional storytelling, can subtly shift public attitudes toward greater acceptance of diversity and human dignity, particularly among younger generations exposed to global media (Tang, 2020). For instance, the popularity of Bollywood actresses like Priyanka Chopra, who advocate for gender equality, inspires discussions on women's rights in conservative communities (Shailo, 2016). In conclusion, India's cultural diplomacy in West Asia, through yoga, Bollywood, and diaspora-led initiatives, represents a nuanced strategy to promote tolerance and pluralism. While not a direct solution to human rights issues, it fosters dialogue and mutual respect, laying the groundwork for societal change. By focusing on universal values and avoiding political or religious impositions, India's soft power efforts contribute to a more interconnected and harmonious region, demonstrating the enduring relevance of cultural exchange in global diplomacy.

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IBN KHALDUN: A FOREWARD THINKER

By Warisha Wasi (M.A, Sem-IV)

Ibn Khaldun, born in Tunis as Abū Zayd 'Abdu r-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Khaldūn Al-Hadrami (1332-1406), is recognized as one of the most prominent Arab scholars , particularly noted for his contributions to social sciences and economics. He hailed from a family whose members occupied high administrative positions in courts in North African region. Throughout his career, Ibn Khaldun was involved in various courts holding administrative positions across Morocco, Tunisia, Tlemcen (Algeria), and Granada (Spain). His political journey was marked by instability, as he was at times imprisoned by rulers while other times enjoyed prominent administrative roles by undertaking diplomatic missions. Eventually, towards the end of his career, he was appointed as a professor at esteemed universities in Egypt and later held judicial positions. His practical experience in court administration, combined with his exceptional intellect, allowed him to create his masterpiece, the *Muqaddimah*, written in 1377. This profound text showcases Ibn Khaldun's ability to transcend his era, offering valuable insights into sociology, economics, history, and political science. While often regarded as an introduction to his more comprehensive historical work, *Kitab al-Ibar* (Book of Examples), the *Muqaddimah* stands as a significant intellectual accomplishment in its own right, influencing scholars across various disciplines for centuries.

The book adopts a systematic methodology to analyse society and history. In the realm of epistemology, Ibn Khaldun combines mysticism with Islamic theology by examining the categorization of intellect and division of sciences. The Muqaddimah investigates how the theorization of knowledge contributes to a broader understanding of society, religion and philosophy. The notion of Assabiyah, social cohesion forms the major theme of the book. Ibn Khaldun argues that it is an inherent human instinct to inhabit social groups and engage in cooperative interactions. These social connections are fundamental to the subsequent evolution of societies. He employs a multidisciplinary approach towards understanding societies and civilizations.

By discussing various fields and disciplines such as philosophy, religion, science, geography economics, politics and culture the Khaldun endeavours to explain the factors leading to rise and fall of empires. More significantly, the book discusses the transient nature of civilizations drawing parallel with human cycle of birth and death to explain the perpetual cycle of rise and decline of empires and civilizations. Khaldun presents a theoretical base for historical understanding which requires a deeper enquiry in understanding past and makes sense of reality.

The concepts that gained prominence in the modern era including significance of critical enquiry, criticism of rote learning, an enhanced role of learning environment, the division of disciplines and complete mastery over the single subject, known as subject expertise are all discussed by Khaldun in his book. The ideas expressed by Ibn Khaldun significantly contributes to modern thought positioning him a pioneer in the fields of modern sociology, historiography and economics.

The Turkish and French translations of his work, along with the publication of his biography in the eighteenth century, introduced this brilliant text to a wider audience. As a remarkable intellectual contribution, the notion of social organization can be traced in the writings of Karl Marx, Augustus Comte, and Durkheim. Ibn Khaldun provided a novel lens for understanding society by considering political, cultural, and economic factors, offering future thinkers valuable insights across diverse cultures and epochs.



MOROCCO: LAND OF LIGHTS

By Tabassum (M.A, Sem-IV)

Located in the northwest corner of Africa, Morocco is at the crossroads of Europe and Africa. Bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, it is distinguished by Berber, Arab, and European influence. Preserving its legacy of rich culture and heritage this country invites tourists from around the world through its colorful cities like Marrakech, Casablanca, Fes, Rabat, and others.

Located in a fragile position, it has welcomed invaders since antiquity, including Phoenicians, Byzantines, Carthaginians, Romans, and Vandals. However, with the coming of Islam in the 7th century, it developed an independent state that kept the invaders at bay. Attempts to get a strong foothold over the country by Europeans started in the 15th century. It was made a French protectorate in 1912 but regained Independence in 1956. The country is progressing and developing with its monarchical setup of governance, choosing to be the only nation with a monarchy in North Africa. Mohammad VI of the Alawi Dynasty succeeded after the death of his father King Hassan II in 1999.

Moroccans are comprised of Berber/Amazigh and Arabs. Berbers used to live in the mountains and spoke the Berber language, but urbanization has attracted them to cities to seek employment. The majority of the population comprises Muslims with some descendants of Spanish refugees. Arabic is one of the national languages spoken by a large majority while Tamazight, the language of Amazigh became an official language in 2011. French, Spanish, and English are also spoken widely.

The economy of the country relies on the export of raw materials, tourism, and telecommunications. Since the 1980s, encouraged by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the Moroccan government has introduced vigorous privatization programs and economic reforms which were successful in stabilizing the country economically. In 2004 it signed a Free Trade Agreement with the US. Relation with the US traces back to 1786 when the first Treaty of Friendship was signed between them, which was



later renewed in 1836. In 2004 it signed a Free Trade Agreement with the US. Relation with the US traces back to 1786 when the first Treaty of Friendship was signed between them, which was later renewed in 1836. Currently, since 2009, it has undertaken a shift towards developing renewable energy, promoting energy efficiency, and regional integration.

Morocco is popular for its tourism and is known for its preservation of beautiful landscapes and rich culture. The walled cities of Fes and Marrakesh are filled with vibrant colors. With the Sahara Desert, Atlas Mountains, and beaches it became a perfect tourist destination. However, its location is prone to earthquakes. In September 2023, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck, which caused significant damage.

FACTS

- Morocco recognised Israel in 2020.
- Currency- Moroccan Dirham
- Most visited country in North Africa.
- Medina in Fes is car-free.
- Casablanca has the only Jewish Museum in the Arab World.



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