

G20 Announced New Infrastructure Project

The G20 Summit finished with one major announcement, an economic corridor linking India, the Middle East and Europe via rail and sea. The project was unveiled by Indian prime minister Narendra Modi and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, who said the rail link would make trade between India and Europe 40% faster. The “real big deal”, as Joe Biden described the initiative, might challenge China’s economic clout in the region. The US president seeks to counter Beijing’s Belt and Road push on global infrastructure by pitching Washington as an alternative partner and investor for developing countries. Details were scant but no binding financial commitments were made but the parties agreed to come up with an action plan over the next 60 days. The US has been looking at numerous infrastructure projects to counter the China BRI, but none have seen the light of day due to funding and scale and this project to link India the Middle East and Europe looks like it will join the list.

Déjà vu with Pakistan’s Energy Crisis

With the peoples of Pakistan taking to the streets in protests against the rise in utility bills The caretaker government issued directives to tackle this issue promptly, despite the obstacles posed by the country's heavy reliance on imported oil and the towering burden of debt. The caretaker government declared its two solutions to seal with the energy crunch is for the people of Pakistan to exercise restraint and for the Electricity Distribution Companies to be privatised. The caretaker government criticized the PTI government and then comes up with the same solutions as them.

Egypt Bans Niqab in Schools

The Egyptian government has banned female students from wearing the niqab, a face-covering veil, at schools. Education Minister Reda Hegazy’s statement, released on Monday 11th and quoted by the government owned Ahram Newspaper, said students have an “optional” right to choose if they will cover their hair at school. The statement, however, added that the hair covering cannot cover their face. There have been fierce discussions in Egyptian society over wearing niqab in public spaces and educational institutions for a long time. Various educational institutions in the country autonomously impose bans on niqabs. In 2015, Cairo University introduced a niqab ban for its staff, which was upheld in later years by the Egyptian judiciary in 2016 and 2020 despite appeals.

Niqab ban proposals introduced in the Egyptian parliament in recent years were either withdrawn or rejected. The Egyptian government has run the country into the ground with its vanity projects and borrowing which has made the economy worse rather than improve things. In this context the focus on the niqab is a deflection from the real issues in the country.