

## 'The US and West must stop their misadventures in the Middle East'

Adel Al Asoomi, president of the Arab Parliament, the legislative body of the Arab League, speaks to Ramisa Rob of The Daily Star in an interview about Israel-Palestine and the turbulent situation in the Middle East.

**Can you briefly describe the role of the Arab Parliament in the Middle East?**

The Arab Parliament represents Arab parliamentary diplomacy and countries which represent 400 million Arabs. It adopts Arab issues in international forums and meetings with the objective of defending these issues against interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries. The parliament works with other international and regional blocs to support issues pertaining to Arab states, so that the issues of the 22 countries are always presented in international forums.

**Can you describe how the Arab Parliament supports the Palestinians in this current**

name of the Arab people to the International Criminal Court against Israel and its officials for the massacres they are committing against children, the elderly, and women; Israel preventing aid, food, and medicine from reaching to the Palestinian people; and the unfathomable genocide committed by the Israeli occupation forces.

**The parliament recently rejected the position aimed at displacing the Palestinian population from Gaza. So, what can Arab countries do to protect the people in Gaza?**

Arab countries have the ability to influence, with the necessary power, to support

**Israel?**

Of course not. We in the parliament do not have any contact with the Israeli apartheid state. We will not engage in any direct dialogue with any Israeli party. We hope that the major powers, led by the US, will reach a permanent ceasefire and prevent this brutal aggression, to protect the innocent people who are killed on a daily basis, and to prevent this war from expanding to other countries in the Middle East, along with its impact on neighbouring countries.

**How do you view the actions of the United Nations and its role during this genocide?**



Adel Al Asoomi, president of the Arab Parliament in Dhaka, Bangladesh on January 8, 2024. PHOTO: NAIMUR RAHMAN

**approach to the situation in Palestine?**

Unfortunately, the United States has a sad and negative position, and it has contributed to the expansion of the aggression by sizing up the Israeli side. The US foreign policy and diplomacy are increasingly falling short of avoiding escalation of the crisis in neighbouring countries in the Middle East. We hoped that the US position would be to protect human rights. Instead, it has called for vetoes and seems to be enabling further aggression and spillovers in the region. The Gaza crisis cracked open the West's Pandora box, starkly exposing the hypocrisy of the "human rights" rhetoric while supporting and encouraging the barbaric—there's no other word for it—killing of Palestinians. The international community must confront the US regarding its role in enabling Israel.

**What do you see in the future for the Middle East?**

The Middle East is on the verge of a very dangerous and unpredictable turn. So, the US and other Western countries that helped this aggression must recalculate and rearrange their affairs in order to protect the region in general from any serious deterioration that might lead to deadlier conflicts.

Until that happens, unfortunately, the region will enter a new phase of violence due to the Israeli aggression. Even other nations in the region which had relations with Israel are now quietly pulling back because they're scared. Regarding Arab normalisation ties with Israel, every country has the freedom to pursue its interests, but Israel's viciousness has distanced everyone from pursuing peace

deals as such.

**Is the two-state solution in the interest of the Palestinians and the Arab countries?**

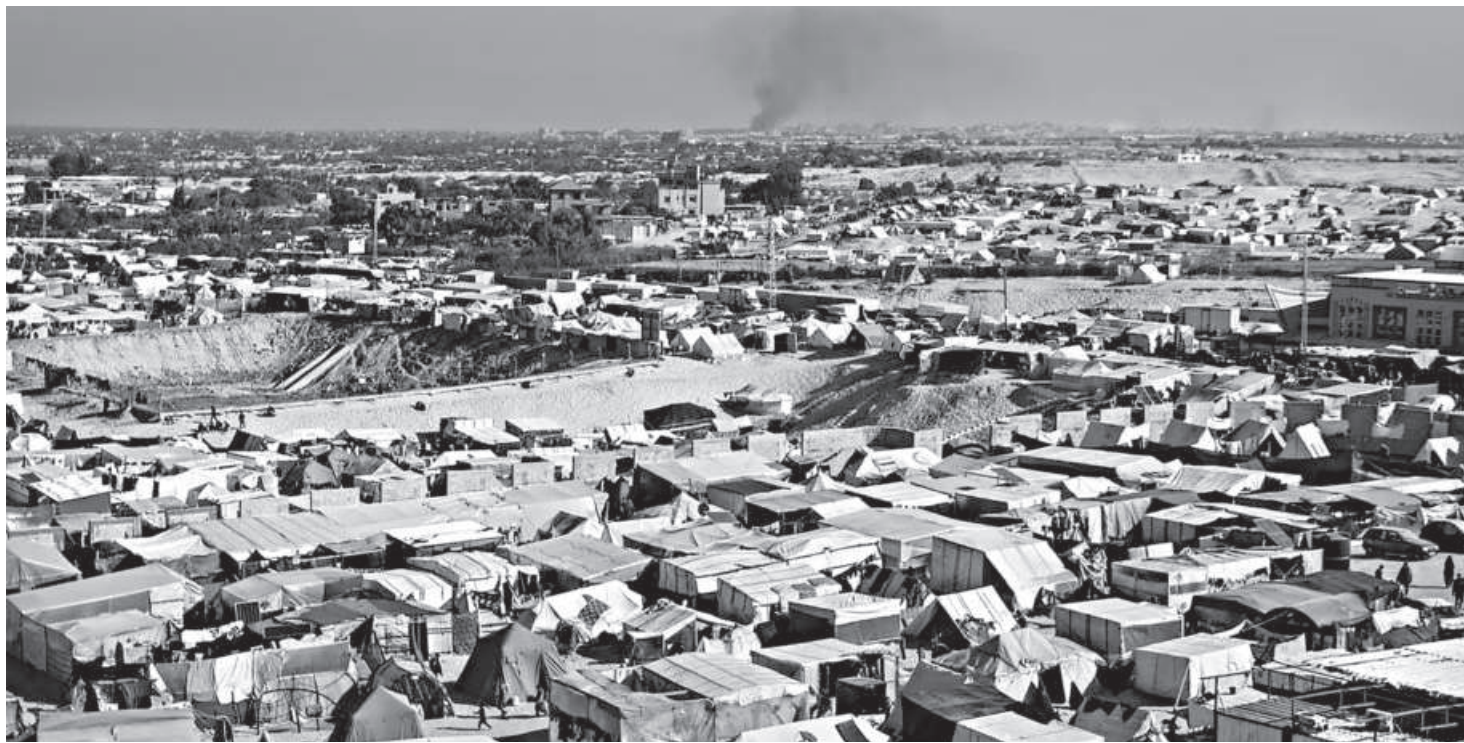
Let's be clear: the two-state solution is in the interest of the Israeli occupation state, because Palestinians are the rightful owners of the land. Giving 78 percent of the land to the aggressors and 22 percent to the right holders is not in the interest of Palestinians. Yet, Israel will not even come to that compromise. It's been very clear to us that many Israeli leaders openly support the killing of Palestinians, feel an unwarranted right to the land, and view aggression to be the only way forward. It's very disturbing.

**As the genocide in Gaza drags on, can Netanyahu achieve his goal of destroying Hamas?**

It is impossible and cannot be achieved, and he has failed to accomplish this in the past few months of deadly attacks. Netanyahu is fighting for a delusional belief that he can purge Palestinians from their homes and grab their land. He clearly has shortcomings in understanding political science and evaluating the Palestinian resistance. He has done nothing to show he is eliminating Hamas as well. Rather, he has "eliminated" thousands of children. We clearly see that Israel has the ability to target Hamas with their inventory of deadly weapons. But those have been used to kill civilians who don't pose any threat to Israel.

**What is your message to the world regarding Palestine and the turbulence in the Middle East?**

Many world leaders have lost the plot, with attention to political motives and agendas overtaking the need for a humanitarian solution. The world must now commit to one goal: protect the Palestinians and their rights to life and prevent this brutal aggression that contradicts all international laws and norms. The people whose governments continue to support the Israeli occupation forces must continue to put pressure to change their nations' positions. The support is continuously encouraging Netanyahu and others like him to commit massacres. We must not get confused by all the political ploys happening right now in many parts of the Middle East. Stopping Israel is the only way to stop the situation from taking a deadlier turn. There's no other way, and we all know it. It's time the West stopped its misadventures and adopted the only solution they know can put an end to this crisis.



A general view of a tent camp housing displaced Palestinians, as smoke rises in the distance due to an Israeli ground operation in Khan Younis, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, as seen Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on January 22, 2024. PHOTO: REUTERS

**genocide?**

The Arab Parliament condemns this genocide, which is taking the lives of children, women, the elderly and civilians. We have moved at the international level with national and regional parliaments and international bodies, and we have a complete file to support the Palestinian cause. Among the important steps we have taken is filing a complaint in the

Palestinians. And we in the Arab Parliament demand that there will be one unified Arab position to support them and prevent the plan to displace Palestinians to other countries. We hope that the Arab countries will have one clear position to support the Palestinian cause and stop this brutal aggression.

**Can the Arab Parliament, as a legislative body, play the role of mediator with**

The actions of the United Nations, unfortunately and evidently, have not been sufficient to protect Palestinians.

All international decisions proposed have not been implemented. In my view, the war on Gaza demonstrated the weakness of the United Nations to play any role to halt the war, establish a ceasefire, or protect civilians.

**How do you see the United States'**

## The future of India-Maldives relations



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The relations between India and Maldives have reached a new low following a row over derogatory comments made by Maldives' deputy minister regarding Indian PM Modi's visit to Lakshadweep and Maldives' call for the withdrawal of Indian troops by March 15, 2024. Conversely, China-Maldives relations have soared to new heights, culminating in the agreement on a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" during the Maldives President's visit to China in the second week of January. Given the diminishing likelihood of Maldives maintaining a delicate balance between the two Asian giants, the future of India-Maldives relations appears to be inversely proportional to Maldives' ties with China.

The 2023 Presidential election in the Maldives was characterised by the international media as a contest between India and China, as the two leading candidates showed clear affiliations with the two major powers. The then-president Mohamed Salih was seen as pro-Indian due to his "India First" policy, while contestant Mohamed Muizzu was regarded as pro-Chinese owing to his "India Out" campaign. Ultimately, Mohamed Muizzu emerged victorious, riding the wave of the "India Out" campaign.

India expressed its discontent by sending a low-profile minister to Muizzu's swearing-in ceremony. In turn, the new Maldivian president didn't hesitate to formally request the visiting Indian minister to recall their military staff during their meeting the day after the ceremony. It's worth noting that Indian PM Modi attended the oath-taking ceremony of the former President Salih. Since then, there have been several attempts to arrest the



Maldives' President Mohamed Muizzu and Chinese President Xi Jinping at a welcome ceremony in Beijing on January 10, 2024. PHOTO: AFP

free-fall in the relationship between the two countries, but so far, the outcome remains to be seen.

In the near future, it appears that Muizzu is determined to break free from his country's reliance on India. Apart from pressing for the withdrawal of the Indian military from the island, his government has chosen not to renew a hydrographic survey deal with India. This decision aligns with his electoral

commitment to terminate all agreements with foreign parties, particularly India. The pact, inked during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2019 visit to the islands, was viewed as a symbolic representation of India-Maldives defence ties. India interprets the withdrawal of Indian hydrographic ships from Maldivian waters as an action designed to support China's marine surveys of the surrounding seas, a critical component in advancing its anti-

submarine warfare capabilities.

Despite efforts to reduce India's influence in the Maldives, India will strive to maintain a strategic presence on the island, given its crucial role in the broader Indian Ocean strategy. China's overwhelming presence in the Maldives poses a potential threat that India cannot afford to ignore. Despite public discontent in India regarding the recent controversy over Modi's photo, the Indian government

remains committed to fostering a positive relationship with the Maldives, aligning with its "Neighbourhood First" policy. India continues to express hope for a resolution to the ongoing dispute with the Maldives regarding the deployment of Indian troops in the islands, as conveyed by a spokesperson from the Indian foreign ministry.

The Maldives also cannot afford to overlook India entirely, given its

of the future trajectory of India-Maldives relations. The visit has stirred geopolitical considerations, with Muizzu expressing intentions to implement the Maldives-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and seeking collaboration under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for key infrastructure projects. The signing of 20 agreements covering diverse sectors such as tourism, fisheries, digital economy, and disaster risk reduction has drawn attention to China's expanding influence in the region. Notably, while there are concerns, the absence of major defence or security shifts in these agreements helps alleviate immediate security threats for India.

Opting for alignment with China might currently appear as the remedy for Muizzu's Maldives to counter the challenges arising from a strained relationship with India. However, relying too heavily on China carries inherent risks. There already exists an apprehension about falling into a Chinese debt trap and the potential for corruption in Chinese projects. The Maldives is already grappling with substantial Chinese debt, with Malé owing over \$1.3 billion, constituting 20 percent of its total debt. It's worth noting that Muizzu's coalition partner and former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom faced public backlash for his pronounced tilt towards China during his presidency. Maldives, under his leadership, joined China's Belt and Road initiative.

Nevertheless, the outlook for future India-Maldives relations seems grim. If Muizzu remains true to his pledge of not allowing any foreign power to interfere in the internal affairs of the Maldives that can be some sort of relief for India. Otherwise India at present doesn't have much leverage to hold back Maldives from becoming another pearl in the Chinese string of pearls surrounding India. However, Muizzu's overreliance on Chinese support might lead to a "China Out" campaign in five years if he fails to deliver. It's also crucial to remember that, in the recent election, the pro-Indian candidate, Mohamed Salih, secured 46 percent of the votes. Until then, India is left grappling with a complex geopolitical scenario, where its once closest maritime ally is cosying up to its key adversary.

A critical analysis of President Muizzu's recent state visit to China is also imperative for a nuanced understanding