Global North must start listening to messages from Global South, former Slovenian president Danilo Turk tells Arab News at UNGA

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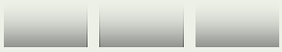

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- West and Russia's diplomatic stalemate over Ukraine is a major obstacle to progress, says Turk
- The Club de Madrid president lauds Saudi Arabia's awareness of "its growing global responsibility"

NEW YORK CITY: As the world grapples with challenges ranging from sustainable development to climate change and conflicts, the global conversation has been increasingly dominated by the evolving landscape of multilateralism, the role of emerging powers, and the imperative for cooperation on such matters as migration and human rights.

On the margins of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, Danilo Turk, a former president of Slovenia and current president of Club de Madrid, an organization comprising former heads of state or government from across the globe, shared his insights with Arab News on some of the burning issues of the day.

The UN is an old home for Turk, who was his country's first UN ambassador, and this latest visit is in the capacity of president of Club de Madrid.

This organization, representing 126 former leaders from 73 countries, maintains deep-rooted connections with the UN, with many of its members serving as special envoys of the UN secretary-general.

Heads of state or government descended on the UN headquarters in New York City. (AFP)

According to Turk, the UN is in a state of transformation, growing larger and more diverse, involving not only member states but an array of global actors. He said a visit to the UN today reveals a complex world coming together, seeking solutions to global challenges.

One of the key priorities that Turk and Club de Madrid brings to the UNGA is a spotlight on Sustainable Development Goals, with a special emphasis on social development.

"Sustainable Development Goals are not only about the environment, if I may put it so crudely. It's about the whole transformation of societies, new social-development models. And we have got to start discussing this very seriously," he said.

A robust SDG political declaration adopted last week by member states emphasized the need to intensify efforts toward the Summit for the Future next year and the World Social Summit in 2025.

These gatherings, conceptualized and promoted by Club de Madrid, of which UN chief Antonio Guterres is a member, serve as vital platforms to solidify strategies and approaches to development models, "measuring social development in ways which are more comprehensive, giving appropriate space for women to play a full role in the social development process and making other priorities more clearly defined."

Turk described a conference slated to be held in Brazil in November as a crucial step in shaping this approach. Financing these endeavors poses a challenge, which is why Turk underscored the necessity of aligning financial resources with social-development priorities.

"Public and private finance should be combined in new ways," he said. "More capacity of private finance should be brought into the picture. But also, on the other hand, public finance must take more risks than was the case so far."

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The overarching theme of this year's UNGA has been multilateralism, a concept that has sparked debates about its viability and relevance. Some diplomatic circles at the UN repeat often that, as conflicts proliferate and inequity widens, the multilateral system has become dysfunctional, if not completely defunct, while its advocates continue to defend its relevance.

Danilo Turk is a former president of Slovenia and current president of Club de Madrid (Arab News photo)

The conclusion of the BBNJ Treaty, an important addition to the international architecture on the Law of the Sea, and the inclusion of loss and damage in the COP27 agreement, which aims to provide financial assistance to poorer nations as they deal with the negative consequences that arise from the risks of climate change, are two examples of success that demonstrate that multilateralism can indeed deliver results, according to its advocates.

Turk acknowledged the "very serious changes and transformations" the global landscape is undergoing. He observed that the world is no longer unipolar. With the liberal unipolar period coming to an end, a new multipolar world is taking shape, introducing complexities in global dynamics.

He said: "The world is (no) longer under the domination of the liberal, unipolar period. This has changed. And now, a new multipolar world is emerging, and it is not yet entirely clear how the relations among new centers of power in the world will look. And those new centers, of course, they have always been there, but they haven't had the kind of critical role that they are now assuming, in the context of BRICS, for example."

As the relations among these new centers of power evolve, patient diplomacy remains key to avoiding crises, Turk said.

He added: "We've got to be (very) patient because it's not going to happen overnight. But (we have also got to be) attentive; things can get out of hand."

In this context, multilateral frameworks, including the UN, continue to be valuable because they offer a crucial gathering space for people worldwide, Turk said.

"If nothing else, the United Nations is a wonderful meeting place, a place where everybody comes, a place where everybody can meet, a place where clarifications can be made in a wide variety of informal, discreet ways in the United Nations building and elsewhere. And that is what the charter of the United Nations has asked the United Nations to be. And that is the function that the United Nations is performing.

"So, I am not excessively pessimistic. I am concerned, but I am not a pessimist."

As the relations among these new centers of power evolve, patient diplomacy remains key to avoiding crises, Turk said. (AFP/AP)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marked a significant milestone as the first ever fully negotiated, all-encompassing global development strategy formally embraced by both the Global South and the developed world. It was widely celebrated as the dawn of a new era in development collaboration.

Despite significant development gains globally, which have raised many millions of people out of absolute poverty, the UN says that inequality between the world's richest and poorest countries is widening, an anomaly that was particularly spotlighted at UNGA this year, where it has become clear that the Global South and the Global North are coming to issues from diametrically opposed positions.

Reflecting on the dynamic between the developed and developing worlds, Turk said: "The problem is, as it has always been, the whole question of understanding of development."

He added: "You know, there are inequalities between states, which are growing. There is a diminished fiscal space in much of the developing world. There is a problem of migration which has gone out of control. And none of these problems is new. All of them have been there before. What is now needed is a kind of renewed effort. The United Nations is offering (not only) a good institutional framework, but also a platform for searching for solutions."

Referring to the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Turk said: "I am quite encouraged by the fact that initiatives are emerging, that BRICS is becoming more and more — I shouldn't say assertive — certainly more imaginative … the group of countries together in the BRICS and so forth.

"In short, the agenda is not new at all. The configuration of power and potential of new actors is there, and it will have to be reflected in solutions.

FASTFACTS

- **Danilo Turk lauded Saudi Arabia's awareness of 'its growing responsibility and global responsibility' as 'good for the world.'**
- **Club de Madrid is composed of 126 members from 73 countries.**

"In the old days we had G77 and that kind of a very bloc-like, North-South dialogue. This is now much more diverse, much more imaginative, much more, I would say, promising. And the North has got to listen. I think that the problem is that the North is not used to listening (to) the messages that are coming from the South. The North has to start to listen."

In this emerging global political landscape, Turk highlighted the transformative role of emerging powers, including Saudi Arabia.

He observed that the Kingdom is playing an increasingly prominent role not only in the Middle East but also on the international stage, particularly in the context of climate change.

"Saudi Arabia (is) developing a very large number of new policies and new activism at the global level. Now, this is new, and it is not easy to develop a new pattern based on the fact of multipolarity," he said.

Elaborating on the point, Turk said Saudi Arabia had always been an important player in the Middle East context, but was now an important player in a global context, "and that's different."

He added: "When it comes to climate, for example, now I think the countries that have benefited from the high energy prices in the past period have an opportunity to invest the proceeds in ways that actually help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and also save the planet. So, we see the responsibility of Saudi Arabia is now much larger because the power is much larger.

"It is fortunate that Saudi Arabia seems to be on the path of assuming this larger responsibility. That's very good. Of course, I cannot speak for Saudi Arabia and I cannot speak about priorities that Saudi Arabia is developing, but clearly, the awareness of its growing responsibility and global responsibility is there. This is good for the world."

The UNGA reviewed the implementation of the 2030 agenda. (AFP)

Beyond the Gulf region, the Middle East remains fraught with complex, protracted conflicts, from Syria and Yemen to Sudan and the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Turk said finding solutions to these conflicts is a "question of commitment." He applauded efforts such as Syria's readmission to the Arab League, which to him signals a positive approach via diplomatic engagement, with the Arab League "now taking an active approach."

He added: "And again, Saudi Arabia has a very important role in that regard. So have other countries, including Egypt and others. So, there are solutions that could be developed on the basis of what was done already."

Turk also lauded initiatives to end the war in Yemen. "There have been very useful initiatives, assisted (indirectly) by China, for example, that have created a new political atmosphere," he said.

"I hope that the countries that have influence in the region, in particular Saudi Arabia, will seize that opportunity to bring peace to Yemen."

Though the institution has changed over the years, there are still areas where UN reform is needed, said Turk. (AFP)

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Turk said: "Palestine is a very sad situation, really very sad. I am saying this deliberately because we should have moved toward a two-state solution much more vigorously and much earlier. I don't think that a real solution could be ignorant of the legitimate needs for survival of Palestinian people. That has to be put really in the center.

"The international community should come together. We have seen a kind of a diversification of views regarding Palestine, which is not good. Now we have got to figure it out. A two-state solution is the only framework, and this has been known from 1948 onwards, that (it) can produce a stable, durable, just peace in the region.

"Now, how to get there? It's not clear. It's perhaps more difficult now than it was 20 years ago. But still, I think, realizing that — and initiatives in that direction — would be very welcome."

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Slovenian diplomat Danilo Turk says as ties among new power centers evolve, patient diplomacy is key to avoiding crises

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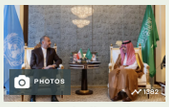

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Visitors tour the Capitol grounds in Washington, Monday, Sept. 25, 2023. (AP)

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- More than 40 million Americans relied on SNAP to make ends meet in 2022; inflation has put new pressure on household budgets, with prices higher since the COVID-19 pandemic for goods from bread to fresh vegetables and baby formula

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and one of his top aides warned on Monday that a federal government shutdown could cause widespread suffering, including a rapid loss of food benefits for nearly 7 million low-income women and children.

Biden told a meeting on Historically Black Colleges and Universities that failure by Congress to fund the federal government would have dire consequences for the Black community, including by reducing nutritional benefits, inspections of hazardous waste sites and enforcement of fair housing laws.

He said he and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy had agreed a few months ago on spending levels for the government.

"We made a deal, we shook hands," he said. "Now a small group of extreme House Republicans .. don't want to live up to that deal, and everyone in America could be faced with paying the price for it."

Asked if he had spoken with McCarthy, Biden said, "I haven't." He shook his head when asked when they would speak.

US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told reporters earlier that the "vast majority" of the 7 million participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program would see an immediate reduction in benefits in the days and weeks after a shutdown starts.

Nearly half of US newborns rely on WIC, the USDA says.

A separate benefits program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), will continue as normal for the month of October but could be affected afterward, he said.

More than 40 million Americans relied on SNAP to make ends meet in 2022; inflation has put new pressure on household budgets, with prices higher since the COVID-19 pandemic for goods from bread to fresh vegetables and baby formula.

During a shutdown, farm service agencies will also stop making loans to farmers during harvest time, and new homebuyers will not be able to get loans in rural areas, Vilsack said. More than 50,000 Department of Agriculture workers will be furloughed, meaning they will not receive a paycheck.

The Republican-controlled House of Representatives may move to advance steep spending cuts this week that would almost certainly be rejected by the Democratic-controlled Senate. While the cuts would not become law, a failure by both chambers to agree could force a partial shutdown of the US government by next Sunday.

House lawmakers on Tuesday were set to take up four spending bills for the coming fiscal year that would also impose new restrictions on abortion access, undo an $11 billion Biden administration climate initiative, and resume construction of the Mexico-US border wall, a signature initiative of former President Donald Trump. Biden has vowed to veto at least two of the bills.

Vilsack called Republican fiscal plans "punitive" and "petty."

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US condemns reported attack on Cuba's embassy in Washington

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- An assailant attacked the embassy with two Molotov cocktails on Sunday night, Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla said earlier on X, adding that nobody was hurt

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday condemned a reported attack on Cuba's embassy in Washington and said it was in contact with law enforcement to ensure a timely investigation took place, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement.

An assailant attacked the embassy with two Molotov cocktails on Sunday night, Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla said earlier on X, adding that nobody was hurt.

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Anti-Muslim hate speech in India concentrated around elections, report finds

RSS Hindutva supporters beat a Muslim man during a clash in New Delhi, India, February 24, 2020. (REUTERS)

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- About 80 percent of those events took place in areas governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is widely expected to win the general elections in 2024

WASHINGTON: Anti-Muslim hate speech incidents in India averaged more than one a day in the first half of 2023 and were seen most in states with upcoming elections, according to a report by Hindutva Watch, a Washington-based group monitoring attacks on minorities.

There were 255 documented incidents of hate speech gatherings targeting Muslims in the first half of 2023, the report found. There was no comparative data for prior years.

It used the United Nations' definition of hate speech as "any form of communication... that employs prejudiced or discriminatory language toward an individual or group based on attributes such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or other identity factors."

About 70 percent of the incidents took place in states scheduled to hold elections in 2023 and 2024, according to the report.

A RSS Hindutva supporter brandishes a gun during a protest against a new citizenship law outside the Jamia Millia Islamia university in New Delhi, India, January 30, 2020. (REUTERS)

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat witnessed the highest number of hate speech gatherings, with Maharashtra accounting for 29 percent of such incidents, the report found. The majority of the hate speech events mentioned conspiracy theories and calls for violence and socio-economic boycotts against Muslims.

About 80 percent of those events took place in areas governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is widely expected to win the general elections in 2024.

Hindutva Watch said it tracked online activity of Hindu nationalist groups, verified videos of hate speeches posted on social media and compiled data of isolated incidents reported by media.

Modi's government denies the presence of minority abuse. The Indian embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Rights groups allege mistreatment of Muslims under Modi, who became prime minister in 2014.

They point to a 2019 citizenship law described as "fundamentally discriminatory" by the United Nations human rights office for excluding Muslim migrants; an anti-conversion legislation challenging the constitutionally protected right to freedom of belief, and the 2019 revoking of Muslim-majority Kashmir's special status.

There has also been demolition of Muslim properties in the name of removing illegal construction and a ban on wearing the hijab in classrooms in Karnataka when the BJP was in power in that state.

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- Imran Riaz Khan, widely perceived to be sympathetic to ex-PM Imran Khan, was arrested two days after the May 9 protests

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani anchorperson and YouTuber Imran Riaz Khan has been "safely recovered," Sialkot Police confirmed on Monday, four months after the journalist was arrested and his whereabouts remained unknown following a nationwide crackdown against supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan.

The TV anchor, widely perceived to be sympathetic to ex-PM Imran Khan, was arrested from Sialkot airport on May 11, according to his lawyer Mian Ali Ashfaq, after the violent protests of May 9 which saw angry Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf supporters torch government buildings and attack military installations across the country. His lawyer told media Khan was arrested under the Maintenance of Public Order ordinance, under which authorities can arrest a person to maintain public order and extend the period of such detention for a time period not exceeding six months at a time.

According to Ashfaq, Khan was taken to Cantt police station after his arrest and later to the Sialkot prison. On May 15, a law officer told a court that Khan was released from jail after an undertaking in writing was taken from him.

Following that, his whereabouts remained unknown for four months.

Khan's father Muhammad Riaz lodged a case of alleged abduction of his son at the Sialkot Civil Lines police against "unidentified persons" and police officials and subsequently filed a petition at the Lahore High Court for his son's recovery. During a hearing of the petition, the LHC gave the Punjab police chief one "last opportunity" to recover the missing anchor.

"Journalist/Anchor Mr.Imran Riaz Khan has been safely recovered," Sialkot Police wrote on Twitter. "He is now with his family."

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Taiwan golf ball maker fined for storing 30 times limit for hazardous material

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TAIPEI: Taiwan authorities fined a golf ball manufacturer $75,000 on Monday and warned of criminal charges for storing 30 times the legal limit of hazardous material and other violations after a major factory fire killed nine people and left one other missing.

The mayor of Pingtung county said at a news conference that Launch Technologies Co. had 3,000 tons of organic peroxides on site, far more than the 100 tons of hazardous material that is permitted, Taiwan's Central News Agency reported.

Those responsible would be held accountable for public endangerment and negligent manslaughter, Mayor Chou Chun-mi said.

Company officials could not be reached for comment.

It's unclear what caused the fire on Friday, but two explosions in the already burning building trapped firefighters and workers under rubble. Four firefighters were among the nine who died. More than 100 other people were injured.

Organic peroxides, which are highly flammable, are used in a variety of rubber products including golf ball cores. Launch Technologies is one of the world's major golf ball makers, producing 20 percent of the global supply last year.

Taiwanese law requires organic peroxides to be stored in a separate warehouse building, but Launch Technologies kept the material on the first floor of the factory building, Chou said.

Larger fines were assessed for failing to designate a point person to help fight the fire and failing to give a complete inventory of the organic peroxides on site when firefighters arrived, she said.

Launch Technologies, which was founded in 2006, has been fined before.

Since 2018, the company has been fined $6,200 for safety and health violations and another $9,300 over labor conditions, according to Taiwan's Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The company was also fined $9,300 for air pollution violations in 2020, according to its 2021 annual report.

In 2011, a court ordered Launch Technologies to pay compensation to five workers who had sued the company for working overtime beyond the legal limit and in polluted conditions harmful to their health. Company general manager Lu Ying-cheng said at a news conference on Sunday that Launch Technologies has made improvements to the work environment in recent years.

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