

The Argus

No. 556 MARCH 12, 2026
Since 1954

International Law and Its Role in Maintaining International Peace and Security

**Global Security Challenges
Arising from Great-Power Competition
and Militarization**

**Normative Frameworks Beyond Power:
Human Rights, Environmental Protection,
Sex Equality, and Peace**



**International Institutions
Without Enforcement Power:
Addressing Violence and Transnational Crime
Through Multilateral Cooperation**

**Cycle of Crisis and the Reconfiguration
of the International Order**

The Argus

ESTABLISHED 1954

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Editorial

Traces of Time

Countless traces are left behind as time moves forward. Some are intentionally preserved, while others remain quietly embedded in everyday life. When these traces are closely examined, they often reveal far more than expected, not only about the past itself, but about the ways it continues to shape and operate within the present.

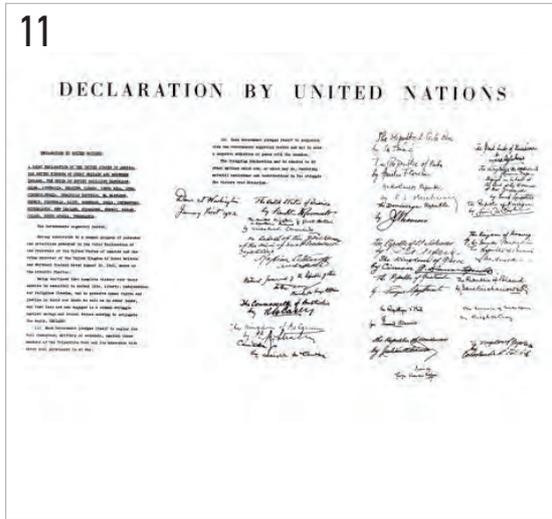
This March issue examines how the past continues to intersect with the present through what remains. International law was modeled by the lessons of past conflicts, reflecting an attempt to prevent history from repeating its darkest moments. The world it sought to regulate, however, has never remained static. As political realities shift and new challenges emerge, frameworks rooted in earlier eras reveal their limitations. Revisiting how international law was formed and how it has been revised reminds us that systems born from history must continue to adapt.

Traces of the past also survive through art. The works of artists preserved across time and borders allow contemporary audiences to encounter the spirit of another era. The works do not merely depict a historical moment frozen in time; they transmit emotions, values, and perspectives that continue to resonate today. Through exhibition and reinterpretation, artistic heritage becomes a bridge, connecting generations and transforming what once belonged to a specific time and place into a shared cultural experience, allowing the present to meet and reinterpret the past. Public health, too, carries the imprint of time. Shifts in consumption and emerging concerns have prompted new responses, reflecting an ongoing effort to address the consequences of earlier habits. Yet change does not erase what came before; it reshapes it. Even the choices made in everyday life reveal how the present continues to adjust, reconsider, and redefine its relationship with the past, not by erasing it, but by responding to it.

These different forms of preservation demonstrate that the past is not simply left behind. Rather, it persists in different forms, requiring adaptation in institutions, reinterpretation in art, and responsible response in everyday life. Learning how to preserve and convey these traces ultimately shapes the depth of our understanding and the responsibility we hold toward both the present and the future. 

By Lee Seeun
Editor-in-Chief

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CONTENTS



Cover Story

>> International law has been intended to contribute to maintenance of international peace and security, grounded in the principles of sovereign equality and the prohibition of the use of force. Yet, as illustrated by cases such as the Trump administration's actions concerning Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro or Russia's military operations in Ukraine, the structural constraints of international law, particularly in relation to its weak enforcement and binding power, have at times allowed power-based decision-making to prevail over legal norms. Even so, why does international law still matter, and why must it be defended? Let's examine the significance of international law, its inherent structural constraints, and the efforts required to uphold and protect it.

02 · News Desk

Culture Section

04 · Culture Trip

“The Miracle of Klimt and Other Treasures from Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi”: A Passage Through Italian Art

Social Section

11 · Cover Story

International Law and Its Role in Maintaining Peace and Security

Theory & Critique Section

19 · Caduceus

Sweetness Without Sugar: The Metabolic Truth Behind Alternative Sweeteners

25 · Epilogue

Learning to Recalibrate

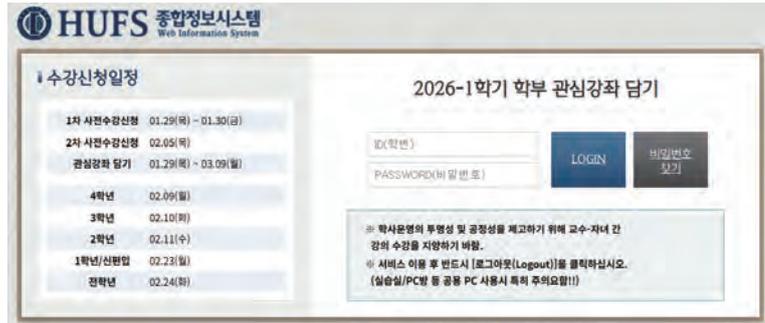
HUFS Introduces New Pre-Course Registration

HUFS Academic Support Center announced the addition of a “Pre-Course Registration” system to the campus course registration process for the first semester of 2026 on Jan. 6. The first round of Pre-Course Registration was held from Jan. 29 to 30, followed by the second round on Feb. 5.

This reorganization of the course registration system was introduced to enhance students’ right to enroll in the classes of their choice, while increasing fairness by mitigating unfair factors such as the use of macros, automated programs that rapidly execute repetitive commands. Under the previous system, students had only one opportunity to register, often losing desired classes due to speed-based competition, which led to overcrowding in major-required courses and concerns about delayed graduation.

The new system operates in two rounds, beginning with the identification of student demand through the first Pre-Course Registration. Courses that fall within the capacity are immediately confirmed, and if the number of applicants exceeds the capacity, the university reviews the possibility of increasing the quota and adjusts between departments. A second round is then conducted reflecting these adjustments. Courses that remain over capacity after the second round proceed to a final first-come, first-served registration process. In addition, the preliminary registration function has been renamed “Interested Courses.” Students may select up to 15 courses, which function as a structured wish list. A priority-setting feature allows students to arrange courses in their preferred order, helping them prepare strategically for the final registration stage.

Hwang Sung-jae, a senior majoring in Business Administration, said, “It was helpful that I could plan my registration strategy in advance, and when demand was low, I felt less pressure from competition. However, required courses in departments such as business and economics are always in high demand, and in many cases the number of applicants far exceeds the quota, so I did not feel a significant change even when capacity was slightly increased.” In contrast, Sun Ja-ryeong, a junior majoring in Business Administration, noted, “Unlike my initial expectations, I was able to secure enrollment in all three courses that I failed to register for during the first round, because additional seats were opened in the second round, which was very gratifying.” These differing responses, even within the same department, show that the impact of the revised course registration system varies among students, bringing both positive changes and ongoing limitations. Ultimately, the success of the reform will depend on how effectively capacity is expanded for high-demand courses, which remains a key challenge. 



▲ The pre-course registration schedule is displayed on the course registration website.

©HUFS Course Registration System Website (Interest Course Selection)

By Choi A-won
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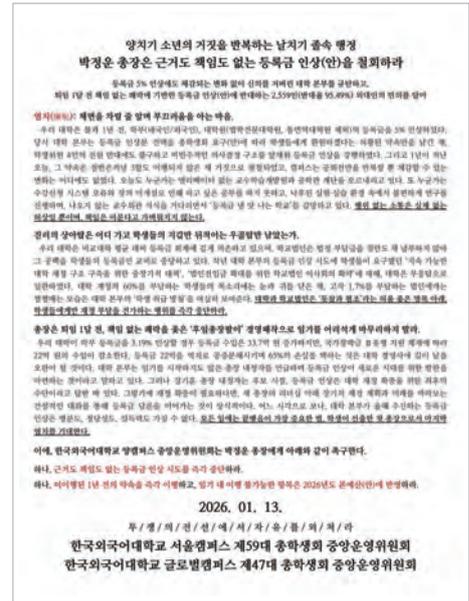
HUFS Raises Tuition by 2.3 Percent

HUFS has decided to raise tuition for undergraduate, international, and graduate students by 2.3 percent from the 2026 academic year. This figure reflects a 0.89 percent reduction from the initially proposed 3.19 percent announced by the university administration during a meeting held between the student councils of the Seoul and Global Campuses and the Office of Planning and Coordination on Jan. 7, 2026.

Following a 5 percent tuition increase in 2025, the plan to raise tuition for a second consecutive year prompted strong opposition from both student councils. On Jan. 13, the Central Executive Committee of the student councils formally called for the university to rescind the proposed tuition increase. After two meetings of the Tuition Review Committee held on Jan. 21 and 27, the increase was adjusted to 2.3 percent and finalized.

Students opposed the tuition increase not only because of the financial burden, but also because of concerns regarding transparency of the decision-making process and the university's financial responsibility. Student representatives pointed out that the previous 5 percent increase in 2025 was approved despite unanimous opposition, and that only a small portion of their demands were implemented afterward. Critics further argued that the university foundation has not sufficiently fulfilled its financial responsibilities, resulting in a greater financial burden being placed on students.

Shin Seung-min, a sophomore majoring in Department of Political Science and Diplomacy, said, "Tuition was already raised significantly last year, yet the benefits corresponding to that increase were limited. Given that, it is difficult to understand why another increase was proposed this year. I hope campus issues can be addressed through dialogue and mutual understanding rather than conflict." Meanwhile, Yang Hyun-joon, a junior majoring in Department of Vietnamese, said, "I believe a tuition increase is necessary, but it should be accompanied by greater financial support from the foundation." An emergency survey conducted from Jan. 10 to 12 found that 2,559 students opposed the increase, accounting for 95.49 percent of respondents. The results were followed by a press conference on Jan. 19 to officially express opposition. During subsequent deliberations of the Tuition Review Committee, the proposed increase was adjusted from 3.19 percent to 2.3 percent. Ultimately, the compromise of the 2.3 percent tuition increase is an outcome shaped by strong student opposition and the organized response of the student councils. 



▲ The student councils of both campuses express opposition to the tuition increase.

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© Instagram @hufsstudent

“The Miracle of Klimt and Other Treasures from Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi”: — A Passage Through Italian Art —

By Lee Seeun
Editor-in-Chief

In 1997, a painting was stolen from the Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi in Italy. It was “Portrait of a Lady” (1916) by the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt. The work disappeared without a trace, and for many years its whereabouts remained an unsolved case in European art history. However, in 2019, it was discovered behind the museum by a gardener, after which it reappeared before the public. Remarkably, the painting was found in perfect condition, without any damage. After passing through a period of loss, silence, and rediscovery, this work is now being unveiled for the first time outside Italy, in South Korea (hereafter Korea). The exhibition, “The Miracle of Klimt and Other Treasures from Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi,” presents around 70 modern and contemporary artworks, including “Portrait of a Lady,” from the collection personally assembled by Ricci Oddi, the founder of the Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi. Through portraits, landscapes, and genre paintings, the exhibition captures modern and contemporary Italian society and the lives of the people within it. Just like the Ricci Oddi collection, which transformed from one individual’s passion into public artistic heritage, the exhibition demonstrates that art transcends generations and national borders. The Argus seeks to celebrate the moment in which works once held as private possessions are returned to the public, allowing the sentiments and beauty of an era to be shared.

Viewing Information

Location:
My Art Museum (4-minute walk from
Exit 4 of Samseong Station)

Period:
2025. 12. 19 - 2026. 03. 22 /
Closed on February 2 and February
17, 2026

Time:
Monday to Sunday 10 a.m. - 7:40 p.m.
(Last admission 7 p.m.)

Admission Fee:
Adults: 25,000 won (US\$17.08)
Teenagers: 18,000 won (US\$12.30)
Children: 16,000 won (US\$10.93)
Infants: Free

1

Entering the World of Ricci Oddi



▲ The Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, designed by Giulio Ulisse Arata, stands as a purpose-built exhibition space.

Upon entering the exhibition hall, a darkened space unfolds. On the right, a view of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi appears, giving the impression of stepping into the actual museum in Italy. The museum building, designed by an Italian architect Giulio Ulisse Arata, holds architectural significance in its own right. Breaking with the convention of the time of converting existing palaces, the monastery was newly constructed solely for the purpose of exhibition, and it harmonizes a skylight system that maximizes natural light, a rational circulation layout, and epitomizes the elegance of the Renaissance.

On the front wall the history of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi and the life of its founder, Ricci Oddi are presented. The Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi was opened in 1931 by Giuseppe Ricci Oddi, a nobleman and collector from Piacenza, Italy. Rather than keeping the artworks he had collected throughout his life as private property, he donated them to establish a public museum for the local community. From the late 19th century until his death in 1937, Ricci Oddi collected works by painters and sculptors who interpreted the concept of modernity according to their own aesthetic standards, and he led the effort to found the museum to share his personal collection with the public and leave a lasting cultural heritage in Piacenza. "The Miracle of Klimt and Other Treasures from Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi" presents around 70 works from his collection, tracing approximately a century of Italian art, from Romanticism of the 1830s to Novecento Italiano, the return-to-classicism art movement that emerged in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s.

2

Landscapes Reflecting the Artist's Inner World



▲ On the Banks of the Po at Turin (circa 1875)

After passing through the history of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, a green exhibition space reminiscent of a warm field unfolds. The first work that comes into view is a landscape painting depicting a riverside scene. The calm and majestic river flows beneath a brightly lit sky, while in contrast the road in front of the riverbank is cast in shadow, giving it a somewhat darker appearance. This work is "On the Banks of the Po at Turin" (circa 1875) by Antonio Fontanesi, a pioneer of 19th-century Italian landscape painting. When looking at his painting, it feels as though silence speaks and light offers comfort, drawing the viewer into a world where time seems to stand still. This is because Fontanesi did not simply depict the riverside as it appeared, but rather sought to express within the painting the deep resonance and loneliness it evoked within him. Fontanesi worked mainly in Turin, a calm city in northwestern Italy, and he repeatedly painted scenes along the Po River. He used broad, bright areas for elements he wanted to emphasize, contrasting them with narrow, dark tones elsewhere, creating a contrast that clearly reveals the interplay of light and shadow and conveys the emotions, atmosphere, and hidden order within his work.

In the 19th century, when Fontanesi was active as an artist, technological advances following the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of paint in tubes enabled artists to paint freely outdoors and elevated the status of landscape painting. In particular, 19th-century Italian landscape painters sought not to reproduce nature as it appeared, but to capture the essence hidden within nature beyond surface phenomena, which is the manifestation of an invisible world. Landscape

Culture Trip

painting was redefined as a medium for inner reflection and a new visual language revealing the mystery of existence. Fontanesi occupies a central position within this lineage of inward-looking landscape painting. Born in Reggio Emilia, he is regarded as the master who most successfully transplanted European Romantic sensibilities into Italian art. In 1869, he was appointed professor at the Accademia Albertina in Turin, where he emphasized to his students authentic engagement with the subject over technical imitation.

To achieve this, Fontanesi employed the technique of Luminism, a method used in landscape depiction in the mid-19th century that treats light itself as an independent artistic medium. Through layered transparent glazing and maximized light diffusion, it captures immaterial light and atmosphere on the canvas. In “On the Banks of the Po at Turin,” this approach emphasizes expansive areas of light contrasted with shadow, allowing light to become the central subject and elevating the landscape beyond mere representation into something that appears revelatory and mysterious.



▲ Houses in Carate Brianza (1942)

©Lee Seem / The Argus

Turning the corner, a scene of houses harmoniously integrated into nature comes into view. This is “Houses in Carate Brianza” (1942) by Raffaele De Grada, one

of the leading figures of modern Italian landscape painting. While Fontanesi painted scenes marked by natural beauty, De Grada created works in which the lyrical sensibility of the 19th century is combined with the rigorous formal structure of 20th-century painting. The gentle hills and small villages of the Brianza region, along with the landscape shaped by the Lambro River, became key elements in De Grada’s work. “Houses in Carate Brianza” is deeply reflective of his life. In 1941, with the outbreak of World War II, he stayed in Carate Brianza and, through his work, imbued the place with a sense of affection and urgency. The houses depicted are not merely architectural structures, but quiet presences settled within nature, through which he expresses his inner world with depth.



3 Women's Lives and Labor Captured Through Genre Painting



▲ Women in the Washroom (circa 1940)

©Lee Seem / The Argus



▲ Return from the Pasture (1898)

©Lee Seem / The Argus

From the late 19th to the early 20th century, labor marked a time of upheaval in which women’s social status and identity were being reshaped. Realist painters of this period, especially artists with a strong commitment to social engagement, delved deeply into the concrete realities of everyday life. Italian realist painters turned their attention to women’s labor amid rapid social change. At the time, the lives of rural women were shaped by patriarchal structures and arduous physical work, yet they were excluded from official historical records. In response, painters depicted women washing clothes along cold lakeshores or cultivating barren land, presenting on canvas, without embellishment, the unrecorded realities of their lives.

Facing the viewer is Giuseppe Biasi’s “Women in the Washroom,” (circa 1940) depicting women doing laundry within a white frame, which captures what Italian painters of the time sought to observe. The women stand at a large

washroom, washing clothes with their bare hands. The bold oil paint brushwork seems to convey their confidence and upright strength. To the left of the painting, five women are seen working in a pasture. Some carry baskets on their shoulders, while one woman appears to be guiding a flock of sheep, which drink from a nearby stream. This work is “Return from the Pasture” (1898) by Mose Bianchi. Rather than featuring glamorous scenes or solemn poses, Bianchi was an artist who looked for the reality of life in modest places where time seemed to pass slowly, such as alleys, fields, and stream banks. This artistic orientation deepened from 1890 onward as he regularly visited Gignese, a mountain village located along the route connecting Lake Maggiore and Lake Orta. Immersing himself in landscapes where streams, narrow mountain paths, barns, and farmers came together, he immediately transferred his vivid on-site impressions onto the canvas. “Return from the Pasture” was likewise a product of such sustained observation and recording. In his work, figures merge harmoniously with the landscape through spontaneous and fluid brushstrokes. Flowing water refracts light to create nuanced variations of color, and the unadorned composition evokes a quiet atmosphere, as if time has come to a standstill. The fluid handling of oil paint lends the work an added warmth. Through this freedom of expression, Bianchi captured the essence of his subjects with clarity while maintaining a warmly sympathetic gaze.



▲ In the Joy of the Sun (circa 1888)

“In the Joy of the Sun” (circa 1888) by Francesco Paolo Michetti conveys the woman’s intense vitality and sense of exhilaration. Michetti studied narrative expressiveness under Domenico Morelli, a leading master of the Italian art world of the time, and learned how to meticulously observe his subjects from Filippo Palizzi. However, his true place of learning and source of inspiration was Abruzzo, his hometown. While carefully documenting the traditions of religious rituals and festivals, he infused them with his own lyrical sensibility to

A few steps forward reveals a woman in a markedly different atmosphere. Holding a flowering branch in her hand, she appears to dance among chickens.

create a distinctive body of work. He portrayed on canvas the resilient figures of his hometown people, who retained their dignity amid changing times. From the late 1870s, Michetti moved beyond pastoral rural subjects to explore more complex compositions. Influenced by symbolism, which favored suggestive and subjective imagery to evoke dreams, death, mystery, and inner human emotions and ideas over outward appearances, he began to depict Abruzzo as a world imbued with myth-like mystery and intensity. In other words, he combined symbolic elements with ancient traditions to pursue layered compositions, a quality clearly reflected in his style. “In the Joy of the Sun” likewise transforms a simple rural scene into a celebration of the irrepressible vitality shared by a young country girl and a blossoming white tree.

These 19th-century Italian painters captured the presence of women in rural society with a gaze that was both incisive and empathetic. Their canvases vividly conveyed the arduous labor women endured, their perseverance, and the human dignity embedded within it. The representation of women’s labor in 19th-century Italian painting clearly conveys the social structures, gender hierarchies, and modes of knowledge transmission of the time. As such, these works remain not merely objects for aesthetic appreciation but records that preserve truths otherwise at risk of being forgotten, realities beyond what is visible.



Figure Paintings Expressing Nudity and Sensuality



▲ Naked Girl Lying Down (1926)

In this section, a white wall is filled with the image of a nude woman reclining on a black cloth adorned with golden

Culture Trip

patterns. “Naked Girl Lying Down” (1926) by Giacomo Grosso emphasizes the female body through the contrast between warm apricot tones and a dark background, conveying sensuality without overt display and instead projecting a quiet atmosphere with restraint. The space is further filled with additional portraits of women, creating an intriguing contrast with the images of women defined by labor in the previous section. This shift reflects a profound change in the representation of women in European painting in the late 19th century. For centuries after the Renaissance, the female body had been idealized only within the safe frameworks of myth, religion, and allegory. From the late 19th to the early 20th century, however, women’s bodies in European painting began to emerge as real beings endowed with emotion and desire, breaking away from myth and idealization. In other words, the depictions of women moved away from abstract symbolism and emerged as autonomous, realistic presences. Painters confronted the body and gaze within private spaces directly, crossing the taboos imposed by bourgeois morality.

Beside “Naked Girl Lying Down” is another work by Giacomo Grosso, “In the Mirror” (1914). In the painting, a young woman gazes at herself in the mirror, overtly revealing her alluring nude body. Her figure carries a sensuality that seems to flow effortlessly, offering an intense magnetism. Her relaxed yet confident gaze, heavy makeup, and short hair symbolize a self-aware modern femininity, while her long dangling earrings shimmer like emblems of freedom. Grosso’s depiction of the human body is so realistic that it approaches the photographic, yet it never feels cold. The skin vibrates with vitality, and each detail seems to speak. In particular, the treatment of color in the green cloth covering the lower body and its floral decorations demonstrate his exceptional skill as a painter. This work clearly epitomizes Grosso’s style of painting, which freely moves between seduction and introspection, visual pleasure and spiritual depth.



▲ In the Mirror (1914)

©Lee Seem/The Argus



▲ The White Room (1909-1910)

©Lee Seem/The Argus

On another wall appears a woman inside a room. Although the woman is clearly positioned at the center of the composition, attention is drawn not so much to her as to the surrounding space. Dressed in a slip, she sits at a table brushing her hair as morning sunlight filters through the curtains above her. The light gently touches the furniture, the neatly arranged objects, and the reflections in the mirror. Every element of this interior, imbued with refined taste, comes together in subdued, silent elegance to complete a static narrative. This is “The White Room” (1909-1910) by Camillo Innocenti, a Rome-born painter who gained early recognition at the Venice Biennale for his modern style. In the early 20th century, Innocenti emerged as a leading figure in Italian painting with a modern yet international sensibility. Whereas Grosso emphasized bodily materiality, Innocenti delicately rendered the nuanced tones of femininity. He observed women in the process of dressing and undressing yet did not seek to dominate them. Instead, he captured femininity as lived experience, memory, and premonition, not mere appearance. He created an image of modern femininity that appears light and pure yet reveals an anxious elegance, simultaneously unsettling and alluring.

In this period, the body was not a tool for moral instruction but a living reality that fully revealed the complexity of human experience. This shift reflected not only a formal transformation but broader cultural and social changes that sought to explore individual emotion and emotional depth. It was a projection of the spirit of an era that acknowledged the affective dimension of existence and asserted the right to live according to the impulses of the soul rather than social norms.

5

The Mystery of Klimt



▲ Portrait of a Lady (1916)

A gallery with a distinctly different atmosphere unfolds. In the darkened space, lighting illuminates only the explanatory text of this section. At the very back of the gallery stands the centerpiece of the exhibition, Klimt's "Portrait of a Lady." With its powerful pull, "Portrait of a Lady" immediately captures the viewer's gaze. In the early 20th century, Klimt's portraits of women dominated the Viennese art scene. He earned a singular reputation through his fusion of refinement, sensuality, decorative elements, and psychological depth. His models can be broadly divided into commissioned sitters from wealthy bourgeois families and unidentified figures, including professional models. The latter, known in art history as so-called "modern women," became icons of style with an overwhelming presence despite their anonymity. Striking hats, flowing shawls, and theatrical poses frequently appear, and at times the titles themselves emphasize attire, underscoring clothing as an essential part of the narrative.

"Portrait of a Lady" also appears to belong to this category, yet its history is distinctive and shrouded in mystery. In 1996, it was revealed that beneath "Portrait of a Lady" lay another female portrait painted by Klimt around 1909. In

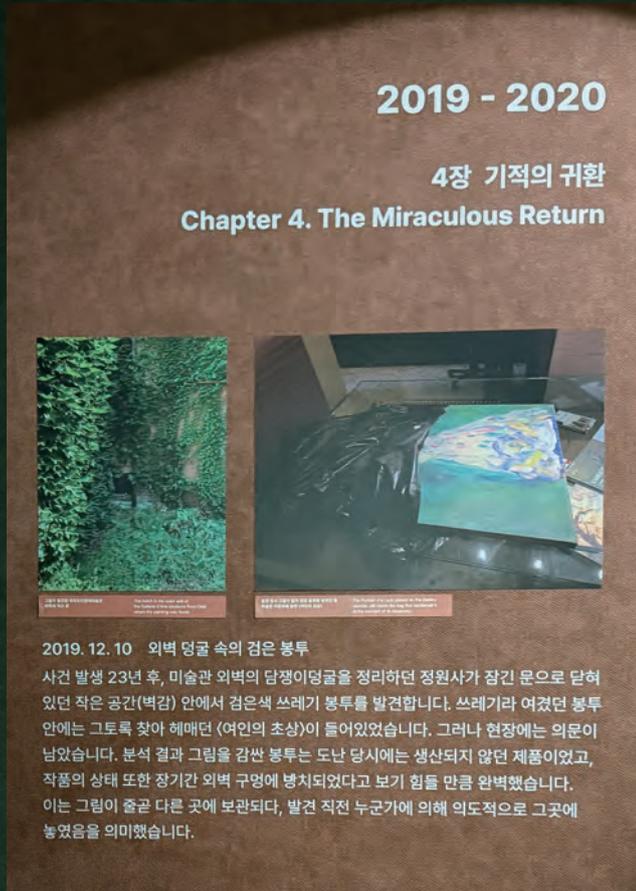
other words, the portrait now in the Ricci Oddi collection was painted over an earlier image. The initial version, known as "Backfisch" (1909), had previously been exhibited at the Miethke Gallery in Vienna. In that version, the woman wears a wide-brimmed black hat and a stole, with a blue shawl draped over her shoulders. The background was the same vivid green tone seen today, but the overall mood was far bolder and more provocative. At some point between late 1916 and the following year, however, Klimt painted over the original, entirely transforming the work. The hat disappeared, the dark stole was replaced by a bright floral shawl, and although the face and background remained, the atmosphere changed completely. The title was also changed to "Portrait of a Lady."



▲ Backfisch (R) and the final Portrait of a Lady (L) reveals Klimt's rare and deliberate transformation of a single canvas.

Once this complex origin is understood, traces of the underlying image begin to emerge upon close inspection. The background around the woman's face has been more densely overpainted to conceal the complex dark mass of the boa beneath. At the shoulders, the low neckline of the original dress remains, faintly visible beneath the current robe adorned with floral patterns. In the brushwork surrounding the face, traces of the large hat later erased from the Piacenza portrait still subtly linger.

The mystery surrounding this work does not end there. In February 1997, an exhibition curated by then-director Stefano Fugazza opened at the Gothic Palace in Piacenza. On Saturday, February 22, amid the complex preparations surrounding the packaging of artworks, Klimt's painting was stolen. To this day, the circumstances of the theft remain unclear. A few days after the disappearance, the empty frame was found on the roof near the museum's skylight. Twenty-two years passed before the work finally returned, under circumstances as mysterious as, or even more so than those of the original theft.



© Lee Seem / The Argus

On December 10, 2019, maintenance work was underway in the green area along the museum’s exterior wall, where a plastic bag was discovered in a small space blocked off by a door, and inside it was a single canvas: “Portrait of a Lady.” A young security guard took it with trembling hands and carried it into the museum. Subsequent appraisals and scientific examinations conducted at the request of Italian authorities conclusively verified the work’s authenticity, and on November 28, 2020, the painting finally returned in full to the Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi.

A woman in her 50s surnamed Lee, who lives in Incheon and visited the exhibition, said, “I have seen Klimt’s works several times in Korea, but this was my first time encountering “Portrait of a Lady,” so I visited the exhibition with anticipation. Seeing it in person, the strange feeling conveyed by her gaze and slightly parted lips was an emotion I could not feel from photographs. When I saw it in books, it gave only a single impression, but in person the work felt different from moment to moment.” As one walks through the exhibition, the modern and contemporary Italian art unfolds not as a mere listing of styles, but as a narrative of an era. Landscapes became a medium for inner resonance, women’s labor remained as testimony to unrecorded histories, and nudes and figure paintings exposed the complexity of human existence beyond taboo. Finally, at the end of all these works, Klimt’s “Portrait of a Lady” shows how art can capture the passage of loss and recovery.

▲ Portrait of a Lady reemerges after 22 years of disappearance.

This exhibition is not simply about presenting valuable works of art. The journey from one individual’s passion to public legacy, and from a painting’s theft and silence to its miraculous recovery, reveals the endurance and restorative power inherent in art. It demonstrates how art preserves memory across borders and time, calling forgotten presences back into view. This exhibition offers an opportunity to reflect on how art transcends specific places and eras, carrying memory across time and space. 🇰🇷

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International Law and Its Role in Maintaining Peace and Security

By Choi A-won

Staff Reporter of Social Section



“I don’t need international law.” This statement by U.S. President Donald Trump on January 8, 2026, is cited by critics, suggesting that state power can take precedence over law in international relations. On January 3, the Trump administration announced the detention of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro on charges related to narco-terrorism and trafficking. The claim that a single decision by the major power state could destabilize another country’s government prompted significant international reaction, and was cited as illustrating the vulnerability of international law to unilateral action. More broadly, challenges to international law have persisted over time. On March 17, 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin in connection with alleged crimes related to the invasion of Ukraine, but the warrant has not been enforced even three years later. When international law is disregarded, shared legal standards for the peaceful management weaken, and power-based considerations begin to dominate. The international community established codified international law in June 1945 to prevent the recurrence of large-scale armed conflict after World Wars I and II, and this has served as a minimum common framework for managing disputes between states through rules and procedures. However, international law is potentially limited in its effectiveness because of several structural limitations. The Argus aims to help readers critically assess the future of international relations from a transnational perspective by understanding the background and importance of the enactment of international law and analyzing its limitations.

[Before Reading] The U.N. Charter

In this column, international law refers to the U.N. Charter, which functions as the central treaty of the contemporary international legal order. Under Article 38 of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Statute, international law is defined as a comprehensive concept consisting of four sources: treaties that have legally binding force according to agreements between states, international customary law, general principles of law, and finally judicial decisions and teachings of the qualified publicists. Among these, treaties most clearly codify the rights and obligations between states and form a foundational framework of international order. Adopted in 1945 in the aftermath of World War II, the U.N. Charter currently binds 193 member states and forms the institutional core of the U.N.-centered legal system.

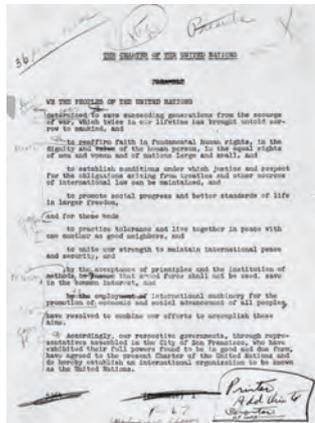


What is the U.N. Charter?

1) Background and Purpose of the Enactment of the U.N. Charter

Due to the development of transportation, communication and technology caused by the Industrial Revolution from the 19th to the 20th century, the time and cost required for movement and trade were significantly reduced, and accordingly, the cross-border movement of people, goods, and capital became more frequent. As certain cultural and economic practices became increasingly interconnected worldwide, interaction between geographically distant countries expanded, creating a need for common rules to sustain exchanges between states. Traditional international law developed primarily around treaties regulating trade, commerce, and diplomatic relations between states. Consequently, its binding force was limited to the states that had consented to each treaty.

However, the limitations of traditional international law were exposed by World Wars I and II. Before World War I, international law lacked comprehensive legal restrictions on the use of force, allowing states to legally resort to coercive means such as war to pursue their own interests. Triggered by the large-scale wars and humanitarian catastrophes of the wars, international discussions sought to move international law beyond the coordination of economic interests among individual states, toward the establishment of universal norms. Amidst this growing awareness, the international community began to articulate shared principles for peace, beginning with the Atlantic Charter in 1941. Through “The Declaration by United Nations” on January 1, 1942, 50 countries including the United States, Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, endorsed the common principles outlined in the Atlantic Charter. Three years later, representatives of these



▲ This shows the original text of the U.N. Charter drafted in 1945.

© United Nations, Charter of the United Nations (1945)

states met at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 and adopted the U.N. Charter as codified international law, marking the foundation of the modern international order.

The U.N. Charter, which serves as a central international treaty of modern international law, codifies the core principles of the international order, including the equality of national sovereignty and the prohibition of the use of force in international relations, across 19 chapters and 111 articles. This normative foundation is explicitly stated in the Preamble of the U.N. Charter. The Preamble states: “We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security...”

Adopted in the aftermath of World Wars I and II, the U.N. Charter embeds the prevention of future conflict and humanitarian catastrophe as a foundational principle while affirming human rights, human dignity, equal rights of men and women, and the legal equality of nations both large and small. For these purposes, the U.N. Charter expresses a collective commitment to peaceful coexistence, the acceptance of its guiding principles and the maintenance of international peace and security by ensuring that force is used only in legally justified circumstances. Based on these founding principles, contemporary international law under the U.N. system operates as a broadly shared normative framework within 193 member states and seeks to promote international peace through the prohibition of the use of force and the principle of sovereign equality.

2) Structure and Enforcement Mechanism of the U.N. Charter

To uphold the principles of sovereign equality and international peace enshrined in the U.N. Charter, the basic rights and obligations that U.N. member states are required to uphold are prescribed through its articles. To become a formal member state, a country must receive a recommendation from the U.N. Security Council (here after UNSC) and then receive approval from the U.N. General Assembly. Meanwhile, there are also entities that are not among the 193 member states but hold observer status, allowing them to attend sessions of the General

Assembly. The Holy See and the State of Palestine fall into this category. In contrast, entities such as Kosovo and Taiwan are neither U.N. members nor have they been granted official status within the U.N. system.

Countries joined as member states must fulfill various obligations specified in the U.N. Charter. The Declaration on Friendly Relations systematized the rights and obligations of member states in the form of seven core international law principles. These include the obligation for states to refrain from the use or threat of force against other states, to resolve international disputes by peaceful means and not to intervene in the internal affairs of other states, and to cooperate within the international community. It also affirms the principle of equal rights, under which all states possess equal legal status regardless of political, economic and social differences, and stipulates that each state has the right to freely choose its own political, social, and economic system.

When a state violates international law, state responsibility arises. The International Law Commission, stipulates in the Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, adopted in 2001, that the violating state must first cease the wrongful act, prevent its recurrence and perform restitution to the injured state. If restitution is impossible, the responsible state is required to provide compensation through financial reparation. Where compensation alone is insufficient, it must take other appropriate measures, such as an official apology or the punishment of those responsible. However, if the violating state does not implement these obligations, this may lead to an international dispute, which can be addressed through judicial procedures. Among these, the ICJ, as the primary judicial organ of the U.N., adjudicates legal disputes between states and determines whether a violation has occurred.

However, while this procedure addresses state responsibility, individual criminal accountability is handled through separate international mechanisms, the ICC. The ICC was established in The Hague, the Netherlands, in 2002 under the Rome Statute to prosecute individuals for crimes that have a significant impact on the international community, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although it is not a U.N. organ, it operates in close cooperation with the

U.N. system, particularly through the UNSC referrals and institutional coordination. As a permanent criminal court, it supplements the state-centered structure of international law by ensuring that individuals, not only states, can be held accountable.

One notable case handled by the ICC is that of the Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi. In 2016, he was convicted of war crimes for the intentional destruction of historical and religious sites in Timbuktu, Mali, in 2012.



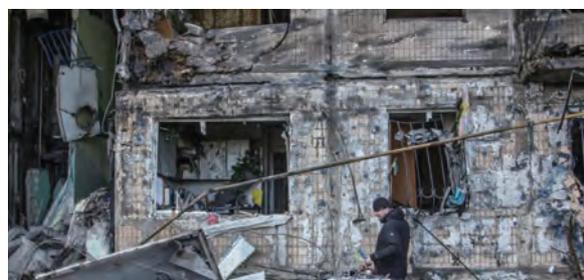
▲ Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi appears before the ICC during his trial.

The case is often regarded as symbolically significant in the ICC history because it was the first case in which both a prison sentence and a reparations order were finalized, resulting in a nine-year term of imprisonment. Through this layered structure — state responsibility under the U.N. Charter and individual criminal responsibility under the ICC — the international legal system seeks to preserve peace and accountability in a coordinated manner.



Contemporary Challenges to the Application of the U.N. Charter

1) The Ukraine Conflict and Institutional Implications of Permanent-Member Veto Authority



▲ Apartment buildings are destroyed by shelling in Ukraine.

In the early morning of February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military operation against Ukraine stating that its actions were motivated by security concerns, including claims related to NATO expansion and Western military support for Ukraine. According to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human

Rights, since the start of the military operations, numerous civilian casualties have been reported, infrastructure damage has increased, and human rights violations have been documented. Subsequently, according to a U.N. report released in December 2025, the confirmed number of civilian casualties in Ukraine that year was 2,514 deaths and 12,142 injuries, representing a 31 percent increase compared to 2024. Many U.N. member states and international legal bodies have characterized Russia's use of force in Ukraine as a violation of Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the U.N. Charter, which requires states to refrain from the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. Numerous U.N. member states sought to condemn the situation and prevent further escalation of the conflict through diplomatic and legal mechanisms. According to the U.N. meeting records from February 25, 2022, the UNSC, which holds primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security according to the U.N. Charter, voted on a draft resolution calling for an end to the Russian Federation's military actions in Ukraine. Although it gained the support of many member states with 11 votes in favor and 3 abstentions, it failed to be adopted due to a veto cast by just one member state. This outcome occurred because Russia exercised its veto power as a permanent member of the UNSC. In this case, a permanent member subject to the draft resolution exercised its veto, blocking a proposal supported by a majority of the UNSC members and illustrating structural constraints within the UNSC's veto system.

The five permanent members of the UNSC (the U.S., Britain, France, China, and Russia) possess the authority to block the UNSC action through the veto by any one single permanent member. The UNSC is composed of five permanent members and ten non-permanent members. According to Article 23, Paragraph 1 of the U.N. Charter, the five states designated at the time of the U.N.'s establishment in 1945, hold permanent membership, while the remaining 10 members are elected for two-year terms. Article 24 of the U.N. Charter confers upon the UNSC primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and acts on behalf of the member states, when recommending or deciding on measures in response to threats to peace. Accordingly, a decision

adopted by the UNSC is binding on U.N. member states, which have agreed to accept and carry out such decisions under the U.N. Charter. According to explanations provided by U.N. sources, this structure is intended to enable more unified and timely responses by allowing the UNSC to act on behalf of member states rather than relying on individual action.



▲ The UNSC convenes to address the situation in Ukraine.

However, this structure, combined with the veto power granted to permanent members, has been criticized for limiting collective responses. In particular, permanent members are granted special status and special voting rights, commonly referred to as the veto. According to the U.N., the framers of the U.N. Charter granted this authority because the five countries played central roles in the creation of the U.N., and were expected to contribute significantly to maintaining international security. However, a frequently raised concern is that a state directly involved in an armed conflict may be able to block collective measures directed at its own actions. Regarding these structural limitations, Soh Changrok, a professor at Korea University, argued that “The veto power held by the five permanent members has fixed a structure that prioritizes political interests over legal judgment, and even if clear violations of international law or large-scale civilian damage occur, the UNSC has repeatedly been unable to make any decision if the interests of the permanent members conflict.” He also stated that “This dynamic has contributed to perceptions of inconsistent enforcement of international law, which may weaken confidence in international norms.” framing the issue as a structural characteristic of the international legal system rather than the result of a single incident.

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2) The Normalization of Nuclear Threats and the Limits of Interpreting the Right of Self-Defense in Article 51 of the U.N. Charter



▲ A photograph of the 1971 Licorne nuclear test illustrates the destructive power of nuclear weapons.

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) entered into force on February 5, 2011, limiting deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 for each country and capping key delivery systems such as intercontinental ballistic missiles. It also established on-site inspection mechanisms and information-sharing procedures to support verification and transparency. Nuclear arms control agreements such as the New START have widely been regarded as contributing to risk reduction and limits on global nuclear stockpiles.

However, on February 5, 2026, the treaty expired, ending legally binding constraints on the U.S. and Russia, which possess the majority of the world's nuclear weapons. The absence of institutional limits on nuclear force development has since raised concerns about increased instability in international security. On February 4, 2026, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the collapse of this system of restraint coincides with rising geopolitical tensions and an elevated risk of nuclear weapon use, describing the situation as a serious challenge to international peace.

Amid these rising tensions, on September 29, 2025, Kim Son Gyong, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of North Korea, stated during the General Debate of the U.N. General Assembly, that nuclear weapons are linked to North Korea's sovereignty and would not be relinquished. Such declarations have intensified debates over how Article 51 should be interpreted in situations involving potential nuclear threats.

According to Song Seung-jong, a professor in the

Department of Military Affairs at Daejeon University, in *A Study on the Legitimacy of Preemptive Strike for Self-Defense: With a Special Focus on the Article 2 (4) and the Article 51 in the U.N. Charter* (2015), the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, has intensified international security threats, prompting scholarly debate over whether preemptive strike could be considered under self-defense doctrines when threats are deemed imminent, rather than relying solely on traditional defensive strategies.

However, the current U.N. Charter does not clearly specify the scope of practical self-defense measures applicable to nuclear threats. Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the U.N. Charter establishes the principle of the prohibition of the use of force in order to protect the territorial integrity and political independence of states. By contrast, Article 51 of the U.N. Charter provides that, "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations..." thereby recognizing an exception to the prohibition of the use of force when an armed attack occurs. Accordingly, whether a state's use of force can be regarded as lawful under international law depends in significant part on how the phrase "if an armed attack occurs" in Article 51 is interpreted.

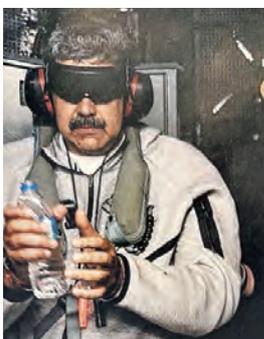
A key issue is that the U.N. Charter does not clearly define the precise meanings of "use of force" and "armed attack." According to An Jun-hyeong, a professor at Graduate School of Security of Korea National Defense University, in *The Possibility of Armed Response to Small-Scale Hostilities that Do Not Reach "Armed Attack" under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter and its International Legal Limits* (2019), "use of force" is generally understood as encompassing the overall use of military power, whereas "armed attack" is interpreted more narrowly, often equated with armed aggression. This conceptual distinction has been argued to create a structural gap, in which a victim state may be unable to invoke the right of self-defense, if the use of force it faces is assessed as falling below the threshold of an armed attack under Article 51. Consequently, the exercise of self-defense may be limited to responses after an armed attack has already occurred, including in extreme cases

involving nuclear weapons.

As a result, debates have emerged regarding whether preemptive strikes could be considered a form of exercising the right of self-defense. In this context, a preemptive strike is generally defined as a limited use of force intended to defend or repel an imminent armed attack, rather than to pursue offensive objectives. Some scholars argue that if a sufficiently imminent threat can be demonstrated, such as clear attack preparations or a rapidly increasing risk of harm, a preemptive strike might be considered within the scope of self-defense. Conversely, because preemptive strikes are not generally recognized as a lawful exercise of self-defense under international law, a state undertaking such action may be characterized as an aggressor and face diplomatic or economic sanctions. Accordingly, critics argue that the absence of clear definitions or authoritative interpretations regarding the use of force, armed attack, and preemptive strike, limits the practical clarity of self-defense rights under the U.N. Charter. As a result, the current U.N. Charter is viewed by some scholars as lacking clear standards for the use of force, armed attack and preemptive strike, highlighting ongoing structural debates regarding the scope of self-defense in situations involving nuclear threats.

3) Sovereign Equality and Its Limits: Legal Debates Surrounding U.S. Policy Toward Venezuela

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▲ A photograph shared by President Donald Trump on social media shows the transfer of President Nicolas Maduro.

On January 3, 2026, the Trump administration conducted a military operation in Venezuela, during which Maduro was detained and transported to the U.S. At a press conference that day, Trump said “We will run the country (Venezuela) until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition.” As a result of the operation, Venezuela’s sitting leader was removed from office, and Trump publicly referenced Vice President Delcy Rodriguez as a potential transitional figure;

however, Rodriguez has since called for Maduro’s release. While the Trump administration framed the operation primarily in terms of counter-narcotics enforcement and criminal accountability, critics pointed to statements made at the press conference, referencing U.S. energy interests and concerns over China’s growing influence in Latin America as broader strategic considerations. The U.N. Human Rights Council Special Procedures issued a statement criticizing the operation, arguing that “Venezuela’s vast natural resources, including the world’s largest oil reserves, must not be used as a thin pretext to justify military aggression, foreign occupation and regime change strategies.”

From one legal perspective, such actions raise questions about compatibility with the principle of sovereign equality under the U.N. Charter and the related principle of non-intervention in internal affairs. Article 2, Paragraph 1 of the U.N. Charter states that “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members,” establishing that states are legally equal in international relations regardless of differences in political systems and values. This principle is widely regarded as foundational to international law, emphasizing respect for territorial integrity and political independence in response to historical experiences of large-scale conflict and external domination in the twentieth century. At the same time, the Trump administration argued that Venezuela’s government had forfeited normal sovereign protections through what it described as hostile conduct, including alleged narcotics trafficking into the U.S. It also cited the nationalization of U.S.-financed oil infrastructure, labeling it unlawful expropriation and portraying its response as defensive rather than imperial. Critics, including commentators in *The New York Times*, disputed this interpretation, describing the operation as “hegemonic” and warning that treating criminal or economic hostility as grounds for intervention risks eroding the principle of sovereign equality.

Article 2, Paragraph 7 of the U.N. Charter, grounded in the principle of sovereign equality, provides that the U.N. shall not intervene in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state, while recognizing an exception for enforcement measures authorized

under Chapter VII, thereby articulating the principles of territorial sovereignty and non-intervention. This provision limits U.N. intervention in domestic affairs, while allowing the UNSC enforcement measures when authorized under Chapter VII. However, the operation to arrest Maduro, code-named “Determined Resolve,” was not authorized by a UNSC resolution and was carried out unilaterally by the U.S., which framed the operation as a law-enforcement and security action rather than a U.N.-mandated intervention. According to Professor Choi Tae-hyun, a professor at Hanyang University Law School, in *The Limits and Coordination of the Exercise of Enforcement Jurisdiction Overseas under International Law* (2010), actions such as forcibly removing an individual without the consent of the territorial state or applying coercive pressure are generally regarded by many international law scholars as violating territorial sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention. From this line of interpretation, the Trump administration’s measures have been viewed by some scholars as falling within this category of prohibited conduct; by contrast, U.S. government argued that the operation constituted a lawful exercise of extraterritorial criminal jurisdiction and self-defense against transnational threats emanating from a regime it regarded as illegitimate and actively hostile.

To date, legal controversy and criticism regarding the actions of the Trump administration have persisted, while formal international sanctions or enforcement measures have not been adopted, partly reflecting institutional constraints rather than consensus on illegality. One explanation for the limited use of coercive enforcement in international law lies in the absence of centralized authority — a condition often described as “a state of anarchy.” Unlike domestic legal systems, international law regulates conduct among sovereign states rather than functioning as a centralized criminal justice system. As a result, findings of state responsibility and compliance with international legal obligations are often enforced indirectly, frequently through reputational costs, diplomatic pressure, or reciprocal measures, which some analysts argue can be effective precisely, because states value legitimacy and long-term cooperation. In practice, the application of such measures to major powers is often

constrained; others counter that major powers remain subject to informal pressures, including alliance costs, economic interdependence, domestic political scrutiny, and reputational considerations. Such cases are frequently cited as illustrating that, while international law declares sovereign equality in principle, its effectiveness depends on a combination of legal norms, political will, and reciprocal restraint, rather than coercive enforcement alone.



Future Outlook and Structural Reform Debates in International Law

The U.N. Charter operates within an international governance structure designed to manage international security and dispute resolution through the U.N. However, as power asymmetries between states have widened, many observers argue that this system has become increasingly strained. The challenges facing the U.N. Charter are usually attributed to structural tensions inherent to the international legal system and its core principles, rather than to defects in single provision. Historically, the U.S. played a central role in constructing a U.N.-centered international order and as the dominant power the relative stability of that system was partly sustained. Since the inauguration of the Trump administration, some analysts have argued that U.S. policy choices have contributed to tensions within the international legal order. Professor Soh noted that “While international law and the U.N. system have always contained limitations, they maintained relative stability for an extended period due to U.S. hegemonic leadership.” He added that recent changes in U.S. engagement, together with broader shifts in the international environment, have altered that balance.

The international law system has historically developed in response to periods of war and systemic disruption, often stabilizing and reconstructing itself in the aftermath of major crises. Rather than collapsing, it has undergone phases of adjustment and institutional redesign. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that the system will collapse simply because international law appears less effective in the current period, even as this moment raises questions about possible institutional

reconfiguration. Oh Si Jin, an associate professor at the Kangwon National University School of Law, noted that “Skepticism toward international law and international organizations has existed throughout their history, and cautions that imagining a world without them would likely result in an international order governed primarily by power and force.” She emphasized the importance of considering how international law might evolve in response to new crises, rather than focusing solely on its existing limitations. Professor Soh similarly argued that

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▲ The U.N. flag flies in front of the U.N. Headquarters in New York, symbolizing the pursuit of lasting international peace.

the central issue is not the necessity of norms themselves, but how norms and institutions can be adapted to reflect contemporary realities.

Several proposed avenues for reform have been discussed to address the limitations of international law. Many analyses attribute current challenges to structural constraints inherent in a global governance system without central authority, rather than to loopholes in specific provisions of the U.N. Charter. One notable change compared to earlier periods is the shift of power within the international system. Whereas superpower states historically shaped the international order, the expansion of digital technologies and artificial intelligence has increased the influence of large technology corporations, in some cases rivaling the economic and informational capacities

of states. As a result, Professor Soh argues that “The formation and maintenance of new international norms may require clear frameworks for corporate participation, accountability, and responsibility, particularly in the technology sector.” Professor Soh observed that the post-World War II success of the U.N. rested on a compromise between normative ideals and political realities, particularly between the principle of sovereign equality and the decision to grant veto power to a limited number of states. He further noted that contemporary conditions may require a different form of compromise, suggesting that reform efforts should focus not only on strengthening existing norms, but on developing governance models capable of ensuring accountability and transparency while reflecting evolving power structures.

A second commonly emphasized factor is the political will of states to comply with international law. Professor Oh noted that “Loopholes exist in any treaty or legal system, but that compliance ultimately depends on whether influential states are willing to observe international law.” She emphasized that “Sovereign states, particularly major superpowers, may need to accept practical constraints on their freedom of action in order for the international system to function effectively. Human rights, humanitarian norms, and environmental protection are widely recognized principles within the international community; however, the extent to which states are willing to uphold these principles remains contested. Accordingly, greater emphasis on shared interests, legal education, and institutional incentives are often proposed as a means of encouraging compliance.

As various cases demonstrate, the effectiveness of the U.N. Charter is shaped by structural factors, including limited enforcement mechanisms, the institutional dynamics of the permanent-member veto, and the political will of states. When compliance is lacking or veto power is repeatedly exercised, the operation of the international legal system may be institutionally constrained. These limitations, however, do not nullify the relevance of international law; rather, they invite closer examination of how the system functions under existing structural conditions. Modern international law developed in response to large-scale conflict and reflects efforts to institutionalize collective security and shared legal standards. Its practical effectiveness therefore depends not only on formal norms, but on how institutional design and state practice interact. The central question is not whether the system is imperfect, but how cooperative legal frameworks can be sustained and adjusted within those constraints. 

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Sweetness Without Sugar: The Metabolic Truth Behind Alternative Sweeteners

By Lee Seun
Editor-in-Chief

“Would you like regular cola or zero cola?” This question has become routine in restaurants, showing how zero-calorie carbonated beverages have become part of everyday consumption. According to a survey conducted by Danawa Research titled “Changes in Annual Sales Share of Zero-Calorie Carbonated Beverages” from June 2021 to May 2025 shows that zero beverages and regular carbonated drinks held nearly equal market shares until mid-2022. However, from June 2024 to May 2025, zero beverages accounted for 58.15 percent of total carbonated beverage sales, surpassing half of the market. The rise of zero-carbonated drinks has also led to the spread of products labeled “zero” or “low-sugar,” such as zero-calorie jelly candy and reduced-sugar coffee. An article published by *OhmyNews* on June 10, 2025 reports that this growth is linked to heightened health awareness following the COVID-19 pandemic, as consumer demand for sugar-free products increased under the Healthy Pleasure trend. Many consumers have come to view zero-labeled products as a healthier option, but are they truly healthier? As Valentine’s Day on March 14 approaches, store shelves will once again be filled with sugar-laden sweets such as chocolate, quietly bringing sugar consumption back to the center of everyday choices. Therefore, *The Argus* examines the background of zero products, analyzes their different types and characteristics, and explains why some products may lead to adverse effects, to help readers make informed choices about alternative sweeteners that suit their individual needs.

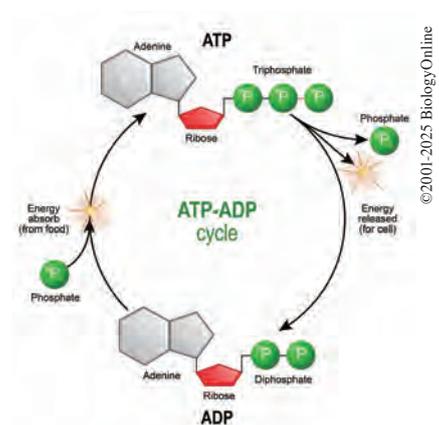


1. Why Are Alternative Sweeteners Used?

1) Why Do People Crave Sweet Foods?

During exam periods or while working on lengthy assignments, people often find themselves craving particularly sweet foods such as chocolate after prolonged mental effort. Why do humans unconsciously seek out sugary foods? All human activities such as thinking, moving, and even breathing are ultimately the results of chemical reactions within individual cells. The human body is composed of roughly 30 trillions cells, and each cell requires energy to sustain life. In essence, to be active means that these cells are constantly producing and consuming energy. The primary energy source used by cells is adenosine triphosphate (ATP). ATP is a molecule composed of “adenine,” a nitrogenous base,* and “ribose,” a five-carbon sugar, together forming adenosine, to which three phosphate groups are attached. Whenever cells require energy to carry

out physical or cognitive activities, ATP is broken down through hydrolysis, a reaction of a substance with water molecules leading to breaking down large molecules into smaller ones. When the terminal phosphate group is removed, ATP is converted into adenosine diphosphate (ADP) and inorganic phosphate, releasing energy in the process. Cells use this released energy to carry out physiological functions that



▲ ATP is broken down into ADP and inorganic phosphate through hydrolysis, releasing energy for cellular functions.

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require energy, such as transporting ions, synthesizing proteins, and contracting muscles. In other words, human life depends on the continuous production and consumption of ATP.

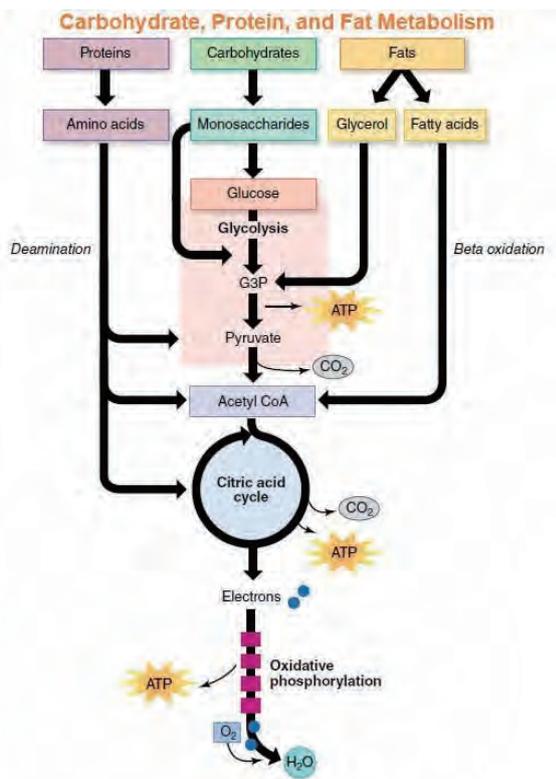
Where, then, do cells obtain the ATP that is essential for human activity? ATP is synthesized through the breakdown and oxidation of nutrients consumed in food within cells. In particular, the chemical energy released from the oxidation of organic nutrients such as carbohydrates, fats, and proteins is used to produce ATP. In terms of energy density, carbohydrates and proteins each provide approximately 4 kilocalories per gram, whereas fats yield about 9 kilocalories per gram, making fats a more concentrated source of stored energy. Carbohydrates are broken down into glucose during digestion and transported to cells through the bloodstream. Once inside the cell, glucose undergoes glycolysis, oxygen-independent metabolic pathway occurring in the cytoplasm that breaks down one 6-carbon glucose molecule into two 3-carbon pyruvate molecules, followed by oxidative processes in the mitochondria, leading to ATP production. Because this process occurs relatively quickly, carbohydrates serve as an immediate

source of energy. Fats are broken down into fatty acids and glycerol. Fatty acids then undergo beta-oxidation, a primary metabolic process in the mitochondria that breaks down fatty acids into Acetyl-CoA, and generates large amounts of ATP. Although fats produce more ATP per unit mass and therefore function as a highly efficient fuel source, their mobilization and oxidation are comparatively complex and require more time. As a result, fats are primarily utilized during prolonged activity or periods of fasting. Proteins are broken down into amino acids, whose primary role is to support tissue structure and enzyme formation. Although proteins also provide approximately 4 kilocalories per gram, their primary physiological role is not energy production but the synthesis of enzymes, structural components, and other functional molecules. However, when necessary, the carbon skeletons of amino acids can enter metabolic pathways and contribute to ATP production. This pathway is supplementary and does not serve as a primary energy source under normal conditions.

Although carbohydrates, fats, and proteins all contribute to ATP production, they differ in terms of speed and metabolic priority. Glucose derived from carbohydrates is transported rapidly through the bloodstream and can be readily used in cellular metabolism, making it particularly advantageous for quick energy supply. The brain, under normal physiological conditions, also relies primarily on glucose as its main fuel source, which makes rapid replenishment important when blood glucose levels decline.

Since carbohydrates, which are broken down into glucose, exist in the form of sugars, the perception of sweetness is closely linked to the body's recognition of readily available energy. Humans perceive sweetness as a sensory signal to detect the presence of sugars such as glucose. Sweet taste receptors on the tongue have evolved to recognize energy-dense carbohydrates. When sweetness is detected, the body interprets it as a signal of a high-energy resource and reinforces consumption behavior. Shin Kyung-Ok, professor of Department of Food&Nutrition at Sahmyook university, explained, "Sweetness is fundamentally linked to human survival. Sugars are absorbed rapidly and serve as an immediate source of energy. Over the course of evolution, the human brain developed the ability to recognize sweet nutrients, as this capacity increased the likelihood of survival," highlighting the evolutionary basis of human's attraction to sweetness. At the same time, the intake of sweet foods activates the brain's reward circuitry, triggering the release of

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▲ Carbohydrates, fats, and proteins are broken down and oxidized through interconnected metabolic pathways, glycolysis, the citric acid cycle, and oxidative phosphorylation, to produce ATP within cells.

dopamine and endogenous opioids and producing a temporary sense of satisfaction. Ultimately, the attraction to sweetness is not merely a matter of preference. It reflects the metabolic role of glucose as a substrate that rapidly contributes to ATP production, combined with a neurological reward system shaped to efficiently secure such energy sources.

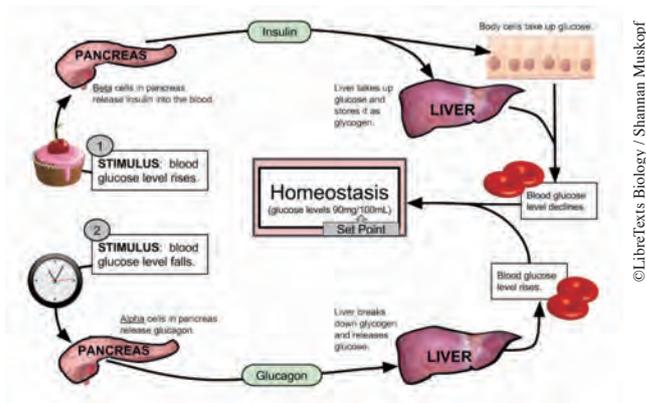
*Nitrogenous Base: A nitrogenous base is a molecule that is a component of DNA and RNA, and is labeled as adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine in DNA, and uracil in RNA.

2) What Happens When Too Much Sugar Is Consumed?

Sugars are classified according to their structure into monosaccharides, disaccharides, and polysaccharides. Monosaccharides are the most basic units of sugar that cannot be further broken down and include glucose, fructose, and galactose. Disaccharides consist of two monosaccharides bonded together, such as sucrose, lactose, and maltose. Polysaccharides are long chains of glucose molecules, with starch and glycogen as representative examples. These polysaccharides are broken down into monosaccharides during digestion before being absorbed. Among these various forms of sugar, the one most commonly used in daily life to produce sweetness is sucrose, also known as table sugar. Table sugar, a disaccharide composed of one molecule of glucose and one molecule of fructose, is a natural disaccharide carbohydrate obtained by refining the juice of sugarcane or sugar beet.

When table sugar is consumed, sucrose is broken down in the small intestine by the enzyme sucrase into glucose and fructose. These monosaccharides are then absorbed through the intestinal wall and enter the bloodstream. Once in the blood, glucose increases blood glucose levels, referring to the concentration of glucose circulating in the bloodstream. The human body maintains a property known as homeostasis, which regulates the internal environment within a stable range. Physiological indicators such as body temperature, blood pressure, and blood glucose must remain within specific limits to ensure normal cellular function. Therefore, when blood glucose levels rise after sugar intake, the body acts to restore them to baseline levels. An increase in blood glucose is detected by the pancreas, an organ located behind the stomach that performs both digestive and endocrine functions. Within the pancreas, beta cells in the islets of Langerhans secrete the hormone insulin in response to elevated blood glucose levels. Insulin facilitates the uptake of glucose from the bloodstream into muscle and fat cells. As cells absorb glucose, blood

glucose levels return to the normal range, thereby maintaining glucose homeostasis.



▲ Insulin and glucagon regulate blood glucose levels through opposing actions to maintain glucose homeostasis in the body.

However, repeated and excessive sugar consumption places strain on this homeostatic regulatory system. When sharp increases in blood glucose occur frequently, pancreatic beta cells must continuously secrete insulin. If this condition persists over time, cells gradually become less responsive to insulin signaling, leading to insulin resistance. As insulin resistance develops, greater amounts of insulin are required to process the same level of glucose. Professor Shin explained, “A rapid rise in blood glucose triggers excessive insulin secretion from the pancreas, which can lead to metabolic imbalance in the body. When blood sugar spikes repeatedly, it may result in decreased concentration, fatigue, increased insulin resistance, fatty liver, obesity, chronic inflammatory responses, and eventually diabetes.” Although sugar serves as a physiologically necessary source of energy, excessive consumption places pressure on the body’s glucose homeostasis system and may gradually impair metabolic regulation.

For this reason, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends limiting daily sugar intake to no more than 50 grams, and preferably below 25 grams, which is roughly equivalent to a small chocolate bar. Despite this guideline, average consumption often exceeds the recommended level. According to the *2025 Report on Analysis Report on Sodium and Sugar Intake to Assess Health Risk* by National Institute of Food and Drug Safety Evaluation, children and adolescents consumed between 42.1 and 46.6 grams of sugar per day from 2019 to 2023, exceeding 10 percent of their total daily caloric intake.

2. Types and Characteristics of Alternative Sweeteners



1) Artificial Sweeteners

As excessive sugar consumption has been associated with an increased risk of metabolic diseases, alternative sweeteners have been developed to maintain sweetness while reducing caloric intake and minimizing effects on blood glucose levels. Depending on how they are produced, alternative sweeteners are classified into artificial sweeteners, natural sweeteners, natural sugars, and sugar alcohols. Their taste profiles and the ways they are digested and metabolized vary accordingly. In South Korea, 22 types of sweeteners are currently approved for use in various food categories under regulations set by the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety.

Artificial sweeteners are synthetically produced compounds that provide a much stronger sweetness than sugar while containing little to no calories. They are widely used in diet foods, beverages, and confectionery products and typically possess sweetness that is hundreds to thousands of times stronger than that of sugar. Common examples include sucralose, aspartame, and sodium saccharin.

Sucralose is one of the most widely used sweeteners in zero-calorie carbonated drinks. It is a synthetic sweetener derived from sugar and is approximately 600 times sweeter than sugar. It is barely absorbed by the body and therefore provides no calories. Because it remains relatively stable at high temperatures, it is used not only in beverages but also in baked and other heated products. Aspartame is about 200 times sweeter than sugar and is often described as having a relatively natural sweetness. It is commonly used in diet beverages and low-calorie foods, but its use in heated products is limited due to its sensitivity to high temperatures. Saccharin is one of the oldest artificial sweeteners and is approximately 300 times sweeter than sugar. Although it was once associated with concerns about carcinogenicity, it is now considered safe within established intake limits. Because it can leave a bitter aftertaste, it is often blended with other sweeteners.

The primary advantage of artificial sweeteners is their low caloric content and minimal impact on blood glucose levels. Professor Shin explained, “Artificial sweeteners are generally not digested and are excreted from the body without significantly affecting blood glucose levels.” Unlike sugar, they do not cause rapid spikes in blood glucose and may therefore serve as alternatives for individuals with diabetes. However,

excessive intake has been associated with side effects such as headaches and digestive discomfort, and ongoing research continues to examine the long-term effects of some artificial sweeteners.

2) Natural Sweeteners

Unlike artificial sweeteners, natural sweeteners are extracted from plants or other natural sources. Representative examples include stevia and monk fruit. Professor Shin noted, “Natural sweeteners are derived from plants and are extracted and refined from natural sources. Like artificial sweeteners, they are not fully digested and are either broken down by intestinal microbiota or excreted, and they generally do not raise blood glucose levels. However, they tend to be more expensive than synthetic alternatives.”

Zero-Calorie Natural Sugar Substitutes

<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Stevia 0 Calories 50 to 350 times sweeter than table sugar. Comes from the <i>Stevia rebaudiana</i> Bertoni plant. Look for 100% stevia extract when shopping.</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Monk Fruit 0 Calories 250 times sweeter than table sugar. Also called <i>luo han guo</i>, this plant is native to Southern China, and has a slightly fruity flavor.</p>
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▲ Stevia and monk fruit are zero-calorie natural sweeteners derived from plants that provide intense sweetness with minimal impact on blood glucose levels.

Stevia is derived from the leaves of the *Stevia* plant, a herb belonging to the Asteraceae family. It is approximately 200 to 300 times sweeter than sugar, meaning only a very small amount is needed to produce sufficient sweetness. It contains no calories and is known to have a glycemic index, a 0 to 100 scale ranking carbohydrate-containing foods by how quickly they raise blood glucose levels, with pure glucose as 100, of zero. However, because of its bitter taste, it is often blended with erythritol, a type of sugar alcohol. Stevia is commonly used in beverages, teas, and yogurt. Monk fruit is a natural sweetener extracted from the fruit of a subtropical plant. It is about 250 times sweeter than sugar and contains no calories. It is also known to have a glycemic index of zero. Compared to stevia, it is often described as having less bitterness and a more pleasant flavor. However, because the raw material is relatively scarce, it tends to be more expensive and is frequently sold in combination with erythritol rather than as a pure extract. It is used in coffee, tea, baking, and a variety of other culinary applications.

3) Natural Sugars

Natural sugars refer to sugars that occur in nature or are derived from natural sources through processes such as enzymatic reactions. Unlike conventional sugar, they generally have a lower impact on blood glucose levels or are not fully metabolized into usable energy. Representative examples include xylose, tagatose, and allulose. Professor Shin explained, “Natural sugars taste similar to sugar, but it does not readily bind to digestive enzymes and therefore has minimal impact on blood glucose levels.”



▲ Natural sugars occur inherently in whole foods, whereas added sugars are incorporated during processing and are more strongly associated with excessive intake.

Xylose is a monosaccharide derived from components of plant cell walls. When consumed with sugar, it is known to partially inhibit the breakdown of sucrose, which may help moderate the rate of blood glucose increase. However, its sweetness is weaker than that of sugar. Tagatose is a monosaccharide derived from lactose. It provides a sweetness similar to sugar but contains fewer calories. It is not fully absorbed in the body and has a relatively small effect on blood glucose levels. Because part of it is fermented by gut microbiota, excessive intake may cause bloating or gas. Allulose is a rare sugar found in small amounts in foods such as figs and raisins. It has a taste and texture most similar to sugar, providing about 70 percent of sugar’s sweetness. It is widely used in zero-calorie ice cream and low-sugar desserts. Although its structure closely resembles that of sugar, it is minimally absorbed by the body.

With approximately 0.2 to 0.4 kilocalories per gram, it contains very few calories and is known to have little to no impact on blood glucose levels. When heated, it undergoes browning reactions similar to caramelization, making it suitable for baking and stir-frying. However, it is generally more expensive than other sweeteners, and excessive consumption may cause gas or abdominal discomfort. Although natural sugars are structurally classified as sugars, their metabolic pathways differ from sugar, resulting in differences in caloric contribution and glycemic response. Nevertheless, moderate intake is recommended, as excessive consumption may cause gastrointestinal discomfort.

4) Sugar Alcohols

Sugar alcohols are compounds structurally derived from sugars but chemically modified in part. They provide sweetness while not being fully absorbed in the body. Compared to sugar, they contain fewer calories and cause a more gradual increase in blood glucose levels. Representative examples include xylitol, maltitol, and erythritol.

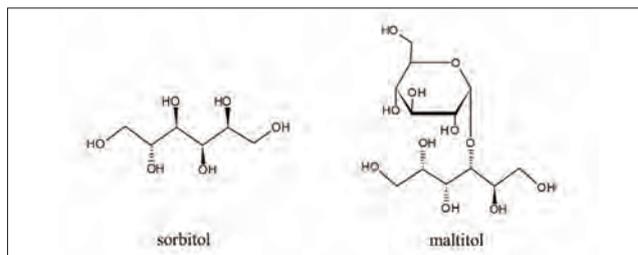
Xylitol is a sugar alcohol derived from plant sources such as birch trees. It has a sweetness similar to sugar and is widely used in chewing gum and toothpaste because it does not promote dental caries. Also, its effect on blood glucose is relatively low. Maltitol is derived from maltose and has a sweetness and texture similar to sugar, making it commonly used in chocolate and confectionery products. However, it is partially absorbed, meaning it contains some calories and can affect blood glucose levels to a certain extent. Erythritol is produced through the fermentation of glucose. It provides approximately 70 to 80 percent of the sweetness of sugar and contains nearly zero calories. Because it is minimally metabolized and largely excreted in urine, it has little impact on blood glucose levels. However, it has a characteristic cooling sensation and may leave a slightly grainy texture when used in large amounts. “Sugar alcohols are commonly used in products like candy and chocolate. They provide a cooling sensation, but excessive intake may cause abdominal pain or diarrhea,” Professor Shin explained. Although sugar alcohols offer the advantage of reduced glycemic impact compared to sugar, excessive intake commonly leads to gastrointestinal discomfort. Due to their limited absorption and osmotic effects in the intestine, overconsumption may result in diarrhea or abdominal bloating.



3. Alternative Sweeteners Currently Under Debate

Alternative sweeteners had long been regarded as relatively safe sugar substitutes, but concerns over potential side effects began to surface as reports of gastrointestinal discomfort following the consumption of certain sugar-free products increased. At the center of this debate is maltitol, a type of sugar alcohol. Some individuals report abdominal pain after consuming products containing maltitol. This occurs because maltitol is not fully absorbed in the small intestine and passes into the large intestine. As a result, osmotic pressure within the intestine increases, potentially leading to diarrhea, and fermentation by gut bacteria produces gas, causing bloating and discomfort. Professor Shin added, “These symptoms are not unique to maltitol but are common characteristics of sugar alcohols in general. Because sugar alcohols are poorly digested and not fully absorbed in the small intestine, they remain in the colon, where they draw water into the intestinal lumen and may cause diarrhea. In addition, fermentation by gut microbiota produces gas, which can lead to abdominal pain and bloating.”

In addition, Maltitol has a distinctive molecular structure. It consists of one glucose molecule bonded to sorbitol, another sugar alcohol that provides sweetness. Because half of its structure is essentially a sugar component, its glycemic response differs from that of many other alternative sweeteners. Lee Hye-young, Professor of the Department of Food Engineering at Dong-eui University explained that if the glycemic index of glucose is considered to be around 100, maltitol typically falls in the range of 35 to 50, which indicates that maltitol can be broken down into glucose in the body and absorbed, thereby affecting blood glucose levels. Unlike many alternative sweeteners that are minimally absorbed or produce negligible glycemic responses, maltitol may raise blood glucose depending on the mixing ratio and the amount consumed.



▲ Maltitol consists of one glucose molecule bonded to sorbitol.

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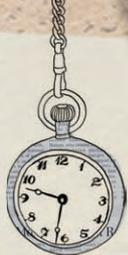
Despite these concerns, maltitol continues to be widely used. Some alternative sweeteners are characterized by a pronounced bitterness or a sweetness that rises quickly and fades just as rapidly. By contrast, maltitol provides a sweetness and texture similar to sugar and remains relatively stable during heating and cooking. Its relatively low cost further enhances its appeal, as manufacturers can achieve both desirable taste and cost efficiency.

Then, are other alternative sweeteners healthy? Excessive intake of certain alternative sweeteners may also cause side effects. Professor Shin commented, “Allulose may not be fully absorbed and can remain in the colon, potentially causing abdominal pain or diarrhea. Some studies suggest that sucralose may alter gut microbiota balance, which may lead to digestive discomfort. Stevia is generally considered safe, but gastrointestinal discomfort may occur in some individuals. In addition, there have been reports suggesting a possible association between xylitol and cardiovascular disease, although further research is needed.” Consumers may assume that zero-labeled foods are inherently safe and therefore place no limits on portion size or frequency of consumption. This perception can contribute to weight gain and the worsening of insulin resistance, underscoring the importance of informed consumption. Professor Shin further emphasized, “Excessive consumption of alternative sweeteners may cause abdominal pain or diarrhea. Consumers should carefully review ingredient lists and nutrition labels, including the type and amount of sweeteners used, before making purchasing decisions.”

The word “zero” offers reassurance to consumers. Yet alternative sweeteners, if consumed without proper understanding, can potentially do more harm than good. Whether derived from sugar or its substitutes, sweetness remains linked to physiological responses, and no choice is entirely neutral. The issue is not sweetness itself, but the uncritical attitude with which it is consumed. Relying on the label “zero” without understanding the ingredients transforms choice into assumption rather than informed judgment. Healthy consumption does not begin with eliminating sweetness, but with understanding how it works. What is needed is not simply less sweetness, but greater awareness of it. 

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Learning to Recalibrate



Lee Seeun

Last semester, I took several computer programming courses out of curiosity and a desire to improve my essential modern literacy. However, the workload was heavier than I had anticipated, and balancing these classes with my responsibilities at The Argus made it increasingly difficult to keep up. Through this experience, I realized that it is impossible to learn everything at once without sacrificing balance. This semester, I aim to set more realistic goals, choosing courses I can manage alongside my commitments and focusing on steady, sustainable learning rather than overwhelming ambition.

Choi A-won

I was happy to transfer to a new school and have the opportunity to take classes taught by excellent professors in a major I truly enjoy. However, as a transfer student, I had to take third-year courses, and I often struggled to understand the lectures. I found myself growing discouraged, dozing off at times, and struggling to speak up while other students actively participated in discussions. Still, I tried to make the most of my time outside class by studying, and I also pushed myself to raise my hand and participate, even when I felt unprepared. What I regret is that I only began to overcome my fear toward the end of the semester. Therefore, in this new semester, I aim to approach every class with a more proactive and challenging attitude, build confidence in myself, and continue moving forward.



Kim Yi-eun

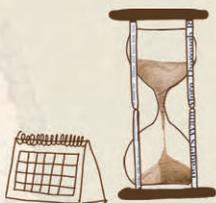
The start of anything always feels both exciting and scary. At the beginning of a new year, a new semester, or any new experience or challenge, I have grand ambitions and set many abstract plans and resolutions. Last semester I resolved to get a certification, improve my grades, and live as a certain kind of person, but I mostly failed when faced with sudden variables, or simply because it felt too bothersome and I procrastinated. Now that I am nearly at the end of my university life, this semester I will not settle for vague, abstract plans. I will define concrete motivations and goals for myself and will not give up or quit simply because I feel like it.

Park Se-eun

In my first semester as a reporter for The Argus, I started with a firm determination to write meaningful articles. However, the pressure of pursuing perfection under tight deadlines became so overwhelming that it actually made me want to abandon my standards. I learned that by releasing the pressure of perfection and focusing on the process, quality follows naturally. Moving forward, I hope to prioritize sustainability over perfection and to pursue my goals according to my own standards.



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2026. 03. 22(일) 개별 통지

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