

# Israel is stoking Iran's fire of wrath



A CLOSER LOOK

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TASNEEM TAYEB

Tensions in the Middle East are reaching a boiling point, with Israel leveraging the Gaza War to open new fronts of conflict, including with Iran. The state has made multiple provocative overtures to goad Iran and its allies in the region into action. Israel has intentionally targeted officials of Iran's feared military wing, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), across multiple regional locations, resulting in the assassination of IRGC senior commander Sayyed Razi Mousavi in December 2023, and that of five IRGC military advisors earlier this week. In an attack in Beirut, Israel also killed senior Hamas commander Saleh al-Arouri earlier this month.

Southern Lebanon is also being showered by constant Israeli strikes, killing civilians and Hezbollah fighters alike and displacing thousands. As of January 22, the death toll in Lebanon stood at 200. According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 83,000 Lebanese have been displaced.

In the face of such provocations, while Iran has so far demonstrated restraint and caution in its retaliation—only engaging in precise, targeted strikes at Israeli or US sites to fend them off—the recent killing of IRGC officials in Syria has elicited ominous response from the regional superpower: “The Islamic Republic will not leave the Zionist regime's crimes unanswered,” Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi said, adding that the response would be “at the appropriate time and place.” Soon after, Iran struck a US airbase

in Iraq's Erbil, leaving some US soldiers injured.

The significant spike in missile attacks across the greater Middle East has alarmed security experts, who fear this could escalate into a full-scale war with Iran and the US, both asserting their power and influence in the region. The situation is so volatile that on January 20, within a span of hours, four countries came under air strikes: Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq—all shelled as part of low-intensity conflicts, as an

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extension of the genocide unleashed in Gaza by Israel, armed and empowered by the US. Amidst such chaos and cacophony of frequent airstrikes, one single misfiring could



The recent killing of IRGC officials in Damascus, Syria has elicited ominous response from Iran.

PHOTO: AFP

show the entire region towards a bloody, large-scale war that would leave thousands of dead bodies on its trail and change the course of the region's geopolitical developments for the worse.

While Israel's aggressive ambitions in the Middle East are known to all, the question remains: is the state's desire for dominance in the region the only factor behind wanting to take the war to Iran?

A closer look at the internal political developments in Israel suggests that, perhaps, there is a more cowardly reason behind it trying to initiate new conflicts in the region: Netanyahu's last ditch attempt to extend the war, to salvage whatever is left of his political career.

With multiple corruption charges facing him, and in the wake of mounting unpopularity, Netanyahu is well aware that there is little possibility of him getting out of this quagmire of his own making. The people are frustrated

with his misadventures: 53 percent of Israelis reportedly feel that Tel Aviv was unable to defeat Hamas, while 22 percent believe that the war is already lost. Netanyahu's constant refusal to free the hostages for a ceasefire has made him extremely detested by the people who want him out of office or even behind bars. Amidst these developments, Bibi's so-called war cabinet has also organically disintegrated, and he is under increasing pressure from the US to minimise civilian casualties, which seems to not be in his personal interest.

Netanyahu sees the complete demolition of Gaza and its subsequent takeover by Israel—as has been made evident by his outright refusal of a US envisioned two-state solution post the Gaza War—as his only means to save his career. But for this to happen, Netanyahu first needs to ensure that he stays in office for now by expanding the scope and scale of the Gaza War. As with most

war-mongering leaders, Bibi uses the fear of war to coerce people into submission, which—now more than ever—would secure his position as the war commander of the state.

What is more, Netanyahu is now buying time: for Donald Trump to make a comeback as the US president in the November election, which will make it easier for him to get the US to engage fully in a Middle East war as the hawkish Trump is no friend of the Iranians or of the Palestinians for that matter. And, given his volatile temperament and past records, he may not think twice before making a rash, albeit irreversible, decision. The Biden administration must see the folly in pursuing the Gaza War or the low-intensity, high-potential conflicts in the Middle East, and must persuade Israel to back off.

Instead of attacking the Houthis and arming Israel, the US administration should now focus on salvaging its own reputation and legacy, which is increasingly being

labelled by the people as being of a genocide enabler. Attacking the Houthis or Iranian interests will only result in more bloodshed and chaos, and Biden can do better in last-minute cleaning up of his image by preventing further bloodshed in the region. The Saudis, Egypt, and Jordan—long-standing US allies in the region—do not want an escalation of the crisis. Even the US has little to gain except adding another name to the growing list of its travesties in the Middle East.

Iran has been reckless in retaliating against the Israeli provocations. It must understand the power it holds in the region and should focus on channelling that to reach a permanent political solution to the Palestinian statehood crisis via strategic diplomatic moves. It will not be in the interest of Iran, its allies, or of Palestinians should Iran make the centre of the Middle East conflict, overshadowing the Palestine issue. The Russian government, the Qataris, and even the Saudis are engaged in dialogue with Iran to find a permanent solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Iran must proceed with caution so as not to lose this position of influence.

Israel is no doubt playing with fire in stoking the Iranian furnace of wrath. An escalation will not be desirable for Israel either, as it will be required to combat greater existential threats. Israel's only chance of securing legitimacy and acceptance in the Middle East, and ensuring a secure and safe state for its people, will be by supporting and enabling a separate, independent state for Palestinians, which is their basic right.

While Netanyahu will try his heart and soul to salvage his political career at the cost of peace in the Middle East, Iran and the US should take the moral high ground and prevent more innocent lives from being lost to satisfy one man's nefarious desperation and greed.

## Two pages ripped, an entire nation torn apart

Sadman Sakib  
is a student who has written under  
a pseudonym.

SADMAN SAKIB

A couple of days back, I woke up to video clips on Facebook showing a furious man ripping pages from a book and encouraging hundreds of onlookers to follow suit. Curious, I dove in to find the original 11-minute video, only to discover that the reason behind this viral stunt was an excerpt from the Class 7 *Iitash O Samajik Biggyan* (History and Social Science) textbook which discussed the need to respect and include people from gender-diverse communities, specifically those from the Hijra community.

It was all the more surprising when I found out who this enraged man was: Asif Mahtab Utsha, apparently an Ethics and Culture lecturer at BRAC University. Seeing an educator from a top private university openly disrespect an NCTB book at a Jatiyo Shikshok Forum event was quite ironic. And, needless to say, appalling.

This is not to imply that we ought to police what others believe. People have the right to live life by their personal codes of morality, including abstaining

ramifications of his actions on the most vulnerable people in our society.

Regardless of the inciteful rhetoric he uses to describe marginalised communities, he ironically fails to respect the bare minimum required of an “academic,” which he claims to be: presenting factually correct information.

Firstly, Asif conflates the very basic difference between sexuality and gender, using them interchangeably. In fact, the text does not address homosexuality at

graduate of a reputable university abroad and a lecturer at one of the more prestigious ones in Bangladesh, the least one can do is not conjure statistics from thin air. Misinformation like this is dangerous, especially in a country where credentials often take precedence over facts and reality.

Just as appalling as his complete disregard for the forces of reality are the extreme views he espouses. In his speech, Asif called for people of diverse genders to not be educated or employed. This is irresponsible coming from an educator who

argument against gender diversity, it's an argument to reform the dated rape laws made by British colonialists 164 years ago.

The consequences of Asif's actions aren't hypothetical. From the hashtag #BoycottBRAC to protests at the gates of the university, a movement of vindictive support for Asif has spread like wildfire, burning down the dignity and safety of marginalised communities. Every social media post claiming gender diversity to be a Western import contributes to the erasure

were not spontaneous. In the past, he has faced backlash for similar controversies, like when he tried to justify rape publicly via his social media account. So while we commend BRAC's swift response, we must simultaneously expect our educational institutions to pay closer attention to whom they're allowing to shape the minds of our future generation. Moreover, we're often far too quick to jump to conclusions ourselves and take sides without ever really

examining what our stances represent. Thus, the responsibility to maintain nuanced and inclusive discourse falls, in part, on ourselves. Before we jump onto another bandwagon, let's remember to do our research and listen to the students who are most likely to spot red flags such as those demonstrated by Asif Mahtab. As everyday internet users and responsible citizens, let us not allow one voice of intolerance to tear apart an entire nation.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

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all, which is illegal in Bangladesh. Yet, he claims that a government-approved textbook is somehow being used to “indoctrinate” children, which is a bewildering implication.

He goes on to assert that 40 percent of children in the US are transgender. A quick Google search, however, reveals the real number to be 1.4 percent among US-American children aged 13 to 17 years, according to a study by the University of California, Los Angeles. Asif also claimed that there is a law that supposedly ensures transgender people study at the same pace and in the same institutes as their cisgender counterparts. However, regrettable though that may be, no such law exists or is in the process of being drafted.

All of this is particularly problematic since Asif's role as an educator and academic lends him a strong veneer of legitimacy. If one is to proudly boast of being a

bears the very responsibility to guide people towards education.

He then proceeds to cherry-pick an anecdote promoting “inclusion” of the Hijra community which he misconstrues as “brainwashing” children; an absurd premise since promoting the rights of certain groups does not imply that you “become” them—not that anyone can consciously choose to become someone they're not.

Perhaps Asif's most outrageous claim was the idea that legal gender identification would somehow encourage sexual assault. He intuits that a “biological male” identifying as a woman could get away with rape, given that the Penal Code 375 (which he incorrectly refers to as “Penal Code 175” during his speech) only defines rape as a crime carried out by men on women. Despite the absurdity of this hypothesis, it's astonishing that a “philosopher” such as Asif Mahtab fails to realise the most obvious logical fallacy: this isn't an

of people who've existed in the subcontinent under the umbrella term “Hijra” for centuries. Every meme misrepresents the cycles of systemic abuse they face to this day. I can't even fathom how difficult it must've been for his gender-diverse students and co-workers to know that someone they had to see every day didn't even believe in their right to exist.

It is important to recognise that ignorance cannot be an excuse for Asif's behaviour. BRAC University actively engages in initiatives such as gender sensitisation sessions for employees and health camps conducted for the transgender community. Asif has had every opportunity to educate himself and better his behaviour; he simply chose not to.

In the aftermath of his speech going viral, Asif was dismissed from BRAC University. And while this marks a step in the right direction, it's important to recognise that Asif's actions

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1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology			
2	Agency	Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited			
3	Procuring Entity Name	Dr. Shahjahan Mahmood, Chairman and CEO			
4	Procuring Entity Code	Not used at present			
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka			
6	Invitation for	Procurement of UPS Spare Parts for Gazipur & Bethunia Ground Station of BSCL			
7	Invitation Ref No	14.39.0000.012.07.002.23-14(M)			
8	Date	24/01/2024			
KEY INFORMATION					
9	Procurement Method	Open Tender			
FUNDING INFORMATION					
10	Budget and Source of Funds	Company's Own Fund			
PARTICULAR INFORMATION					
11	Tender Package No.	BSCL/2023-24/PG-15			
12	Tender Package Name	Procurement of UPS Spare Parts for Gazipur & Bethunia Ground Station of BSCL			
13	Tender Publication Date	25/01/2024			
14	Tender Last Selling Date	11/02/2024	Time: 04:00 PM		
Date					
15	Tender Closing Date and Time	12/02/2024	12:00 PM		
16	Tender Opening Date and Time	12/02/2024	12:20 PM		
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17	Name & Address of the officer(s) - Selling Tender Document (Principal) - Selling Tender Document (Others) - Receiving Tender Document - Opening Tender Document	Chairman and CEO Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited SEL, Rose-N-Dale, Level-07, 116 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1000.			
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PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS					
23	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Dr. Shahjahan Mahmood			
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