

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Heading in a dangerous direction

Israel, Iran must be pressured to take a step back

We are deeply concerned with the situation in the Middle East as tensions continue to rise between Iran and Israel. Israel, which is on trial at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, launched an airstrike at Iran's consulate in Damascus—in violation of international law—on April 1, killing seven Iranian military officers, including two senior commanders. In response, Iran launched a series of airstrikes against Israel over the weekend, allegedly damaging an Israeli airbase.

Israel, which claimed to have intercepted most of Iran's missiles and drones, has already threatened further retaliation. And while it continues to brutally murder helpless Palestinian men, women and children, there is no telling the lengths to which Israel will go to instigate Iran, one of the active supporters of Palestine, to get involved into a conflict—which it has desperately been trying to do for years—and drag other actors into it.

Under the circumstances, it is incumbent upon all rational world leaders to ensure that the situation does not get out of control and bravado does not lead the world down a path of no return. Any miscalculation during retaliation from either side could lead us into a world war type scenario, particularly given the powerful allies both sides have. The United Nations secretary-general has already said that the Middle East conflict is "on the brink," and it is time for both sides to take a step back. However, we are afraid that given the geopolitical realities and the built-up animosity between the two sides, this will not happen without substantial pressure from the international community.

In that regard, one positive aspect is the US ruling out joining the Israeli counterattack against Iran. Other Western leaders have also called for restraint, which is promising, and Iran has announced that its attack against Israel "can be deemed concluded." Even though it's difficult to predict how Israel will react, it can be assumed that should Western leaders put pressure on it to back down, it will be forced to listen. However, it must be realised that the source of these tensions is Israel's genocidal campaign spanning decades against the Palestinians. Therefore, it is high time the international community put pressure on Israel to recognise the rights of Palestinians and agree to and implement the two-state solution.

Lessons from MV Abdullah's hijacking

Authorities must invest into strong security measures, contingency plans

We are relieved to learn that, after more than a month of being held hostage by Somali pirates, Bangladeshi cargo ship MV Abdullah and its 23 crew members have been released. As per our latest report, the ship and the crew members—all safe and sound—were on their way to the UAE after the pirates released them after receiving the \$5 million ransom.

MV Abdullah, a bulk carrier, was carrying over 50,000 tonnes of coal from Mozambique to the UAE when it was intercepted by a group of Somali pirates on March 12. The KSRM Group, which owns the company that owns MV Abdullah, started negotiating with the pirates right away to get them to release the ship and the sailors, and the good news finally came on Sunday—on Pahela Baishakh.

We thank all the actors, both national and international, who made this release possible. However, we cannot help but ask: why was the ship left so defenceless in the first place? As a video circulating around social media showed, recorded by a crew member, the pirates faced practically no deterrent as they climbed onboard the ship. When KSRM has the experience of dealing with ship hijacking—its MV Jahan Moni was also hijacked by Somali pirates in 2010—why did it risk letting its ship go out in the ocean unprotected? There was no armed security team on the vessel—which the KSRM deputy managing director defended saying they were following international standards. However, it needs to be noted that back in 2010s, when Somali sea piracy was at its peak, it was common for ships to have armed guards onboard or escort vessels tagging along.

MV Abdullah's hijacking has revealed that modern-day sailing requires elaborate security measures, especially considering the recent revival of pirate activities in the Indian Ocean. As a country that is heavily dependent on maritime exports, transportation, and trade, ensuring sound maritime security is crucial for Bangladesh in order to maintain uninterrupted trade, thereby keeping the wheel of economic growth running. We urge the relevant state agencies, the government, and the vessel owners to collaborate and come up with a comprehensive policy to ensure maritime security, as well as contingency plans to avoid sudden shocks.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Deceived in Malaysia

The harrowing ordeal of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia, as highlighted by recent reports in The Daily Star, demands immediate attention and action. The heart-wrenching accounts of exploitation, deception, and despair paint an alarming picture of the reality faced by these individuals who ventured abroad in search of a better life.

Thrown into squalid living conditions, denied even the most basic necessities, and burdened with insurmountable debt, these workers find themselves trapped in a cycle of suffering with no way out. The failure of authorities to address their plight and hold accountable those responsible for their exploitation is unacceptable.

It is imperative that both the Bangladeshi and Malaysian governments take decisive steps to ensure the rights and dignity of migrant workers are upheld. Diplomatic discussions must translate into tangible actions that provide relief and justice to those who have been unjustly exploited.

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IRAN'S ATTACKS ON ISRAEL

Bark, not bite

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Between April 13 and 14, almost seven months into the genocidal war in Gaza, Iran launched a historic attack on Israel. Contrary to the narrative pushed forward by Israel and the West, Tehran's attack was not "unprovoked," but rather "retaliatory." Earlier this month, Israel hit the Iranian consulate in Damascus and killed two Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) generals and five officials. Iran's argument for the attack rests on the same premise that Israel has been (mis) using in its war in Gaza: the "inherent right" to self-defence, as enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter.

The scale of Iran's attack, however, was unprecedented. It was the single largest drone attack carried out by a country in global history. The tit-for-tat threats that have been exchanged between Iran and Israel-US laid the groundwork for this weekend's retaliatory strikes. Iranian proxies, the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon, have been in direct confrontation with Israel. Just last month, Israel carried out more airstrikes in Lebanon, taking the death toll to more than 240. Israel's airstrikes

opportunity to leverage the damage to coerce the US into a regional war. In the end, Iran's response seems to have struck the right diplomatic balance, for now. Only time will tell if Tel Aviv is willing to breach Iran's newly drawn red lines.

There was plenty of warning for the aerial attacks, and even the nature of the attack. Both US intelligence

not bite. Their significance lies in the symbolism of the country's first-ever direct attack on Israeli soil, after decades of being arch-enemies.

The US' diplomatic efforts, which have shaped the parameters and outcomes of the war in Gaza, conveyed two contrasting messages. The US publicly reassured Israel of its "ironclad commitment." On the

officials. It is also worth noting that Netanyahu has clashed with previous US administrations over Iran, openly lobbying against former President Barack Obama's nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, before gaining success with the Trump administration.

"De-escalation," has been echoed by Saudi Arabia, the Arab states, the UN, and Israel's Western allies. But



US President Joe Biden meeting with members of the National Security team regarding the unfolding missile attacks on Israel from Iran, in Washington, DC on April 13, 2024.

PHOTO: AFP

This brotherly dialogue from the US to Israel, which can be summed up with the phrase "don't do something you'll regret," has not yet worked as Israel has shown no ounce of regret over their bloody campaign in Gaza. Israel has not abided by the UNSC ceasefire—where the US abstained—and the death toll of Gazans has now crossed 33,000.

on Damascus were undoubtedly an escalation of its ongoing confrontation with Hezbollah. The reckless attack on a diplomatic site, in breach of the Vienna Convention, shows that Israel severely misjudged Iran's willingness to attack directly instead of through its proxies. Inadvertently, Israel forced Tehran to make the decision; if it had not responded and instead relied on its proxies, Tehran would have risked weakening itself and its allies against the threat of Israel. On the other hand, if Tehran had gone in too aggressively by utilising its maximum military capacity, Israel would have had the

officials and Iranian officials had told *The New York Times* on April 12, that Iran is expected to mount an attack on Israel soon, but they will steer clear of attacking US military forces in the Middle East to avoid inciting a direct conflict with the US—which is exactly what materialised.

The hundreds of ballistic missiles did not reach their target; in fact, they had little chance of success to begin with. When Iran launched its attack on Israel, from 1,000 miles away, it gave the Israeli defence system and the US forces in Jordan and Iraq more than enough time to prepare a fend-off. While the world held its breath as videos of Iranian drones and terrifying fireworks surfaced on social media, the attack seemed to have been designed to do just that: ignite fear, create a spectacle, and show symbolic muscle power.

If Iran had intended to cause more than the little damage that its attacks have done, they would've strategically targeted Israel through Hezbollah by unleashing the group's deadly arsenal reach. The geographical proximity of Lebanon and Israel would've also exhausted Israel's extensive air defence system. Tehran wanted to respond to the direct attacks on its consulate in order to reinstate itself as a threat, but it evidently did not want to escalate tensions further. Iran's attacks seem to have been choreographed to bark,

other hand, Biden directed a warning to Netanyahu—who, at this point, appears as though he is Biden's errand, disobedient son—that the US will not participate in any Israeli counter-offensive against Iran. By doing so, the US has planted wedges between itself and its closest ally in the region. But this warning itself, when juxtaposed with the high degree of US intelligence on Iran's operation, suggests that the possibility of a back-channel engagement between Iran and Western leaders prior to the attacks cannot be completely ruled out. The US and Iran often exchange big sounding words, and mostly the word "don't." But so far, both seem withdrawn to drag Israel's genocidal war on Gaza into a Third World War. Even before Iran's drones had reached Israel on Saturday night, its mission to the United Nations mysteriously announced on X (formerly Twitter) that "the matter can be deemed concluded."

Though it caused little physical damage, one of the most significant damages of Iran's actions is leaving the world to again brace itself for a response from Israel, the magnitude of which will soon unfold. It's up to Israel now, and that phrase is more dangerous for the world than anything else; even for the US president, who has privately expressed concern that Netanyahu is trying to drag the world into a broader, wider conflict, according to top US

the response is up to the Israeli war cabinet, which is characteristically and catastrophically escalatory. Put simply, Israel likes to bite. The Biden administration has utterly failed to influence and de-escalate Israel's genocidal response to the October 7 Hamas attacks. This brotherly dialogue from the US to Israel, which can be summed up with the phrase "don't do something you'll regret," has not yet worked as Israel has shown no ounce of regret over their bloody campaign in Gaza. Israel has not abided by the UNSC ceasefire—where the US abstained—and the death toll of Gazans has now crossed 33,000 since October 7.

Israel's defence minister has stated, "It's not over yet." An Israeli official also told CNN that Israel is yet to determine whether to try and "break all the dishes" or do something more measured. As the United Nations Security Council met to discuss Iran's attack, Israeli forces again bombed the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, killing five and wounding dozens on Monday. So, the biggest damage that Iran's aerial attacks have done is taking the world's attention away from the genocide in Gaza. The world is now preoccupied to contain a wider spillover, while innocent Palestinians are being killed by raining Israeli bombs and starvation, because no world power has been able to stop the ruthless Israeli regime.

The art of sharing on social media



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On social media, finding the right balance—sharing enough to maintain connections without compromising one's privacy—is akin to walking a tightrope, requiring both skill and thoughtful consideration. The magnetic pull of social media platforms is undeniable; it dismantles geographical barriers, allowing us to share life's milestones, opinions, and hobbies with a global audience. However, this openness can lead to overexposure, with the consequences ranging from discomfort to privacy breaches, identity theft, financial loss, and emotional distress.

As such, cultivating a security mindset is not optional, but essential. This proactive approach entails constant vigilance and strategic thinking about the what, who, and how of sharing on social media. A foundational aspect of this mindset is familiarising yourself with the ever-evolving privacy policies and settings of social media platforms. Taking control of your privacy settings to dictate who can access your posts and personal information is crucial. Innovations like Facebook and Instagram's customisable sharing options, which

allow posts to be visible to select audiences, offer users more control over their online presence. Moreover, each social media platform has its own culture and unwritten rules. What works on X may not resonate on Instagram. LinkedIn demands a professional tone, whereas TikTok embraces creativity and humour. Adapting your sharing strategy to fit each platform not only enhances your engagement but also ensures your content is received in the intended context.

Yet, the cornerstone of a security mindset is mindfulness in terms of sharing. Before posting, it's wise to consider: is this information sensitive? Could it potentially make you or someone else vulnerable? For instance, joyfully announcing your vacation plans on a public platform could signal to potential burglars that your home is ripe for a break-in. A wiser approach involves sharing your travel highlights upon your return, thereby not compromising home security. Similarly, exercising caution and scepticism towards social media quizzes is advisable, as these can be gateways to identity theft. Also,

while being tagged in a public post that reveals personal information or location can infringe upon your privacy, managing tagging preferences and reviewing posts before they appear on your timeline can prevent such breaches.

Additionally, digital literacy—understanding how information

authenticity of the content we encounter and the credibility of its sources. Moreover, as technology is continuing to evolve, staying informed about new tools and features that can enhance our privacy and security is crucial. It is essential to remember that the choice of what, when, and how much to share is deeply personal. What feels right for one person may not suit another. Respecting each other's boundaries and choices is fundamental to the art of sharing on social media.

The intrinsic duality of social media calls for a balanced, mindful approach to its usage. It's all about leveraging the positive aspects of these platforms while being acutely aware of the potential pitfalls. Creating a responsible digital footprint of oneself extends beyond personal vigilance; it encompasses fostering a culture of respect and privacy awareness within one's social circle. Educating friends and family about the importance of privacy settings and the potential consequences of oversharing can strengthen the security mindset. By fostering a culture of thoughtful sharing, we not only protect ourselves but also contribute to a safer, more respectful online community.

Ultimately, our goal is not to retreat from the digital world but to navigate it with an informed, mindful, and balanced approach. Through mindful engagement and a commitment to digital well-being, we can create a digital world that reflects the best of who we are and aspire to be.

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is shared, stored, and potentially misused on social media—is crucial. As digital citizens, our responsibility extends to being critical consumers of information, questioning the