

## Netanyahu's war and the human cost



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It is clear as daylight that Benjamin Netanyahu never wanted the war in Gaza to stop. This is the highlight of his career as a politician, a star on his resume. The ceasefire was never a real one, and his government had no intention of keeping it. A continued genocide, the killing of women and children—unfortunately, we are witnessing a classic case of striking a Faustian bargain in real time. The Netanyahu government spent approximately \$31 billion on the war in Gaza (and Lebanon) in 2024. Additionally, the country has received substantial military aid and grants from its biggest ally, the United States. Despite the massive support received, Israel's budget deficit and defence expenditure are on the rise. Is this a war against Hamas, or is this a well-funded war against humanity, with the most vulnerable—children and women—overwhelmingly represented in the number of deaths?

We have heard about the vision of beachfront villas and real estate in Gaza, turning the rubble into a "paradise" for whoever can afford to go on a holiday on the strip. Perhaps ethnic cleansing is more economic than forced relocation and displacement of people. This barbaric modern-day, high-tech genocide has capitalistic goals. Policymakers and deal-breakers are already counting their return on investment. There are talks about moving Palestinians to Sudan and other countries, but this has not materialised. That begs

the question: should Israel be moved elsewhere, perhaps to a country with more land mass? Since its "modern democracy" is such an anomaly in the Middle East, perhaps a safer continent would reduce the need for so much defence expenditure and chaos.

Now let's look at the legal basis for breaking a ceasefire. A ceasefire can be broken if one party is acting in self-defence. Under international law, specifically under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, a state has the right to defend itself against armed attacks. A party may decide to unilaterally break a ceasefire if they feel that the other side is not adhering to its commitments, such as stopping hostilities, allowing humanitarian aid or returning prisoners. This decision may lead to the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement, depending on the circumstances. In some cases, a party may break a ceasefire due to the need to address urgent humanitarian concerns or violations of human rights. For instance, if one side is blocking essential humanitarian aid or committing atrocities, the other side may decide to act in response, breaking the ceasefire in the process.

The problem with such broad strokes within international law is that the country breaking the ceasefire can act based on "feelings" and hunches—much like a false alarm that is allowed to echo through the halls of diplomacy unchecked. Why did Israel cry wolf this time, raising

the spectre of a threat so vast that it justified the resumption of violence? Was it truly a threat, or was it merely the latest note in a symphony of pretext, a calculated narrative spun to justify what was already in motion? We may never know, not until the real intelligence is laid bare, if it ever is. This ongoing barbarism has shown us that international law and UN bodies

world. B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organisation, reported that at the end of December 2024, the Israel Prison Service was holding 9,619 Palestinians on "security" grounds. Following the Hamas-led attack on October 7, 2023, approximately 251 individuals, including Israelis, were taken hostage to Gaza. As of

approximately 59 hostages still held in Gaza, according to Israeli sources. Hamas's refusal to release hostages was cited by Israeli officials as a contributing factor to the collapse of the two-month truce. Netanyahu declared that Israel had "resumed combat in full force" against Hamas, with the March 18 strikes described as "just the beginning." How many

be postponed; interestingly, it was scheduled for the same day as the attack. The question is: who is trying to hide under the rubble of the war to escape the hearing? The Israeli prime minister is undergoing a corruption trial involving charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. His scheduled testimony was cancelled due to the Israeli military's "surprise" attack on Gaza, which ended the ceasefire. Strategic and well-thought-out decisions and their implementations are not surprises. If this is just the beginning, as Netanyahu declares, then it will only get worse from what has happened so far.

There are no human rights violations that have not happened in this genocide, and nothing comes as a surprise. What is surprising is that no international pressure has been enough to put a stop to this mayhem. In fact, human rights violations from this genocide have spilled over the borders of Gaza to the neighbouring countries and across oceans and continents, where fear has been steered in marginalised communities for speaking out for human rights. A shadow keeps looming over people just for exercising their basic human right of speech.

What can global citizens do? We can continue to advocate, provide essential aid, and support Palestinians in writing their own history, in building their own capacity—whether it's through education, arts or innovation. We keep sharing across borders. Let's also not forget the routine human rights violations that occur in Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Nablus. If the US is wise enough, it will also recognise that the return on the investment in death machines won't be much, and that losing its foreign policy acumen to a foreign power won't bode well in the long run.



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a residential building in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on March 18, 2025.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

are mere tools of aspiration; there is much less accountability if it's the very powerful against the powerless because the arbiters operate within the colonial framework. International law's role, unfortunately, is only limited to diplomacy. It can only penalise countries in the subaltern

late February 2025, as many as 147 hostages have been returned alive to Israel, with 105 released in a prisoner exchange in 2023, four unilaterally by Hamas, eight rescued by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and 30 in a 2025 exchange. Bodies of 44 hostages have also been repatriated. This leaves

Hamas members were actually killed out of the many women and children brutally maimed, already worn out from war, loss and hunger?

Let's take a sneak peek inside Israel. There are protests outside of Netanyahu's house. The court hearing on his corruption had to

## Potato farmers' plight needs long-term solutions



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While living in the cities, attending rallies and back-to-back meetings on "sangskar" (reform), it is hard to feel the heat of the ongoing crisis potato farmers are facing. Moreover, we, the self-declared "opinion builders," can't see any immediate change in potato prices, as they remain very low at present.

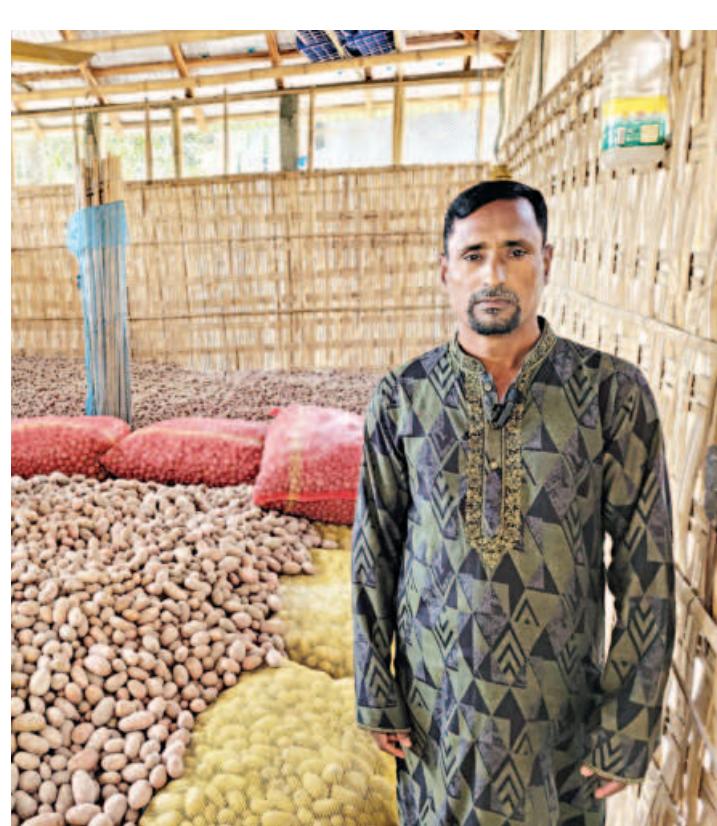
Potatoes are Bangladesh's second-biggest crop after rice. They are regarded as a safe crop in our low-lying South Asian country as it is planted in October and harvested by the end of February when the land is still dry.

It also contributes to our food security basket. Experts see potatoes as a potential antidote to hunger caused by higher food prices, global population growth rate, climbing costs of fertiliser, and reduced cropland. United Nations termed potatoes a "hidden treasure" and proclaimed 2008 the "International Year of the Potato." Asian countries are seeing potatoes as a possible salvation as they scramble to feed their people at reasonable prices in the near future.

The per person annual consumption of potatoes has increased in Bangladesh also, although it is still consumed as a side dish or just a vegetable. According to agriculture officials, the consumption of potatoes has risen from an average of seven kilos per capita in 1991 to 24 kilos in 2007 and 53 kilos in 2022.

In April 2008, the then army chief General Moeen U Ahmed, started preaching—"think potato, grow potato and eat potato." With his patronage and enthusiasm Dhaka experienced a grand three days' potato festival.

Bangladesh experienced crop failure that year and rice prices went up every day if not every hour. A significant number of people had to skip one or two meals a day because they could



Potato farmers can build their storages if they get loans on easy terms.

PHOTO: COURTESY

not afford to buy rice which forms the bulk of their diet.

So, he and his civilian entourage started a potato campaign. The aim of the campaign was to convince millions of Bangladeshis to embrace potatoes as a staple food instead of high-priced rice and wheat. Fortunately, that year we had an unusually good crop of potatoes, which needed to be eaten quickly before they rot.

This year Bangladesh is facing almost the same scenario. Rice prices are going "up above the world so high" and the crop is gradually becoming the "diamond in the sky." In recent weeks, the price of the most popular rice (Miniket) has increased by about Tk 5 per kg. In Kushtia, the price

embargos. According to the Agricultural Marketing Act, 2018, the rent of cold storage must be increased or determined through a government gazette in consultation with the director general of the Department of Agricultural Marketing. However, the BCSA announced an increase in potato storage fees in a press conference on February 8 without any gazette. The storage fee was set at Tk 8 per kg, up from Tk 5. Farmers also have been asked to keep the sacks at a maximum of 50 kg. Earlier, farmers used to keep 70 kg sacks in cold storage for Tk 350.

The cold storage owners are also giving priority to businessmen

over farmers when it comes to storing. Farmers are harassed when it comes to obtaining so-called booking slips which are permits to store potatoes. Most farmers are worried about how much produce can ultimately be saved from rotting by storing potatoes in cold storage. Farmers are now selling their potatoes right from the field at a low price due to a lack of storage opportunities. While farmers spent Tk 22 to 25 on producing one kg of potatoes, now they have to sell the crop for just Tk 14 per kg or less directly from the fields. If the government does not anticipate the *ashoni songket* (bad news) i.e. the imminent danger to the food security situation and the farmers' losses in one crop after another, the nation will head nowhere. Should thousands of farmers face losses due to the syndicate of cold storage owners?

In several countries of Southeast Asia and different states of India, special types of houses are built in farmers' homes to store potatoes for long periods. With the active interest of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the Department of Agricultural Marketing built several such houses in the potato-producing areas in the 2023-24 fiscal year. According to the department, it is a scientific mini-cold storage. Storing 25 to 30 metric tonnes of potatoes in such houses will save the farmers about Tk 1.5 lakh per year. I have visited and talked with some users and found that these houses serve as dependable alternatives.

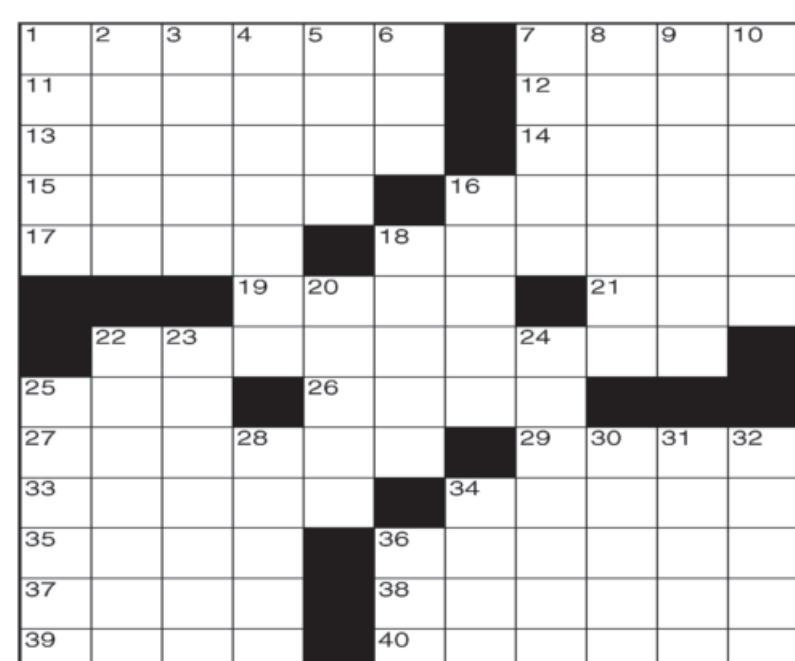
If you build such a storehouse, you can use it for up to 15 years. Each house costs Tk 1.5 lakh to build. Potatoes can be stored in these houses for four to six months. If the government doesn't have money, FAO can invest more in this successful project. The farmers said that if they get loans on easy terms, they will build their own houses. Can microfinance organisations not come forward?

The Indian state of West Bengal also faces a similar crisis but they have taken several initiatives to protect the farmers. We need to examine those initiatives for the sake of our food security.

## CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	33	Costume	7	"Paradise Lost"
1	Barbershop needs	34	Jacket flap	figure
7	Tater	35	Seize	8 Mundane
11	Brewing need	36	Harry Potter, for	9 Open, as a gate
12	Florence's river	one	one	10 First lady of 1812
13	Blood line	37	Pot starter	16 Wanderer
14	Bridge fee	38	Come into view	18 Dismay
15	Peace goddess	39	Old World deer	20 Rig
16	Said with a twang	40	Fragrance	22 Italian port
17	Be bold	counter	bottle	23 Stir up
18	Give	19	Paper pack	24 Yellow gems
19	Paper pack	21	Quite cold	25 Handout seeker
21	Quite cold	22	Yeti's cousin	28 Dice, e.g.
22	1	25	Caesar's land	30 Set off
23	Solemn	26	Chips buy	31 Brink
24	2	27	Take apart	32 Church leader
25	3	28	Draw out	34 Green hue
26	4	29	Make lots	36 Soaked
27	5	30	29	
33	31	31	30	
35	32	32	31	
37	33	33	32	
39	34	34	33	



5-20

## SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

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