

## World cannot afford another forever war

### Consequences of US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites may be grave

We're deeply alarmed by the United States forcing itself into Israel's war on Iran after days of provocative rhetoric. Early Sunday, the US Air Force's B-2 Spirit stealth bombers struck three key nuclear sites in Iran, using the powerful GBU-57 "bunker buster" bombs. President Donald Trump later claimed the strikes had "totally obliterated" these sites, although the extent of the damage is yet to be established. Fordow, Iran's most heavily fortified uranium enrichment site buried under 80 metres of rock, was reportedly hit with a full payload; Natanz and Isfahan were similarly targeted. While both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iranian authorities have confirmed that no off-site radiation has been detected so far, the strategic and psychological toll of this attack is undeniable.

First of all, it marks a dangerous escalation in the ongoing war. Iran, which condemned the attack as "outrageous," warned of "everlasting consequences." Although by now Iranians appear degraded in their military capabilities thanks to the persistent, targeted Israeli attacks over the past week, "they have all sorts of asymmetric ways that they can respond [to the US attack]," as a former Middle East negotiator for US administrations has said. The US strike and threats of further attacks could, according to some analysts, provoke Tehran into retaliating by closing the Strait of Hormuz, attacking US military bases in the Middle East, stepping up its missile barrage on Israel, activating proxy groups against American and Israeli interests, etc. Of course, this is just a hypothetical scenario, as there is no telling what the reactions of a weakened, desperate, but still-resolute Iran will be in the long run.

The US Israeli strikes, we must say, should be viewed as part of an overall continuum that began with Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza—which received full US backing—and then continued with Israel's attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon and the fall of the Iran-backed Assad regime in Syria. The irony with the latest episode is that although Israel attacked Iran based on unfounded claims about the latter's nuclear programme, it likely has little to do with Iran actually acquiring nuclear weapons. As per an observer, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been claiming for over 20 years that Iran was "merely weeks, months, or a few years away" from obtaining them—much like how the US falsely cited the development of weapons of mass destruction to justify its war on Iraq. It is deeply shameful that such false claims are being repeated to commit war crimes while the world watches on silently.

This has to stop. Israel and the US must end their illegal campaigns in Iran and Gaza. We urge the international community to intervene decisively to stop such deadly geopolitical manoeuvres that bring suffering not only to civilians in the affected regions but across the world.

## Marriage as a rape cover-up is not justice

### It not only normalises rape, but also puts victims at further risk

It is alarming to learn of the incidents of rape victims being married off to their rapists, thus putting them at risk of continued abuse. Reportedly, accused rapists often seek to marry survivors as a means to evade legal consequences. While cases filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act—including rape—cannot legally be settled outside court, such arrangements are frequently made across the country through village arbitration or family negotiations. Girls who are married to their alleged rapists through these informal settlements are often subjected to further abuse, divorce, or unstable marriages. The question is: why are such marriages taking place? Are we not, in effect, granting impunity to rapists through these arrangements?

Between 2002 and 2011, *Prothom Alo* said it reported at least 20 cases in which rape survivors were married off to their accused rapists. Of these, 11 marriages ended due to physical and mental abuse, among other factors. In one case, the marriage continued, but the girl was subjected to ongoing violence. The remaining eight cases could not be tracked further. Additionally, over the past four years, *Prothom Alo* spoke with eight survivors and their families who had been married to their accused rapists. It was revealed that none of them were able to sustain a family life. Moreover, they struggled to obtain legal recognition for children born as a result of rape. In one tragic instance, a survivor was murdered after the marriage.

Some families said they agreed to such arrangements out of fear of social stigma. Some parents of adolescent and young girls who became pregnant due to rape said there was "no option but marriage." In some instances, these marriages were even formalised in court, with magistrates present. The recent incident of singer Mainul Ahsan Noble is a case in point. Noble, who was arrested in a rape case last month, married the victim on June 20 with court permission.

These incidents are not only shocking but also unacceptable. Rape is a criminal offence, and rapists must face due punishment under the law—not be rewarded with marriage. Sadly, our legal system is failing not only to convict rapists but also to protect survivors from further abuse and harassment through such marriages. Under no circumstances can forcing or coercing a survivor to marry their rapist be considered a solution. The state must take urgent steps to prevent such marriages and protect survivors from further trauma, injustice, and cruelty.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### The United Kingdom votes for Brexit

On this day in 2016, the United Kingdom voted in a referendum to withdraw from the European Union, with 51.9 percent supporting Britain's exit (Brexit) and 48.1 percent opposing the move; it marked the first time a country had decided to leave the organisation.

# The fallout of Trump's Iran strike

THE OVERTON WINDOW



Eresh Omar Jamal  
is head of the editorial department at The Daily Star. His X-handle is: @EreshOmarJamal

ERESH OMAR JAMAL

US President Donald Trump has bombed Iran, as many had predicted. Rumours of Trump's intention to intervene in the ongoing Iran-Israel conflict had been circulating since June 18, starting with the Israeli media. On June 19, legendary journalist Seymour Hersh reported that, according to his sources, the intervention "will entail heavy American bombing," and that "the Trump administration is in full support of Israel's current plan to rid Iran of any trace of a nuclear weapons programme, while hoping the Ayatollah-led government in Tehran will be overthrown."

Nevertheless, many had hoped that the self-proclaimed "anti-war president," the "America First president," would refrain from dragging



VISUAL: SIFAT AFRIN SHAMS

on June 13 to Trump's subsequent escalation—likely has little to do with Iran actually acquiring nuclear weapons. Indeed, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been claiming for over 20 years that Iran was merely weeks, months, or a few years away from obtaining them.

Many experts, including former US army generals and senior intelligence officials, have argued that Iran's greatest mistake was its decision not to acquire nuclear weapons—something that could have served as a deterrent against the relentless pressure it faces, as well as outright attacks on its sovereignty.

They point to what happened in Libya, Iraq, and Syria—countries that agreed to abandon their weapons programmes—as opposed to North Korea. The North Korean leadership remains in place, while the leaderships in those other countries that made deals with the US have been removed—and, in most cases, eliminated. Those countries have also been bombed and devastated. North Korea, by contrast, has not, because it possesses the nuclear deterrent.

Prior to the US bombing, Iran had warned that it would target American assets in the Middle East if the US intervened. Many experts noted that US assets in the region were extremely vulnerable to retaliation. Some even argued that a US attack would compel Iran to conclude that it has no option

but to acquire nuclear weapons if it wishes to survive.

Now that Trump has crossed that Rubicon, it is impossible to predict what comes next. But in the aftermath of the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu may—perhaps for the first time—have said something that will prove accurate: Trump's decision, he claimed, "will change history." And it

Iranian missiles but of drones and other weaponry. The fleet in the Persian Gulf, just off the Iranian coast, is also vulnerable to Iranian attacks, and that could impact global shipping, oil prices, and indeed the entire global economy." The proxy militias in Iraq could also "target American bases there." And so, there are "a number of ways that American forces could be vulnerable," and it would be surprising "if the Iranians don't target at least some of these."

However, as surprising as it may be for Iran to back down, that may be its best option. Following Israel's devastating success in eliminating Iran's top leadership in the surprise attack on June 13, the conflict has taken some shocking turns. Iran now seems to have been more successful in penetrating Israel's Iron Dome and inflicting damage. While it was initially believed that Iran wouldn't withstand Israel's intense barrage, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is Israel that is struggling to cope with Iran's missile strikes, as its defence systems are becoming exhausted trying to intercept them.

Israel had always sought to drag the US into this war, and in recent days it has tried even more desperately, as Iranian missiles continue to pummel the country. This has led to growing dissatisfaction among Israelis with Netanyahu, whose only path to retaining power appears to be fuelling further chaos.

It should now be clear to Iran that Netanyahu stands to benefit the most from any further escalation between the US and Iran. And that Trump, in bombing the three Iranian nuclear facilities, has effectively bombed his own base, a large portion of which supported him for his anti-war rhetoric. Now that his rhetoric has proven hollow, there could be significant domestic blowback.

The rest of the world, too, has once again witnessed how the US says one thing and does another. Global trust in the US's word has diminished further. Countries such as Russia and China—though unlikely to support Iran directly—may be more inclined to offer indirect assistance, viewing themselves as targets of the same adversary.

Therefore, it may be in Iran's best interest to play the long game: to survive and allow the US and Israel to further expose their hypocrisy to the world, rather than escalate the conflict and give Washington another excuse to raise the stakes and push for rapid regime change in Tehran.

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the US into another major conflict.

But those hopes have now been shattered, as Trump—like every US president arguably since JFK—has put "Israel first" and bombed three of Iran's nuclear facilities: Fordow, Natanz, and Esfahan. The great irony here is that this entire episode—from Israel's pre-emptive and illegal attack on Iran



Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana  
is under-secretary general of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

ARMIDA SALSIAH ALISJAHBANA

Ten years ago, countries across Asia and the Pacific united to correct a silent injustice: millions of people were being born and dying without ever being recorded. The launch of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Decade marked a bold regional commitment to ensure every birth and death is recorded, and every life counts.

At its core, the CRVS Decade was

by strong political commitment, improved systems, and regional cooperation. While there is much to celebrate, 5.1 crore unregistered children in Asia and the Pacific is still far too many.

We've come too far to stop now. We must extend the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade to 2030.

Doing so will ensure that efforts

**A birth certificate is more than a document; it is a child's first proof of existence in the eyes of the law. Without it, that child may be shut out of school, denied healthcare, and excluded from social protection. They may be unable to prove their nationality—or even their age. The consequences are especially severe for the most vulnerable, and the effects ripple across generations.**

about more than data—it was about dignity. It aimed to equip governments with accurate, timely information to deliver essential services, shape responsive policies, and uphold the rights of every person, in every corner of the region.

Today, the region has made undeniable progress. Since 2012, the number of unregistered children under five has fallen by 62 percent, from 13.5 crore to 5.1 crore in 2024. This is an enormous achievement, made possible

to improve legal identity and vital statistics systems remain aligned with the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It will also provide countries with the time and support they need to finish what they started and to fully close the data gap that still leaves millions of people invisible.

Transforming CRVS systems takes partnership, persistence, and innovation. That's why the United Nations and our partners are committed to working together with

## We must ensure every birth and death is recorded



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FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

governments across the region, helping to build stronger, more inclusive, and people-centred CRVS systems.

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We also face a grave challenge on the other side of life. Every year, 69 lakh deaths go unregistered in the region, leaving families without access to inheritance, land rights, or pensions. And even among registered deaths, fewer than one in three are medically certified, meaning we often don't know why people are dying.

This gap in knowledge leaves public health systems in the dark, unable to fully understand, prepare for, or respond to health threats. Timely, disaggregated statistics on causes of death are essential for designing and monitoring effective health policies, and for detecting emerging crises, including pandemics.

The upcoming Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific is the moment to act. Governments must use this opportunity to recommit to the CRVS agenda, renew their national targets, and align with the SDG finish line in 2030.

Extending the CRVS Decade to 2030 is a declaration: everyone counts. Data saves lives. Legal identity is a right, not a privilege. No one should be left behind simply because they were never counted in the first place.

Let us finish what we started. Let us get everyone in the picture and ensure every life truly counts.