

Israel digs in for a 'forever war' Defence analysts say new strategy sees foes degraded, not eliminated

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Even as the US and Iran seek to cement a ceasefire, Israel is seizing more territory from its neighbours in preparation for a long, drawn-out conflict across the Middle East.

Israel's creation of "buffer zones" in Gaza, Syria and now Lebanon reflects a strategic shift after the attacks of October 7, 2023, one that puts the country in a semi-permanent state of war, six Israeli military and defence officials told Reuters.

The approach also acknowledges a reality the officials said had become increasingly clear after two and a half years of conflict: Iran's clerical leadership, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and militias across the region cannot be eliminated outright.

"Israel's leaders have concluded that they are in a forever war against adversaries who have to be intimidated and even dispersed," said Nathan Brown, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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The US and Iran agreed on Wednesday to a pause in fighting while they negotiate a broader end to the war, which erupted on February 28. Israel agreed to halt its attacks on Iran but says it will not stop its campaign against Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

Hezbollah joined the war on March 2 by firing rockets at Israel, which then launched a ground invasion of southern Lebanon to clear a buffer zone up to the Litani River - a broad swathe of land that makes up about 8 percent of Lebanese territory. Israel has ordered the area's hundreds of thousands of residents to flee and is in the early stages of destroying homes in Shia Muslim villages that it believes have been used by Hezbollah to store weapons or stage attacks.

A senior military official said the aim was to "clear" an area stretching 5-10 km beyond the border, putting Israeli border towns out of range of Hezbollah rocket-propelled grenade fire.



People march in New York City, US on Wednesday during a protest against US-Israeli tensions with Iran and conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran bruised, but still powerful over Hormuz

REUTERS, Dubai

Nearly six weeks of war in Iran have ended, seemingly, with President Donald Trump claiming victory, but the US-Iran ceasefire locks in a harsh reality: an entrenched, radical government with control over the Strait of Hormuz and a powerful lever over global energy markets and Gulf rivals, analysts say.

The shockwaves have rippled outward, contributing to global economic strains and bringing conflict to Gulf neighbours whose

economies depend on stability.

"This war will be remembered as Trump's grave strategic miscalculation. One whose consequences reshaped the region in unintended ways," Middle East scholar Fawaz Gerges told Reuters.

Before the war, the Strait was formally treated as an international waterway. Iran monitored it and intermittently intercepted vessels, but it stopped short of asserting outright control.

In the new reality, Tehran has moved from shadowing tankers

to effectively dictating terms. It currently functions as de facto gatekeeper of the route. Iran wants to charge ships for safe passage.

Additionally, Iran has demonstrated resilience under sustained attack and retained the capacity to escalate further, projecting influence across multiple fronts and strategic choke points. Its reach extends through Lebanon and Iraq via Hezbollah and Shia militias, and into Bab el-Mandeb in the Red Sea, leveraging the sphere of influence of its Houthis allies.

Vitamin A

FROM PAGE 16

routine measles vaccinations, last year's health workers' strikes, and the prolonged gap in special campaigns for children who missed the routine programmes.

Epidemiologist Prof Mahmudur Rahman said, "Vitamin A strengthens immunity, so when children with deficiency are infected with measles, they suffer more severe complications."

"Deworming is not carried out, children cannot fully utilise the food they consume, leading to malnutrition and comorbidities," Prof Mahmudur, a former director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), also told The Daily Star yesterday.

Prof Mushtaq Husain, a public health expert, noted that children from marginalised communities are especially vulnerable, as malnutrition and lack of supplements heighten complications.

"Vitamin A capsules make a big difference. Anyone can be infected with measles, but the lower the immunity, the higher the risk of complications," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Prof Husain also said worms prevent absorption of nutrients from food. "This is why there is a direct link between measles casualties and the absence of the two campaigns," he added.

The last Vitamin A Plus campaign, in March 2025, targeted 2.26 crore children aged six to 59 months.

Prof Anjuman Ara Sultana, the former line director of National Nutrition Services, said that although the tenure of the 4th Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) ended in June 2024, there was enough capsule in stock to carry out the March 2025 campaign.

Since 1998, four HPNSPs have been implemented, with the latest ending in June 2024. The interim government scrapped the proposed fifth programme in March 2025, opting instead to integrate sectoral programmes into regular ones.

Several projects were later approved to continue unfinished tasks and ensure the supply of medicines and vaccines, but approvals were significantly delayed - some until November last year - causing funding shortages for vaccines, medicines and even the salaries of many health workers, health officials said.

After the expiry of the sector programme, the Institute of Public Health Nutrition (IPHN) was supposed to carry out the

Vitamin A Plus campaign.

Contacted, Mohammed Eunus Ali, director of IPHN, said they had planned to distribute Vitamin A capsules in November or December last year but did not receive the supply.

He said that in the absence of an operational plan, a fund was arranged from the DGHS to procure capsules through Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD).

But CMSD had to cancel two bidding processes because the bidders quoted unusually high rates, he told this correspondent early last week, adding that the third bidding process is now awaiting administrative approval.

Asked when the campaign could be carried out, he said, "Once the tender process is completed, the campaign schedule can be announced."

Back in 2005, the government launched the soil-transmitted helminth (STH) control programme after stool tests showed 80 percent of children had worms, a DGHS official said.

Since then, the national deworming campaign has been carried out under the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) programme, providing deworming tablets twice a year to school going children aged 5 to 16, he said, requesting anonymity.

The stool positivity rate fell to below eight percent in 2018-19, he said, adding that the last campaign was held in May 2024, with coverage reaching around 96 to 98 percent.

He said the campaign cost is relatively low, as the tablets are supplied free of cost through the World Health Organization, yet the campaign has not been held in the past two years.

Contacted, Prof Halimur Rashid, DGHS director (Disease Control) and the last line director of the CDC programme, said the campaign could not be held in the absence of an operational plan.

However, they have supplied around four crore deworming tablets to hospitals.

When asked how all school-going children would receive the tablets from hospitals, since medical facilities usually provide them only to those who come for treatment, Prof Halimur Rashid did not respond.

Replying to another question, he said the campaign would be carried out again if the operation plan is revived or the government decides to do so. "The matter is not that urgent at the moment," he added.

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