MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

The War in the Middle East has started impacting countries in the region. The multi-pronged war launched by US-Israel against Iran and which has since spread to neighbouring countries is a complicated crisis with each side waging psychological warfare and no clarity on the real scene. There are claims and counterclaims about targets from all the countries involved; social media and Indian television channels are making the scene all the more confusing through their reportage. The scene right noe is: US wants Iran to surrender; Iran is standing its ground and issuing threats to the US, Israel and all its neighbours including Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Qatar and even the UAE. The USA is warning Russia over supporting Iran. On the other hand, President Donald Trump said he is hopeful that the war will end soon after his hour-long conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin! What is going on?

India – both public and the government have started preparing for a long haul. The most immediate impact is on the supply of the cooking gas as many hotels have announced closure of food business. The government is bracing for the situation and is exploring different sources for oil security. There is a possibility that the government may announce some curbs on public life to conserve oil. Experts are warning people against not having induction plates as the LPG – in the cylinder and through pipes –is to go short supply almost immediately. There is no country which is close to both the USA and Israel or for that matter to Iran and is asking for peace and diplomatic talks. And if we may ask where is the UN? Nobody heard from it as the war is being imposed on the humankind? The UAE ambassador to India has claimed if PM Modi speaks to Israel, the war may end.

Communication ethics in an age of conflict

Chaitanya K Prasad

In today's media environment, wars rarely remain confined to battlefields. They unfold just as vividly on television screens, digital platforms, and social media timelines. Every strike, every explosion, every movement of troops travels across the world within seconds. Technology has made it possible for audiences thousands of miles away to witness conflict almost as it happens. Yet this unprecedented access has created a strange paradox: the more we see of war, the less we often understand it.

What we are witnessing is the emergence of a new communication order around conflict. Information moves at extraordinary speed, but reflection rarely keeps pace with it. Images circulate faster than context. Algorithms amplify the most dramatic footage, and broadcasters compete for attention in an increasingly crowded media landscape. In such a setting, communication itself becomes part of the battlefield. While military operations determine the physical outcomes of war, the information environment shapes how societies interpret those events, how they emotionally respond to them, and sometimes even how they participate in them.

War reporting has not always looked like this. For most of the twentieth century, there was a distance between the battlefield and the newsroom. Journalists filed reports after verifying what had happened, often hours or even days later. That delay, though frustrating at times, created space for editorial judgment and context. Stories were written with the benefit of reflection rather than immediate reaction. Today, that distance has almost disappeared. Twenty-four-hour news cycles and real-time satellite feeds have transformed war into something that resembles a continuous broadcast event. The shift is subtle but important: we are no longer only reporting war, we are broadcasting it.

Television studios increasingly resemble control rooms for a global spectacle. Large digital screens display animated maps, missile trajectories, and radar simulations. Footage of explosions is replayed repeatedly from multiple angles. Anchors narrate unfolding events with urgency and drama. Graphics and sound design sometimes mirror the visual language of cinema or sports broadcasting.

In this environment, visual intensity often replaces informational depth. The purpose quietly shifts from explaining events to capturing attention. Ratings, viewership metrics, and digital engagement begin to shape editorial decisions. War becomes a form of content.

This raises an uncomfortable but necessary question: when conflict is presented as spectacle, does the audience gradually become a spectator rather than an informed citizen?

Images, of course, have always played an important role in communication. Powerful visuals can humanise distant suffering and generate empathy across borders. They can make the consequences of war visible in ways that statistics never could. But images also have the power to distort reality when they are presented without context.

In contemporary conflict coverage, viewers often encounter an endless loop of explosions, missile launches, and night-vision footage. Cameras gravitate toward the most dramatic scenes, fireballs lighting up the sky, buildings collapsing under airstrikes, or tracer rounds cutting through darkness. What receives far less attention are the quieter and slower dimensions of war: displaced families, fragile diplomatic negotiations, economic disruptions, or the long and complicated process of rebuilding societies after violence.

The result is a kind of visual hierarchy of war. The most spectacular moment dominates the narrative, while the structural realities that explain conflict remain largely invisible. Audiences are exposed to bursts of violence but rarely to the deeper political, historical, and economic contexts that led to the conflict in the first place.

Over time, this can produce something even more troubling: normalisation. When viewers encounter dramatic imagery of violence day after day, war can begin to resemble a form of high-stakes entertainment rather than what it truly is, a catastrophic breakdown of political order.

A newer challenge is now intensifying this dynamic: the growing use of artificial intelligence in visualising conflict. Some broadcasters have begun using AI-generated imagery or digital simulations to reconstruct how an attack might have unfolded, how missiles may have travelled, or how military planners might have executed a particular operation. These visualisations are often presented as explanatory tools, but they occupy a complicated space between journalism and dramatisation. Even when clearly labelled as simulations, the realism of AI-generated imagery can blur the boundary between fact and speculation. For many viewers, the difference between a verified image and a reconstructed scene may not always be obvious.

More importantly, such simulations often prioritise visual drama over analytical clarity. Stylised animations of military operations risk turning strategic violence into something resembling a cinematic sequence. What is presented as explanation can easily slip into oversimplification, or worse, a kind of theatrical staging of conflict. In an era already struggling with misinformation and manipulated media, the casual use of such imagery deserves far more scrutiny than it currently receives.

At its core, the issue is not technological but ethical. Media institutions across the world have developed elaborate codes of conduct for elections, political reporting, and even public health crises. Yet when it comes to the communication of war, reflection often gives way to speed.

Several uncomfortable questions, therefore, remain insufficiently discussed. Should broadcasters repeatedly display the mechanics of weapons used in attacks? Does visualising military capabilities inadvertently glorify violence or reveal sensitive information? How much speculative reconstruction should be permitted in news coverage? And perhaps most importantly, at what point does reporting cross the line into dramatisation?

These are not minor editorial dilemmas. They point to a deeper problem within the global communication environment: communication itself rarely undergoes introspection during conflict. The urgency of reporting tends to overshadow the responsibility of representation.

Perhaps it is time to think about a clearer ethical boundary. In sports, certain violations are so serious that they trigger an immediate red card. It is a simple but powerful signal that a line has been crossed. Everyone understands the rule, and everyone understands the consequence.

Conflict communication might benefit from something similar, a conceptual "red card" for media ethics. Such a framework would not exist to censor reporting but to establish limits that protect the integrity of journalism. Certain practices could clearly fall into this category: presenting speculative military scenarios as factual visuals, repeatedly looping violent imagery purely for dramatic effect, revealing tactical details that may escalate tensions, using AI-generated visuals without clear disclosure, or framing conflict in ways that trivialise human suffering. The goal would not be to silence journalism but to recalibrate it. Because the media ecosystem today is global, such questions cannot be addressed by individual broadcasters alone. A broader conversation is needed among international journalism bodies, academic institutions, and organisations concerned with information ethics. Together, they could help articulate a set of shared principles for responsible conflict communication.

Such principles might begin with a simple but important idea: context should always come before spectacle. Historical background, diplomatic developments, and humanitarian consequences should accompany battlefield imagery. Audiences deserve to understand not just what is happening, but why it is happening.

Transparency should also guide the use of digital reconstructions and AI simulations. If such visuals are used, they must be clearly labelled and treated as illustrations rather than evidence. At the same time, the human cost of war must be represented with the same prominence as military developments. Civilian suffering, displacement, and long-term societal damage are not side stories; they are central to the reality of conflict. Editors should also be mindful of how visual repetition shapes perception.

PROTECTING INDIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS IN IRAN

MOMIN KHAN

I am writing on behalf of Indian medical students currently studying in the Islamic Republic of Iran, many of whom have been facing an extremely challenging and uncertain situation over the past months. As representatives and well-wishers, we feel it is our responsibility to bring their concerns, fears, and resilience to light.

Earlier in January, the situation in Iran became tense, leading to a complete internet shutdown in several regions. Communication lines were severely disrupted. For Indian students living far from home, this sudden digital blackout created panic and isolation. Families in India were unable to reach their children, and students struggled to connect with their parents and representatives. During that period, some of our Indian medical students took extraordinary steps to ensure communication could be re-established.

A group of students travelled toward the Iraq border in an attempt to access connectivity and inform us about their safety. Similarly, students from the Urmia region went toward the Turkey border so they could get internet access and contact us at AIMSA. These were not acts of recklessness but acts of desperation — young students trying to reassure their families and seek guidance in a rapidly deteriorating environment. Despite the chaos, we maintained direct telephonic communication with many students whenever possible. In certain areas such as Urmia, internet connectivity was partially functional, which helped us coordinate and verify their safety.

The psychological toll on students was immense. Being in a foreign land during uncertainty, without stable communication, is an experience no student should have to endure. Now, as of March 3, the situation has again become tense. Reports of renewed conflict and explosions in and around certain regions have deeply frightened students, particularly those in Tehran. Many described hearing loud explosions, which understandably triggered fear and anxiety.

The memories of January's communication blackout and instability are still fresh in their minds. However, this time, coordination has been more structured and proactive. We have remained connected with students through direct phone calls. Representatives on the ground have been actively gathering information and sharing real-time updates. Importantly, internet connectivity in regions like Urmia has remained functional, allowing smoother communication compared to the earlier shutdown. On March 3, Indian students in Tehran began relocation to safer locations under the guidance of the Embassy of India. The Embassy has taken precautionary steps to ensure the safety and well-being of our students. They have been provided with proper transportation arrangements, and the relocation process has been carried out in an organized manner.

We are thankful to the Embassy officials for their timely response and support. In times of crisis, diplomatic coordination becomes a lifeline for citizens abroad. The swift decision to move students to safer areas demonstrates sensitivity to the ground situation and the concerns of parents back home. It is important to understand that these students are primarily pursuing medical education. They left India with dreams of becoming doctors, serving humanity, and contributing to society.

Instead, they have found themselves navigating war-like uncertainty, internet shutdowns, and the emotional strain of being away from family during crisis. Parents in India have been understandably anxious. Many have been in constant touch, seeking updates and reassurance.

As representatives, we urge parents to remain calm and united. Panic can spread quickly in such circumstances, but verified information and coordinated action are crucial. This situation highlights the broader need for robust emergency preparedness mechanisms for Indian students studying abroad. Clear communication channels, verified regional coordinators, and rapid embassy response systems are essential.

Despite the fear and uncertainty, one thing stands out: the resilience of our students. Even amid explosions and instability, they have shown discipline, unity, and maturity. They have followed instructions, stayed in touch, and cooperated fully with relocation efforts. Their courage deserves recognition.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely. Further updates, including visual documentation, will be shared as soon as possible to maintain transparency and reassure families. Our primary demand remains clear: the safety and security of every Indian student in Iran must be ensured.

Their lives and mental well-being are paramount. We remain committed to standing with them, raising their concerns responsibly, and coordinating with authorities until complete stability is restored. In these difficult times, unity, patience, and coordinated effort are our strongest tools. We pray for peace, safety, and swift normalisation of the situation so that our students can return to their academic pursuits without fear.

Dr Momin Khan is President of AIMSA, Jammu and Kashmir; views are personal

Agriculture: From traditional farming to global opportunities

Himanshu Verma

Agriculture has been the backbone of human civilisation since the earliest settlements. From ancient subsistence farming to modern precision agriculture, the sector has continuously evolved to meet the changing needs of society. Despite rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and technological advancement, the scope of agriculture cannot be halted or diminished. Instead, it continues to expand and diversify, playing a vital role in ensuring food security, economic development, environmental sustainability, and rural livelihood across the globe. In the coming decades, agriculture will remain one of the most essential and promising sectors for human survival and progress.

The primary and most fundamental importance of agriculture lies in its role in food production. With the global population projected to exceed 9 billion by 2050, the demand for food grains, fruits, vegetables, and livestock products will increase significantly. Agriculture remains the only sector capable of meeting this growing demand. Advances in crop breeding, improved irrigation methods, and climate-resilient farming practices are continuously enhancing productivity. Modern techniques such as precision farming, protected cultivation, and integrated nutrient management have further strengthened the capacity of agriculture to supply food to an ever-growing population.

Therefore, the need for agricultural production will always exist, ensuring that the scope of agriculture remains permanent and indispensable. Apart from food production, agriculture is a major contributor to employment generation. In many developing countries, including India, a significant portion of the population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihood. Farmers, agricultural labourers, input suppliers, transporters, food processors, and marketers all form part of the agricultural value chain.

As new technologies and innovations emerge, new employment opportunities are also being created in areas such as agri-tech startups, digital agriculture services, farm mechanisation, agricultural consultancy, and rural entrepreneurship. Consequently, agriculture not only sustains traditional occupations but also opens new career pathways for educated youth.

Agriculture also plays a critical role in supporting various allied sectors. Industries such as food processing, textile manufacturing, dairy production, poultry farming, fisheries, and biofuel production depend heavily on agricultural raw materials. For example, cotton supports the textile industry, sugarcane feeds the sugar industry, and oilseeds supply edible oil processing units. The development of agro-based industries strengthens rural economies and contributes significantly to national economic growth.

As the demand for processed food and value-added agricultural products increases, the interconnection between agriculture and industry will become even stronger. Another significant reason why the scope of agriculture cannot be stopped is its growing role in environmental sustainability. Agriculture is closely linked with natural resource management, including soil, water, and biodiversity conservation.

Modern sustainable farming practices, such as organic farming, conservation agriculture, agro-forestry, and integrated farming systems, help maintain ecological balance while ensuring productivity. These approaches reduce chemical dependency, improve soil health, and promote climate resilience. In the era of climate change, agriculture is not only a sector affected by environmental challenges but also a key solution provider through carbon sequestration, sustainable land management, and climate-smart agricultural practices. Technological advancements have further expanded the scope of agriculture in recent decades.

Innovations such as remote sensing, geographic information systems (GIS), artificial intelligence, drones, and nanotechnology are transforming traditional farming methods into more efficient and data-driven systems. Precision agriculture allows farmers to apply water, fertilisers, and pesticides in a targeted manner, reducing wastage and improving crop yields. Similarly, biotechnology and genetic improvement techniques have enabled the development of high-yielding, pest-resistant, and climate-tolerant crop varieties. These technological integrations demonstrate that agriculture is not a stagnant sector but one that continuously evolves with scientific progress.

Agriculture also has an important role in ensuring nutritional security. Modern societies are not only concerned about producing sufficient food but also about producing nutritious food. The diversification of agriculture towards horticulture, pulses, oilseeds, millets, medicinal plants, and functional foods contributes to a balanced and healthy diet. Increasing awareness about organic food, natural farming, and farm-to-table concepts has further strengthened the connection between agriculture and human health. As people become more health-conscious, the demand for safe, fresh, and nutritious agricultural products will continue to grow. Furthermore, agriculture contributes significantly to rural development.

Rural areas are the primary centers of agricultural activities, and improvements in agricultural productivity directly influence the socio-economic conditions of rural communities. Infrastructure development, such as irrigation systems, rural roads, storage facilities, and market access improves farmers' income and overall quality of life. Government initiatives promoting farmer producer organizations, crop insurance schemes, and digital agriculture platforms are further strengthening the agricultural sector.

By improving rural livelihoods and reducing poverty, agriculture plays a central role in inclusive development. Global trade is another factor that expands the scope of agriculture.