

Of tea, tantrums, and Tudor theatre



H.M. Nazmul Alam
is an academic, journalist, and political analyst. He can be reached at nazmulalam.rijohn@gmail.com.

H.M. NAZMUL ALAM

If history is, as philosopher George Santayana warned, something we are doomed to repeat when we forget it, then Bangladesh's Awami dynasty has taken that wisdom and staged it as a family-friendly farce somewhere between *EastEnders* and a Shakespearean tragedy. Or is it a Netflix political satire? It's getting hard to tell.

This week, London witnessed not just the drizzle of summer rain but the awkward drizzle of dynastic dysfunction, imported directly from Dhaka—wrapped in diplomatic lace, then promptly stomped on with protest boots.

Prof Muhammad Yunus, Nobel laureate and currently the chief adviser of Bangladesh's interim government. A man whose résumé makes most heads of state look like part-time interns. Invited by King Charles III to receive the inaugural Harmony Award—an honour meant for those rare few who have nudged humanity towards peace—Yunus's trip to the UK should have been a textbook case in soft power diplomacy.

But then came the black flags. And the Facebook posts. And the tea.

Because what is a grand statesman's moment without a family-led circus determined to hijack the stage?

Sajeeb Wazed Joy, digital enthusiast, dynastic heir, and part-time Facebook warrior, announced his parallel visit to

London, accompanied by a cast of European Awami League loyalists coming in for a protest outside St James's Palace. Dressed in black flags and righteous fury, they shouted slogans that made more sense in Motijheel than Mayfair.

Not to be outdone, Joy's cousin Tulip Siddiq, Labour MP and niece of Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, emerged from the fog with a peculiar gesture: an informal invitation to Prof Yunus for tea at the House of Commons. Because when your family accuses a man of state capture, the logical next step is a cosy sit-down over Earl Grey.

Tulip's note was as tone-deaf as it was self-serving. No formal address. No reference to Prof Yunus's interim role. Just a breezy Britishness laced with Bangladeshi entitlement. As if this were a tiff over stolen biscuits at a school reunion and not an institutional breakdown between a Nobel laureate and a family accused of looting state coffers.

And then came the irony's crown jewel: Joy, Tulip's cousin and Hasina's son, emerged on Facebook hours later to declare Yunus a "dictator" and warning UK officials not to meet him. One cousin offers tea. The other offers threats.

This contradictory choreography—one part charm offensive, one part tantrum—reveals not a family at odds but a coordinated

campaign cloaked in contradiction. A two-pronged PR strategy: Tulip softens, Joy sharpens. One feigns civility, the other screams conspiracy.

The playwright Harold Pinter once said, "There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false." He could have been describing the Awami League's current

require a Bangladeshi national ID, a taxpayer identification number, and a network of bureaucratic approvals only available to—wait for it—insiders.

Then there's the small matter of Special Security Force (SSF) protection, a benefit under the Father of the Nation Family Members' Security Act, 2009. Tulip has neither disavowed nor declined this privilege,

of Bangladesh's state machinery for years without ever questioning its abuses. She remained notably silent during enforced disappearances, political repression, and the infamous Digital Security Act's reign of fear.

Tulip is neither rebel nor reformer. She's a symptom of dynastic privilege masquerading as democratic engagement.

The House of Commons is not a therapy couch for political heirs trying to whitewash their familial baggage. Nor is it a press gallery for proxy wars over legitimacy.

The British establishment must tread carefully. Prof Yunus visited London not as a freelancer of democracy but as the recognised transitional figure in Bangladesh, endorsed internationally and formally received by King Charles III. To allow his visit to be hijacked by political agitators related by blood but severed by credibility would be a farcical betrayal of everything the British system supposedly upholds.

Tulip's antics, Joy's outbursts, and their family's fragile grip on the truth all boil down to a single pathology: they cannot bear the idea that Bangladesh might now stand on its own, led not by blood but by merit.

As author George Orwell once wrote in *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." The Awami League's "royal" family has long believed itself to be that "more equal" kind. But democracy has a habit of correcting course, however messy the process.

Prof Yunus's visit, beyond its ceremonial significance, marks a symbolic shift. From rule by surname to rule by substance. From dynasties to dignity.

And if Tulip and Joy want to continue their cross-continental roadshow, the least they can do is rehearse the same script.



VISUAL: MAHIYA TABASSUM

information strategy.

Tulip, cast as the rational moderate, is trying to distance herself from the corruption scandals circling her family. But a quick look at the public records exposes the PR bubble.

She claims no property in Bangladesh. The Anti-Corruption Commission, however, lists her as co-owner of prime real estate in Purbachal and Gulshan. Properties that

funded by the very taxpayers now watching her mock due process from across the globe.

But entitlement, as political psychologist Dr Drew Westen argues, is "the anaesthesia of the powerful—it numbs one to the suffering of others while keeping alive the illusion of victimhood."

Tulip's new storyline, crafted for British media paints her as a victim of a "smear campaign." Yet, she enjoyed the protection

The collapse of deterrence between Iran and Israel



Ashish Singh
has finished his PhD coursework in political science from the NRU-HSE, Moscow, Russia. He previously studied at Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway, and TISS, Mumbai.

ASHISH SINGH

The latest escalation between Israel and Iran marks a perilous moment in West Asian geopolitics, where decades of shadow war have slipped into open confrontation. What was once fought through proxies, sabotage operations, cyber warfare, and veiled diplomacy is now turning into direct strikes between two of the region's most formidable powers. The consequences of this transformation are not just regional, they are global.

On Friday, Israel launched what it termed "Operation Rising Lion," targeting multiple Iranian military and nuclear infrastructure sites in Isfahan, Natanz, and Shiraz. The strikes were reportedly in response to an attempted Iranian drone and missile attack a week earlier, which Israel's defence forces intercepted with minimal casualties. But this tit-for-tat escalation belies a deeper, long simmering confrontation: Israel's determination to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability, and Iran's equally entrenched resolve to challenge Israeli hegemony in the region.

This is not merely a bilateral conflict. The power struggle between Israel and Iran is enmeshed in a web of international interests and ideological divides. The US, while publicly calling for de-escalation, continues to provide advanced defence systems and intelligence support to Israel. Russia, increasingly aligned with Iran following its pivot away from the West, finds itself in a delicate position, caught between opposing partners in its geopolitical balancing act. Meanwhile, China, dependent on Iranian oil and Israeli tech alike, remains diplomatically cautious, urging restraint but offering no decisive mediation.

For decades, the uneasy equilibrium was maintained by strategic ambiguity and third-party diplomacy. Iran backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and militias in Syria and Iraq, encircling Israel through non-state actors. Israel, in turn, conducted hundreds of airstrikes in Syria to curb Iranian entrenchment but refrained from overtly targeting Iranian soil—until now. This breach of the unwritten rules is profound.

It signals a shift from deterrence through ambiguity to confrontation through clarity, from shadows to fire.

The nuclear dimension adds a chilling undertone to this shift. Iran's enrichment of uranium beyond 60 percent purity, while still below weapons-grade, has crossed every red line previously set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Israel's policy

remains distracted by other conflicts—Ukraine, Taiwan, Sudan—the potential for a full-scale regional war here is dangerously underestimated.

The Arab world, once reflexively aligned with the Palestinian cause, is split. The Abraham Accords brought normalisation between Israel and key Gulf states, including the UAE and Bahrain, who now view Iran as a more imminent threat than Israel. Saudi Arabia walks a tightrope, trying to manage regional leadership without alienating its emerging détente with Tehran. This geopolitical realignment has fragmented what was once a unified Arab front, creating new uncertainties in regional diplomacy.

For India, key strategic partner of both Israel and Iran, the conflict presents an uncomfortable dilemma. While Delhi maintains defence and intelligence ties with Tel Aviv, it is also heavily dependent on Iranian energy routes and connectivity initiatives like Chabahar. More crucially, any escalation in the Strait of Hormuz threatens global oil supply chains—jeopardising the very foundation of India's energy security and inflation management. The conflict also poses risks to India's large diaspora in the region, particularly in the Gulf states, who could face economic fallout or political backlash.

But perhaps the most troubling dimension of this unfolding crisis is the failure of diplomacy. The collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), due to American withdrawal

under the Trump administration and Iran's subsequent defiance, left a dangerous vacuum. European mediators, once central to keeping dialogue alive, now appear sidelined by their own internal divisions and economic fragility. The UN, hamstrung by veto politics, watches from the margins as bombs fall.

What does the world do when the very frameworks designed to prevent war have failed? When rational actors become prisoners of their own red lines? The Israel-Iran conflict exposes the fragility of international norms in a multipolar era, where power is fragmented and restraint is rare.

It is not enough to call for de-escalation. The moment demands a return to diplomacy not as an afterthought but as an urgent priority. It requires courage from leadership—on both sides—to resist domestic hardliners and ideological absolutism. It demands from the international community a shift from perfunctory condemnations to active mediation, from arms deals to disarmament talks.

As cities across Israel and Iran brace for more strikes, and as the world teeters on yet another edge, it is worth remembering that history rarely judges nations only by their victories—but always by their choices. The choice now is between escalation and survival, between spectacle and sanity. The world must not look away.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

| | | | | |
|--------|----------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| ACROSS | 24 | Helpers: Abbr. | 20 | Indian musicians |
| 1 | Some turns | 25 | Shylock's outwitter | 21 |
| 6 | Low-budget | 27 | Drenched | Distress call |
| 11 | Maui greeting | 30 | High-speed warship | 24 "Entourage" role |
| 12 | Cut's counterpart | 31 | Dr.'s grp. | 25 European capital |
| 13 | Mystical deck | 32 | Derby, e.g. | 26 Plug's place |
| 14 | Famed fur trader | 33 | Wealth | 27 Surfer girl |
| 15 | River of Iraq | 35 | Radiant | 28 Appear |
| 17 | Bulldog backer | 38 | T, for one | 29 Sampled |
| 18 | Compass dir. | 39 | Soft leather | 30 Deep gorge |
| 19 | Philosopher Bertrand | 40 | Hint of color | 34 Memory item |
| 22 | Cardinal | 41 | Doled (out) | 36 Exalted verse |
| 23 | Figures of speech | 42 | Haste | 37 Unite |

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|------|----|-------------------------|----|------------------|
| DOWN | 1 | Second of two | 20 | Indian musicians |
| | 2 | Galahad's mother | 21 | Distress call |
| | 3 | Not authentic, in a way | 24 | "Entourage" role |
| | 4 | God with a hammer | 25 | European capital |
| | 5 | Swift and others | 26 | Plug's place |
| | 6 | Tax-time VIP | 27 | Surfer girl |
| | 7 | Holds | 28 | Appear |
| | 8 | Respect | 29 | Sampled |
| | 9 | Island rings | 30 | Deep gorge |
| | 10 | Danger | 34 | Memory item |
| | 11 | More melodramatic | 36 | Exalted verse |
| | 12 | | 37 | Unite |

| SATURDAY'S ANSWERS | | | | |
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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

Gopalganj Road Division, Gopalganj

Email: eegopal@rhd.gov.bd

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