

Are we looking at a new era of nuclear proliferation?



Syed Raiyan Amir is senior research associate at the KRF Center for Bangladesh and Global Affairs (CBGA). He can be reached at raiyan.cbga@gmail.com.

SYED RAIYAN AMIR

The latest escalation between Iran and Israel—flaring beyond their traditional shadow war into a more overt theatre of strategic confrontation—has not only brought into sharp relief the frailty of the Middle East's security architectures but also injected a renewed sense of plausibility to a future marred by nuclear proliferation. This is not merely a regional rivalry now shaped by drones, proxies, and ballistic threats; it is a deeper existential tremor through the global non-proliferation regime, particularly as it intersects with an evolving global stance on nuclear energy, evidenced recently by the World Bank lifting its ban on financing nuclear power projects. While such economic realignments suggest a revivalist sentiment towards nuclear energy for development purposes, the geostrategic ripple, if one observes closely, seems to be redirecting states towards the more ominous potential of military nuclearisation.

The gravitational pull of this crisis has clearly intensified since Iran's nuclear posture has taken a turn towards ambiguity, arguably as a form of strategic signal following repeated Israeli threats to pre-emptively neutralise Iran's nuclear infrastructure. While Tehran maintains that its ambitions remain within peaceful bounds—a position reiterated in its official adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—its progressive accumulation of enriched uranium, combined with the installation of advanced centrifuges, has rendered the so-called breakout time increasingly irrelevant. As argued by Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, proliferation is not always about intention but about the temptation born of security anxiety. What we are witnessing in the Middle East is a classic case of the security model driving nuclear aspiration—precisely the kind of condition under which the NPT begins to erode not legally, but normatively.

Israel's long-standing policy of nuclear

opacity, or *amimut*, compounded by its non-signatory status in the treaty, makes it a paradoxical actor within the non-proliferation discourse. Avner Cohen, in *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb*, exposes the internal logic of deterrence that has shaped Israeli policy since Dimona, a desert city where Israel has a nuclear installation, became functional. But the normalisation of such opacity—protected often by Western double standards—has already created conditions under which regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt, may feel increasingly justified in pursuing latent or overt nuclear capabilities. Indeed, as Jacques Hymans demonstrates in *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions*, national identity and state capacity often shape the likelihood of nuclear pursuit, but when perceived threats cross a certain threshold, even states with lower bureaucratic coherence become willing to absorb the risks.

The World Bank's decision to reintroduce nuclear energy into its financing portfolio, albeit under the rubric of green transitions, comes at a time when the line between civilian and military nuclear programmes has grown thinner than ever. In *Nuclear Energy: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Charles D Ferguson underscores how the dual-use nature of nuclear technology remains the Achilles heel of non-proliferation efforts, particularly in politically volatile regions. The shift in global energy paradigms, driven by climate obligations and the search for low carbon alternatives, inadvertently contributes to a proliferation-permissive environment. While the intention may be to catalyse sustainable development, the outcome, especially in strategically insecure regions, may be the opposite: an acceleration towards weaponisation disguised as energy transition.

One must not underestimate the ideological and existential dimensions at play. In *Nuclear Iran: Birth of an Atomic State*, David Patrikarakos articulates how Iran's

nuclear project is deeply embedded within its revolutionary narrative—a means not just of deterrence, but of ideological fortification in the face of perceived Western hostility and Israeli aggression. This framework, where nuclear capability becomes a symbol of sovereignty and resistance, undermines the normative power of the NPT and emboldens other regional actors to similarly frame nuclear pursuits as righteous or defensive.

escalation, the IAEA finds itself unable to contain the narrative spiral; its inspections are challenged, its neutrality questioned, and its authority diluted. Such developments don't merely affect Iran; they delegitimise the architecture built over decades to constrain nuclear ambition globally.

Equally critical is the emergent geopolitics of nuclear patronage. In *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy Toward Russia after the Cold*



A satellite image shows the Natanz nuclear facility in Iran after Israeli airstrike in this handout image dated June 15, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

The erosion of normative compliance is even more troubling when one considers the declining influence of multilateral institutions. Mohamed ElBaradei, in *The Age of Deception*, recounts the struggles of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to maintain impartial credibility, often caught between technical mandates and political pressures. In the current Iran-Israel

War, Angela Stent reminds us that nuclear diplomacy is often subservient to grand strategy. When the West no longer appears neutral in adjudicating proliferation threats, it creates incentives for other power blocs to encourage, or at least tolerate, proliferation under their spheres of influence as counterweights.

This tectonic shift is mirrored in the

Nuclear Tipping Point, a documentary by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, where it is argued that once regional balances are sufficiently disrupted, the psychological and strategic thresholds for proliferation fall precipitously. The Israel-Iran conflict, layered with religious, territorial, and ideological grievances, appears to have arrived precisely at that inflection. The rising tide of normalisation agreements, while ostensibly peace-building, also brings into sharper contrast the isolation of Iran and the consolidation of anti-Iran blocs, thereby reinforcing Tehran's perception of encirclement and its consequent reliance on nuclear deterrence.

Furthermore, within the broader global reordering, there is now less incentive for emerging powers to be morally constrained by treaties designed in a post-World War II liberal order. As John Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* so decisively argues, the international system rewards those who maximise their relative power, even if it means undermining norms. The return of realist imperatives in global politics, from Eastern Europe to the Indo-Pacific, renders disarmament diplomacy not only hollow but also dangerous, as it falsely assumes that regimes guided by survival will disarm for abstract ideals.

To imagine the future, one must be prepared to accept a probable scenario where the number of nuclear capable states grows—not linearly but exponentially. In *Arsenals of Folly*, Richard Rhodes warns that the mere existence of nuclear weapons creates systemic instability, not because of their use, but because of the crises they perpetually generate. With the legitimisation of nuclear financing for peaceful purposes by the World Bank, and with the NPT facing both ideological and enforcement paralysis, the global community may be on the cusp of a second nuclear age—more decentralised, more volatile, and more dangerous.

The Iran-Israel crisis has not only undermined regional security; it has sent tremors through the global nuclear order. The future likely holds more nuclearisation, justified either as deterrence or energy transition, and normalised under an increasingly bifurcated world order. If the non-proliferation regime is to survive, it must confront both the double standards embedded in its enforcement and the shifting global narrative that now sees nuclear capability not as taboo, but as insurance.

Can Bangladesh forge its own ‘economic miracle’?

Mohammad Rashedul Islam is a lecturer and PhD candidate at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

Maj Gen (ret'd) Abul Kalam Mohammad Humayun Kabir is a former diplomat of the Bangladesh government.

ABUL KALAM MOHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR and MOHAMMAD RASHEDUL ISLAM

The post-WWII recoveries of Germany and Japan remain iconic examples of national rebirth and rapid reconstruction after complete devastation. Within a decade, both nations had not only rebuilt their economies to the zenith but also quickly emerged as the two leading industrial and technological powers. The Japanese concept of *Kodo keizai seicho* and the German *Wirtschaftswunder*, both meaning “economic miracle,” encapsulate their astonishing post-war economic advancements that still awe the world.

These miracles, however, were not reactive or mere flukes; they were well-designed, deliberate, and proactive. Patriotism, ethos, national vision, diligence, ethical leadership, good strategies and planning, proper reforms, conducive political culture and relentless pursuit of excellence were their keys to success. Despite contextual differences, their experiences offer replicable vital lessons for the transformation of our mindset and culture, from street agitations and uprisings

to innovation and productivity.

West Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* was underpinned by the Marshall Plan, Cold War geopolitics, and an already skilled industrial workforce. Japan's post-war recovery similarly blended domestic reforms with external support, complemented by national longing and resolve.

Bangladesh secured independence in 1971 after many sacrifices, but its pace of recovery and rebuilding remained slow, betraying the nation's dream even though it has made progress in poverty alleviation, women's education, health outcomes and other social indicators, albeit at a snail's pace and exorbitant prices. Looking forward, the critical question is whether Bangladesh can accelerate its trajectory and attain a high-income, sustainable status soon.

Still struggling after five decades, Bangladesh has turned into a development paradox. On one hand, it has achieved consistent GDP growth, built a globally competitive garments sector, and improved some human development indices. On the other hand, it remains heavily dependent on external support, remittances, and low-value manufacturing, instead of a shift towards a knowledge-based, advanced economy. It lacks functional democracy, good governance, policy consistency, and stable law and order. Corruption is rampant, and so is labour unrest. It inherited fragile state institutions, poor infrastructure, and limited geopolitical leverage with trivial scope for value addition, research, innovation and use of technology.

However, Bangladesh can offset its inherent deficiencies by reforming pernicious political culture, consolidating democracy, infusing a development-oriented psyche, institution building and modernisation. It must improve public sector performance, digitise and upgrade overall service delivery, increase regulatory oversight, maintain policy consistency and uphold the rule of law. Ethical leadership, transparency, accountability, institutional independence and integrity are not development luxuries—they are the bedrock of sustainable progress.

Investing in human capital is indispensable. Bangladesh's youthful demography offers a powerful advantage, though boons may turn into banes unless developed and utilised well. The education system must be reoriented towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution—digital literacy, artificial intelligence, problem-solving, and creativity.

For Bangladesh, economic diversification is imperative. Reliance on ready-made garments exposes the economy to global volatility and hinders value creation. A robust industrial strategy must prioritise high-value sectors—pharmaceuticals, IT, electronics, and agro-processing—alongside stronger intellectual property regimes and industrial clustering.

Strategic industrialisation and digital infrastructure must be scaled up. The resilience of a modern economy hinges on its capacity to produce essential goods domestically while diversifying exports. Bangladesh must develop core essential industries—steel, chemicals, machines

and parts, electrical and electronic goods, household essentials, ICT items and precision tools—while strengthening supply chain linkages.

Initiatives such as a “Digital Sovereignty Fund” for local tech ventures and the establishment of tech valleys focused on AI, robotics, and quantum computing can secure Bangladesh's position in the digital economy. Developing digital universities and vocational centres in every economic zone, and fostering knowledge exchange with countries like Japan, China, Singapore, and the West, will build the foundation of a tech-savvy workforce.

Urbanisation will also be a significant factor, as it was in Japan. Dhaka's unplanned sprawl is likely to make it unliveable and unsustainable. Drawing on models of Vietnam and Japan, Bangladesh can implement green urban policies, climate-resilient infrastructure, and decentralised development through vibrant secondary cities.

Bangladesh, being one of the most climate-vulnerable nations, must embed climate resilience in all development strategies. Promotion of renewable energy, introduction of green financing tools, and implementation of carbon pricing mechanisms are necessary steps. Local governments should be empowered to undertake grassroots climate action, ensuring inclusive and effective adaptation and mitigation.

Bangladesh should skillfully leverage its geostrategic position to play a meaningful

role in regional and global trade. Upgrading ports, streamlining customs, and joining booming trade blocs can open up vistas of opportunities, new export markets, and investment flows. Economic diplomacy and reaching out to ASEAN, BRICS, SCO, the Middle East, North America and Africa should be the major focus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A digital corridor with regional fibre-optic networks, smart logistics, and digital port systems would connect Bangladesh with global supply chains. Strategic alignment with Indo-Pacific frameworks can provide access to critical infrastructure and defence technologies, as long as the country maintains a balanced non-aligned diplomatic posture.

Sustainable development requires more than economic growth. Besides infrastructure and wealth, it should focus on quality of life, civic issues, eliminating corruption, curbing discrimination and injustices for holistic, inclusive development. It needs to bolster the civil service for digital governance, revamp education to produce responsible citizens, critical thinkers, ethical leaders, and construct creative ecosystems that align government, academia, and industry.

Bangladesh, following the July uprising, is now at a crossroads. The time seems propitious, as the nation has resurged, reunited, and realigned, simmering with spirit and yearning for advancement. The defining difference between Japan-Germany and Bangladesh's cases is the patriotism, honesty, national unity and will.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 44th president
- 6 Window makeup
- 11 Air traffic aid
- 12 Arm bones
- 13 Follow as a result
- 14 Glorify
- 15 April forecast
- 17 “The Simpsons” bartender
- 18 Coffee shop workers
- 22 Aid in crime
- 23 Lyric poets
- 27 Gymnast Comaneci
- 29 Yearly record
- 30 Confine to home
- 32 “You’ve—point”
- 33 Leave for a bit
- 35 Easy victim
- 38 Grumpy

response to an

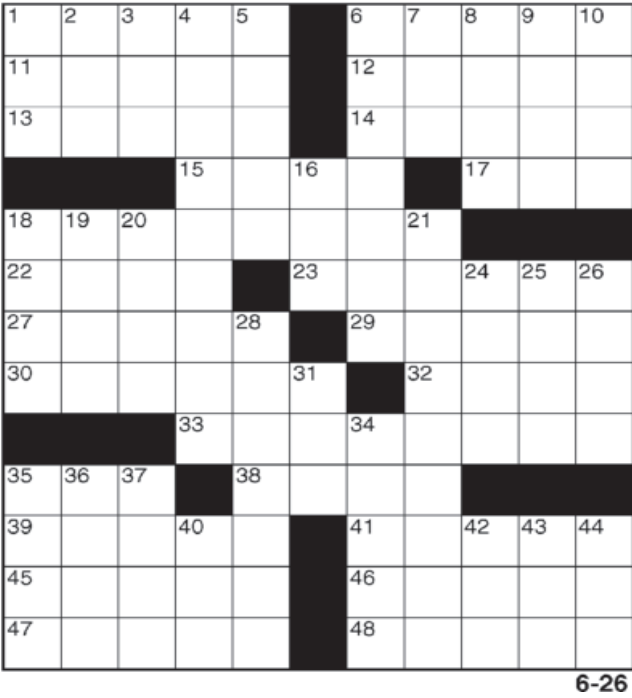
- alarm clock
- 39 Sound from a smithy
- 41 Tourist stop
- 45 French farewell
- 46 Bear out
- 47 Devilish
- 48 Used a needle

DOWN

- 1 Mine matter
- 2 Prohibit
- 3 TV spots
- 4 Indian Ocean island
- 5 Regions
- 6 Caribbean island
- 7 Not strict
- 8 First man
- 9 Farm structure
- 10 Location
- 16 “How was—know?”
- 18 Firecracker

sound

- 19 “Two guys walk into—...” (joke start)
- 20 Give a new look to
- 21 South China Sea island
- 24 January forecast
- 25 “Toodle-oo!”
- 26 Do in
- 28 Caribbean island
- 31 Rep.’s rival
- 34 Service station fixtures
- 35 Con
- 36 Alan of “M*A*S*H”
- 37 Aspirin target
- 40 Tennis need
- 42 Road rescue
- 43 First woman
- 44 Was ahead



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