

reflections

## A Maverick Talker

by Waheedul Haque

SOME NEWSPAPERS HAVE CALLED it organising a social movement in quest of knowledge after the pattern of ancient Greece. What was that Greek way? R T Glover, the historian, has brought that out charmingly when he wrote that in Periclean Greece the citizens' popular pastime was to take a stroll in the market places and join up any of the numerous groups crowding all the public places. The groups heatedly discussed the Latest Phideas or Praxiteles sculpture or an Aristophanes play or a tragedy by Euripedes or Democritus's science or Parmenides's philosophy. Although Plato's routine stroll with friends and disciples — talking philosophy and stagecraft and what not — frequently in the gardens of Akademe, has been immortalised by the coining of that internationally-used word — academy — the Greek passion for talking high things with friends in throngs at public places far preceded even his mentor, the most celebrated and irrepressible Socrates. It is mainly in this that Greek cities of yore differed from modern cities, says Glover.

What one boyish-looking avid student of science has been trying to do these past five years is to talk science with friends but in a more formal setting and charging the listeners sums — moderate though — per *conversazione*. He started what he lovingly albeit somewhat tritely calls *dorshonir binimoye biggan-alochona* way back in 1992.

How is Asif doing now? How is his discussion project faring? He is known by that single name because he never uses any other. May be he finds in this an affinity with his idols Newton and Kepler, Faraday and Einstein. In the third year of his endeavour, 1995, he held as many as 20 discussion meetings participated by 167 listeners paying a total of Taka 24,186. Most of these

meetings involved only one listener-discussant. But that failed to daunt Asif who went on to hold what he calls 'open discussions' in hired auditoriums. To date he has held 15 such lectures. Eight of them were held in '95, 167 attended and paid some 24 thousand taka. That may not impress many. But in October 1996, 150 attended the last open discussion paying Tk 7500. That's for how he and his mission is doing.

What does Asif talk about? Some of the subjects he dwelt on in the '95 stage presentations were called the enigma of time, the geological time scale, the search for a second earth, the forces of nature, the cosmic calendar of Carl Sagan and the life and work of Isaac Newton. What is his way of treating these subjects in a lecture for very much unprepared laymen? Let us take one example. The invitation card for the discussion on the Cosmic Calendar, held on October 10, '95 and priced at Taka 50 contained the following text:

# What is the oldest event in the universe known to us? When did it happen? What was the picture of the universe then?

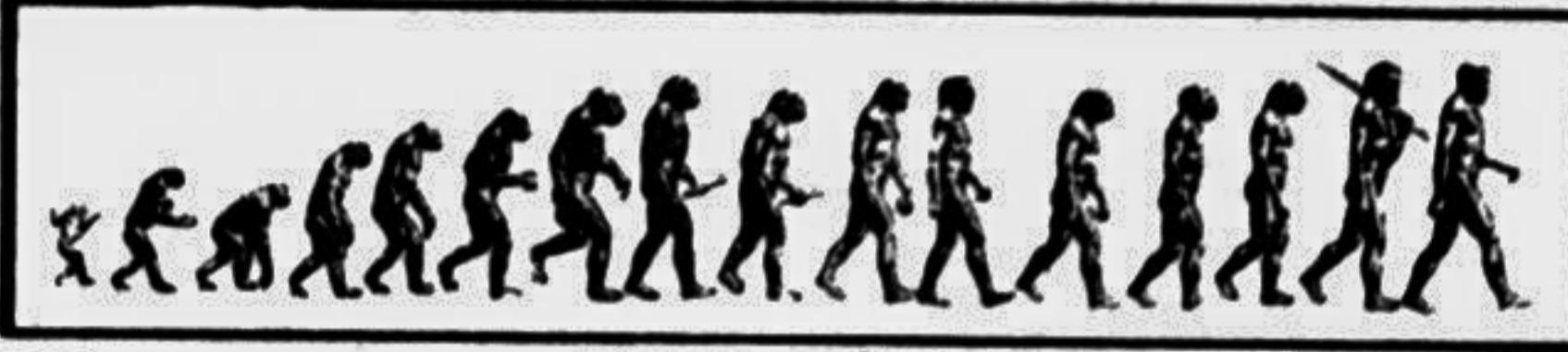
# How much of the events taking place from then up to now have come to human knowledge? How far the information constituting that knowledge is dependable, how much of the information are so? What were the modes of collecting these?

# Cannot a Cosmic Calendar spanning the universe's life be patterned upon the yearly calendar of human activities in order to better comprehend the vastness of the universe, temporally and spatially?

# At what points of the Cosmic Calendar did the Milkyway Galaxy, the solar system and the earth come into being? When did life start on earth? When came the trees and reptiles, birds and amphibians and mammals? When did

### মহাজাগতিক বর্ষপঞ্জী THE COSMIC CALENDAR

- মহাবিশ্বের প্রাচীনতম ঘটনা কি? তা কত আগে ঘটেছিল? তার আগে কি মহাবিশ্ব ছিল?
  - সত্যি কি প্রাণীরা অক্সিজেন ছাড়া বাঁচতে পারে? কি ভাবে পৃথিবীর প্রথম প্রাণীরা দেহের কোটি বছর বেঁচেছিল? মানুষের হৃদয় প্রতিক্রিয়া তৈরী করা কি সম্ভব?
  - মানুষের পূর্বপুরুষ কারা? পৃথিবীর আজকের মানুষ আর প্রথম আতন ব্যবহারকারী মানুষ—তারা উভয় কি একই প্রজাতির মানুষ? তারা কি আজও আছে?
  - মহাজাগতিক বর্ষপঞ্জী কি? সাধারণ বর্ষপঞ্জী ও মহাজাগতিক বর্ষপঞ্জীর মধ্যে পার্থক্য কি?
- পৃথিবীর বিভিন্ন দেশের বহুগুণের অসংখ্য কৌতূহলী মানুষের মত আপনার মধ্যেও যদি এই প্রশ্নগুলো আলোড়ন তুলে থাকে তাহলে বৈজ্ঞানিক পর্যালোচনায় এই রহস্যকে উন্মোচন করুন ডিসকালেন প্রজেক্ট আয়োজিত এই অনুষ্ঠানে



মানুষের ক্রমবিকাশ

প্রথম প্রাণ?

প্রথম ফুল?

বিশ্ব ব্যাপক কি?

জিন ক্রোমি কি?

প্রথম সভ্যতা?

মন্ডল হয়ে প্রাণ!!

the dinosaurs start stomping the surface of the earth and what led to their extinction?

# Who are the forebears of man? Are those who started making and using fire and we, who coming across the stone and bronze copper and iron ages, now rule the earth belong to the same species? If the fire people were different when did they arrive and where are they gone?

# How much space human civilisation would occupy in such a calendar? Has man been able to do anything on the cosmic scale?

These and many other questions are treated in the discussion on the Cosmic Calendar. You are invited to participate.

On 27 September Asif talked on the subject, 'In search of a second earth'. The invitation card noted some of the questions to be treated in the lectures. Besides there were figures and diagrams representing the Drake equation on the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligent life and the radio signals that are being sent out in the direction of M-13 galaxy and the plate inscribed with the images of man and woman that space-ships Pioneer 10 and 11 carried into outer space. Space does not permit giving the text of this invitation.

On July 12 at the National Museum Asif is going to repeat the Cosmic Calendar lecture although there seems to be a change in the array of questions that would be addressed. Asif's groundbreaking efforts in popularising science comes as an interesting, almost arresting part of a general flurry of activity undertaken by young people not only to understand the messages of the sciences but also to spread the gospel to the lay uninitiated ones. This is decidedly a heartening development. But compared with the pervasive welter of unscientific

beliefs and attitudes and deliberate action to proliferate these, the good development is infinitesimally small. However a beginning has been made and there is no harm if the beginning is small. Life begins small in every womb. Universe began small out of possibly nothing.

But the small beginnings would need to be nurtured to grow into movements having true impact on society. Asif's poster for the July 12 lecture has been paid for by Delta Insurance Company. The Biggan Chetona Parishad's regular weekly and publication programmes get a hefty and sustained support from the same organisation. It would be terrific if other business organisations followed Delta and came to help the nascent science movement to grow.

I hear that besides embarking on this unusual *dorshonir binimoye biggan* project, Asif has been unsparingly collecting books on popular science as well as original texts of the leaders of science. He has a good collection of books on mathematics. And there is a goodly collection of video-cassettes on challenging scientific subjects. He has, for example, the celebrated Bronowski programme called *The Ascent of Man*.

I was delighted to discern in Asif a passion for the Alexandria Library and all that was happening around at the time of its influencing the ancient world. He has a dear dear obsession for that great woman of science who like Lucretius to Bruno sacrificed her life for science and at the altar of inertia and irrationality. A comparable and loving awareness of the significance of the Alexandria Library I have found in Dr Liaquat Ali of BIRDEM and that one aspect of his multifarious interests has endeared him to whoever have found in the history of human thought a drama as absorbing and exciting as nothing besides.

book review

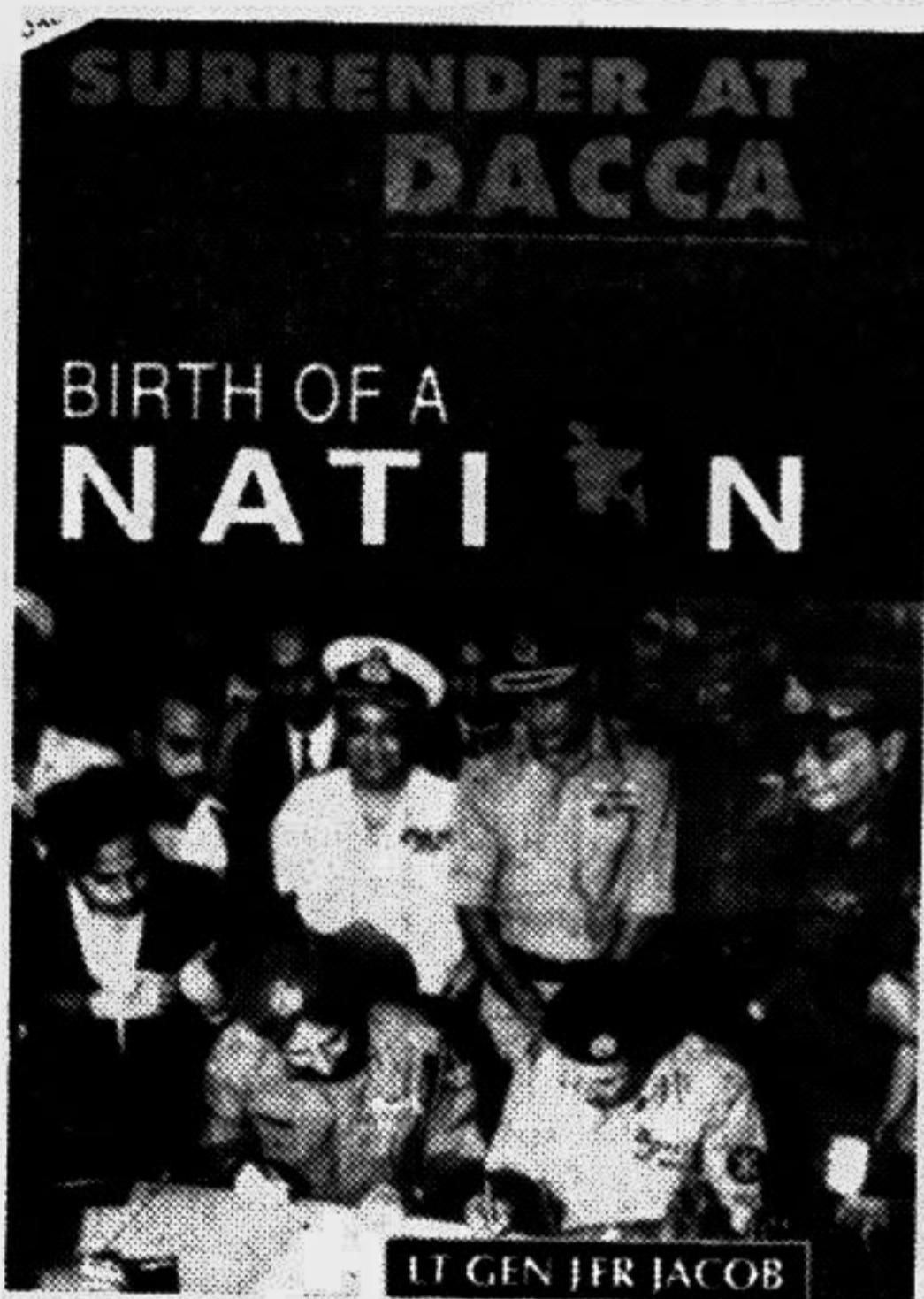
## Surrender At Dhaka : Birth of a Nation

by Shahrulh Rahman and Waliur Rahman

LT GEN J F R JACOB IS A COMMITTED and valiant soldier who is proud of his profession, and is well read about the tradition of war. This book is unique in the sense that we learn about how the battle for Bangladesh was planned, and worked out from the Allied Army point of view. Unique also is the absence of any emotionalism about the struggle, which perhaps one would find in a book written by a freedom fighter trying to liberate his land from the clutches of the occupation army. In his preface to the book Jacob writes:

"The waging of war is a complex business involving almost all sections of the population. The conduct and progress of military operations is far from smooth and never wholly predictable. The successful planning and conduct of operations depends on imagining planning, flexibility of approach, the capacity to react, and foresight so as not to be overtaken by events. Moreover, military operations require sound infrastructural and logistics backing. Luck too plays an important part."

This is the gist of the history of all battles and wars — including epic long drawn out wars fought from the Headquarters at Fort William where he began his career, and it was destiny that he retired from the very same Fort William, in a different India, independent, in 1917. And though the Army



changed in character and purpose in those 37 years, Jacob's early training remained the dominant factor which formed the successful general of 1971 — a training which made him familiar with different terrain and climates from swamps of Burma to the Arabian deserts, and training courses in the UK and USA.

The prelude to the war deals with

how the changing political fortunes from the ancient days of civilisation up to today. Planning and preparation, logistics with infrastructural support, and luck, of course helped by taking all plans and preparations into account, all the actual determining factors which lead to victory in battles. As we read on we understand why Jacob could not be pushed into making hasty decisions which could only end in disaster. The brutal Pakistan military crackdown on the un-armed people of Bengal in response to the legitimate demand of the Bengalees under the leadership of Bangabandhu took the whole world by shock and surprise. The Pakistani military brass in their short sightedness never dreamt that the freedom hungry, emotionally aroused Bengalees would resist. The military elite of Pakistan did not read the history of Bengal: she never accepted with equanimity any foreign subjugation for long. In recent history, the British had to shift their capital from Calcutta to Delhi: They could not tolerate the Bengali resistance. Every Bengalee home had a Khudiram, a Pritilata Waddekar.

His strategic virtuosity deserves our praise. There have been some mushiness in the thinking of the High Command of the Joint Forces. In spite of the rhetoric of diplomatic support of China to Pakistan, China could not have come to the aid of Pakistan. The August 1971

meeting of Pakistan Envoys in Geneva, where Khawaja Kaiser all but confirmed China's position of military non-intervention. Didn't Premier Chou En Lai say the same thing to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in November when he was in Beijing?

In that respect General S A M Manekshaw's instruction to occupy small towns and not the capital Dhaka defies our imagination. And Seventh fleet's positioning was also only a military gimmick. Dr Kissinger knew it well, though he did not admit then, that fall of Dhaka was a matter of days and not weeks. It would be foolhardy to militarily intervene in the War. The NIXON tilt to Pakistan notwithstanding. General Jacob's tribute to our valiant Freedom Fighters Mukti Bahini is indeed well placed. "Due credit must also be given to the Mukti Bahini. Their guerrilla operations isolate the Pakistanis, their movement and hampered their movement and were largely responsible for lowering their morale. Their contribution to the victory of the joint India Bangladesh Forces — therefore, enormous."

Do you remember what Governor Malik flashed to General Yahya on December 7? "For President of Pakistan. Rebels continue cutting their rear and losses in man and equipment very heavy and cannot be replaced. The fronts in Eastern and Western sectors have collapsed. Jessore has already

fallen which will be a terrible blow to the march of the pro-Pakistan elements" (Rebels in Dr Malik's view are our brave Mukti Bahinis.)

John Kelly of UNHCR, and Gavin Young of "The Observer" had to run over the balustrade of the government House. Governor Malik had no alternative but to ask for surrender at the fag end of the allied attack on the governor's House. There was certain amount of irony when Gen Rao Farman Ali, the ideologue who master minded history's worst massacres in Dhaka, had to run like a rat in front of John Kelly for — shelter and no time was last to transmit it to Paul Mark Henry — the UN man at the Dhaka Headquarters. John Kelly tells me now that the cowardice writ large on the face of Forman Ali left no doubt in him that surrender was at hand. This is the same General who ordered the burning of all currency notes in the Bank and who drew the blueprint for murdering the Bengali intellectuals who could give leadership to a free Bangladesh.

His reference to Siddik Siddik Salik and Robert Jackson appears rather bizarre in the context of the story he is writing. But he made up by his remarks about Wing Com Khandakar — an appreciation that Khandakar has retained till today.

The Book is a first hand narration of the experience of a General whose con-

tribution was significant in the War of Liberation. But the Book somehow fails to rise above certain level — it almost appears pedestrian at times. He would have done justice to refer to some heroic actions like the ones we read by Josephus (AD 76) or Barbara Tuchman's finest military expression around Beaufort and Bramborough or the tumult of General Patton's 1943 battle in the shadow of Segesta in Sicily. Or remember what Sullivan Balloo wrote to his wife on July 14 during the American Civil war —

"Oh Sarah! if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again..."

Pathos and Passion are the ingredients that make for good war history. But this is certainly an authentic addition to the corpus of literature on our glorious war — our struggle for national liberation — a thousand year old dream come true — the dream dreamt by a man who was born in Tungipara on the river Modhumati — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His war Map is excellent and the appendices on war — strategy involving President Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Gen Westmoreland and CIA Chief Richard Helms are to be added to the unforgettable lores of our war — the Bengalee struggle for an independent homeland.

profile

## The World of Daphne du Maurier

by A S M Nurunnabi

DAPHNE DU MAURIER WAS BEST known for her famous novel *Rebecca*. A successful cross between two genres — gothic romance and murder mystery — the novel exploits the norms of the one to reinvigorate the conventions of the other, breathing fresh life into a formula apparently on the verge of extinction. Readers recognised the book's borrowings from illustrious predecessors — *Great Expectations* in the case of the young beauty shaped by an older woman to wreak havoc on the male sex and *Jane Eyre*, a plain second wife whose eponymous predecessor represents everything which she is not. In contemporary terms the revival of interest in popular fiction and female gothic makes *Rebecca* significant in terms of both class and gender politics. For the Marxist reader, it appears to respect

Marx's dictum that the British bourgeoisie rule through a surrogate aristocracy.

Daphne du Maurier was obsessed with the past. She intensively researched the lives of Francis and Anthony Bacon, the Regency period and 19th-century France and England. Above all, she was obsessed with her own family history, which she chronicled in *Gerald: A Portrait*, the biography of her father, the famous actor; *The Du Mauriers*, a study of her family with special focus upon her grandfather, George du Maurier, the novelist and illustrator for *Punch*, *The Glass Blowers*, a novel based upon the lives of her du Maurier ancestors; and *Growing Pains*, an autobiography that ignores nearly 50 years of her life in favour of the joyful and more romantic period of uninhibited youth. Du Maurier can best be

understood in terms of her remarkable and paradoxical family, the ghosts which haunted and shaped her life and fiction.

while her contemporaries were dealing critically in their fiction with such subjects as the war, alienation, religion, poverty, Marxism, psychology and art, and experimenting with new techniques, du Maurier committed herself to writing "old fashioned" novels with straightforward narratives that appealed to a conventional audience's love of fantasy, adventures, sexuality and mystery.

At an early age, she recognised that her principal readership was composed of women, and she cultivated their loyal following through several decades by embodying their desires and dreams in her novels and short stories.

Although best remembered today for

her novel *Rebecca*, which was made into an Oscar-winning film by Alfred Hitchcock, and her short story *The Birds*, also filmed by Hitchcock, du Maurier wrote numerous best-selling novels. In some of her novels, du Maurier goes beyond the techniques of formulaic romance to achieve a powerful psychological realism reflecting her intense feelings about her father and, to a lesser degree, about her mother.

The vision that underlies *The Progress of Julius*, *Rebecca* and *The Parasites* is that of an author overwhelmed by her obsession with her father's authoritarian presence. In *Rebecca*, du Maurier fuses psychological realism with a sophisticated version of the 'Cinderella' story. The nameless heroine of her novel has been saved from a life of drudgery and marries a handsome, wealthy aristocrat but un-

like Cinderella's prince, Maxim de Winter is old enough to be the narrator's father. The narrator thus must do battle with the Other Woman — the dead Rebecca and her witch-like surrogate, Mrs Danvers to win the love of her husband and father figure. The fantasy of this novel is fulfilled when Maxim confesses to the narrator that he never love Rebecca — indeed, he hated her, a confession that allows the narrator to emerge triumphantly from the Oedipal triangle.

The Freudian subtext of *Rebecca* is embodied in a form that represents the first major gothic romance in the 20th century and perhaps the finest written to this day. *Rebecca* is a profound and fascinating study of an obsessive personality, of sexual dominance, of human identity, and of the liberation of

the hidden self. The real power of the novel derives from du Maurier's obsession with her charismatic father and her resolution of that obsession through the fantasy structure of the story.

The other short story *Don't Look Now* is a modern gothic tale with echoes of Greek tragic irony. It conveys a chilling account of a couple's attempt to come to grips with the death of their daughter.

*The Birds* captures a nightmarish vision of violence and destruction as the accepted hierarchy of man's dominion over beasts is undermined. The regulated world of the main character, a farmer with his family see nature turn upon them. They suddenly find themselves confronted with a bad dream in which rules of logic and common sense no longer work.