

Book Review

A Vision and Strategy for Bangladesh

Bangladesh: Promise and Performance presents an intellectual stocktaking of the country's past and present

The articles in the book, written by some of the best known scholars on Bangladesh, is an attempt to analyze how the country has performed in the three decades since her independence. The essays illuminate the critical debates that have defined Bangladesh's politics and policies since her birth: the identity question; the issue of democratization and community and people's participation; challenges of economic growth, human development, poverty alleviation; social transformation and the empowerment of the underprivileged groups; and the role of civil society and effective governance in fostering democracy and development.

The volume is designed to serve as a standard text book for courses on Bangladesh and South Asian Studies. The articles are grouped in four parts. In part I, Introduction, Rounaq Jahan provides an overview of the key arguments of the book and a brief political history of the country. In part II, titled Politics two articles by Anisuzzaman and Willem Van Schendel analyze the identity question. A third article by Zarina Rahman Khan describes the various experiments of decentralization by different regimes. In part III, titled Society, four articles examine different aspects of social change. Abu A. Abdullah cites three examples of modernizing changes: Stanley Kochanek traces the evolution of business power; Harry W. Blair focuses on the role of the NGOs in the democratization of the polity and Shelley Feldman presents a contrasting view of the NGOs, highlighting their limitations and contradictions. In part IV, titled Economy, three articles review the performance in the economic sector. Azizur Rahman Khan analyzes the macroeconomic trends; Binayak Sen examines the issues of growth, poverty and human development and Kirsten Westergaard with Abdul Hossain describe the changes in a specific village over a period of three decades. Part V of the book contains an article by Rehman Sobhan providing a forward looking vision for Bangladesh in the new millennium.

A discussion meeting on the book was held at the Centre for Policy Dialogue on October 21, 2000. Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman of the Centre moderated the discussion. Professor M.M. Akash reviewed the articles dealing with Politics; professor

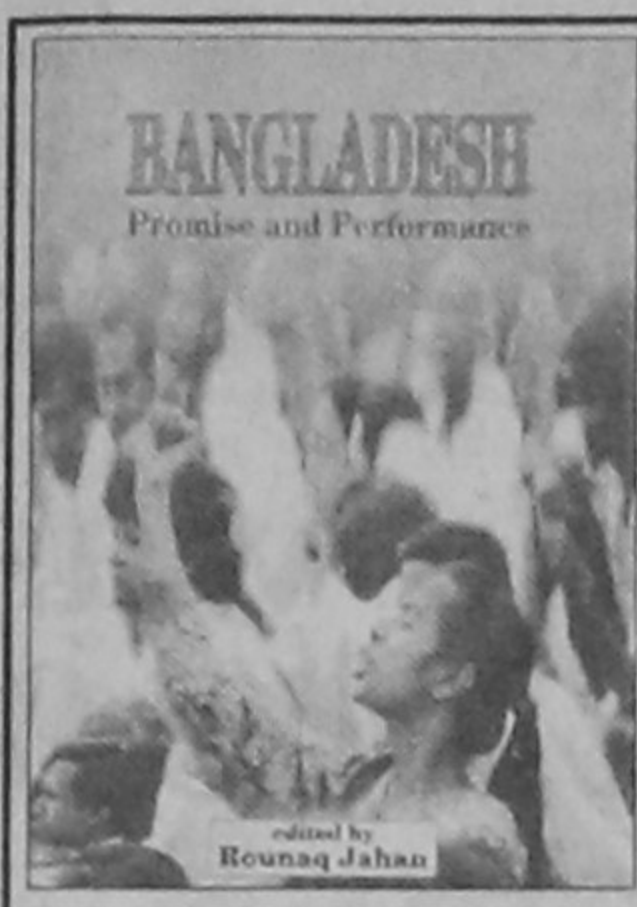
Nasreen Khundker reviewed the articles grouped under Society and Professor Mustafizur Rahman reviewed the articles concerned with the Economy. Many of the authors participated in the discussion. Following are the three reviews on the three sections of the book read out by Professors MM Akash, Nasreen Khundker and Mustafizur Rahman.

by Professor MM Akash

The name of the book is Bangladesh Tesh Promise and Performance. It is edited by Professor Rounaq Jahan of Columbia University. The book focuses on the major trends in Bangladesh's development since her birth. It is designed as a "ready reference" for students and general readers to make them knowledgeable about the major events and trends in the last three decades politics, society and economy. With the exception of a few articles the book is on the whole easy to read.

The volume is a collection of multi-disciplinary articles, a rare and welcome addition to scholarship on Bangladesh. The majority of available books on Bangladesh are written from a single discipline's perspective, focusing on either politics, or society or economy. My comments are limited to the first four chapters of the book which describe the political dynamics of the country. An excellent introductory chapter is written by Rounaq Jahan, the editor herself. The other articles are written by M. Anisuzzaman, Willem Van Schendel and Zarina Rahman Khan.

The introductory chapter starts off by illuminating the different visions expressed by different groups at the birth of Bangladesh. In 1972, many people, feared that Bangladesh would remain an aid-dependent, debt ridden country calling her an international basket case. Some even questioned the viability of the country. In the introduction, Professor Rounaq Jahan argues that side by side with these negative visions expressed by outsiders, people in Bangladesh enthusiastically dreamt of a bright future. Their vision was that of creating Sonar Bangla: a free, economically prosperous, society of exploitation, democratically governed, tolerant of pluralism and respectful of people's rights. That vision was reflected



Bangladesh: Promise and Performance Edited by Rounaq Jahan Dhaka UPL and London Zed

The book 389 pages long is a collection of twelve articles, ten of which were presented at an international conference on Bangladesh titled Bangladesh at 25 which was held at Columbia University in New York in December 1996. The editor of the volume, Rounaq Jahan, organized the conference in collaboration with the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka.

in the 1972 Constitution which adopted democracy, socialism, secularism and nationalism as the four guiding principles of the state. The introduction notes that this dream is yet to be realized; however, Bangladesh has not also become a basket case. In the midst of multiple problems, people of Bangladesh have moved forward with limitless hope and enthusiasm.

After independence, a major problem faced by the Bangladesh government was the management of industries left by their Pakistani owners. A second problem was the issue of trial of Pakistani war criminals and their local collaborators. A third was the relationship with the USA, China and the Islamic world countries that opposed Bangladesh's liberation war.

We all know and the book also notes that all these problems were dealt with by the then Bangladesh government under Bangabandhu's leadership in a manner that tried to accommodate the opposing views and constituencies. For example, the government nationalized the industries owned by Bengalis but

did not touch those owned by non-Pakistani foreigners. However, instead of becoming engines of growth, nationalized industries were mismanaged and its assets were squandered and looted. Management of nationalized industries were given to the former Bengali owners. Some joked that it was like giving the care of chickens to foxes! Under the pressure of jostled members of parliament from North Bengal, land ceiling and definition of family was framed in such a way that the land reform measures introduced by the government became totally inadequate. Some of the local collaborators were punished but the government was forced to handover the Pakistani prisoners of war without trial.

In foreign relations, the government tried to restore relations with the USA and China. The goal of the state policy was declared to be 'friendship towards all, enmity to none'. Side by side, relations with the socialist bloc was also improved. Bangabandhu declared in a Conference in Algeria 'The World is divided into two camps the exploiters and the exploited, we are on the side of the exploited'.

At that time the younger members and the students of the ruling group came out of the ruling party and formed a new party Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) with the slogan of scientific socialism. They were putting pressure on the Bangabandhu to take more radical steps. Within the party the conflict between the leftists and the rights intensified. Outside the party, NAP and the communist party (followers of Moni Singh) also put pressure on the Bangabandhu and the Awami League to tilt toward the left. At that time Bangabandhu was marking time by alternatively siding with the right and the left. One of the major events of that time was the departure of Tajuddin Ahmed from the cabinet and the growing distance between the four members of the Planning Commission and the government. In fact the rightwingers under Mushtaq's leadership was increasingly consolidating its plan of assault.

BAKSAL was launched in this background in 1975. Upto now the academics in Bangladesh have not engaged in any serious debate about BAKSAL. Generally BAKSAL has been portrayed as

an attempt to impose one man, one party, rule or a fascist regime. This book on the other hand attempts to look at BAKSAL in an objective way. It notes that on the one hand BAKSAL was a one party system, but on the other hand it also visualized a series of radical reforms e.g., compulsory co-operative, decentralized administration, elected district governors etc. Of course, a significant part of the leadership of BAKSAL was provided by the old rightist Awami Leaguers. They paid lip services to BAKSAL, but did not really accept its programmes. The book concludes that whether BAKSAL's programmes would have been implemented if Bangabandhu had survived and what impact it would have had, is empirically impossible to judge. So the merits and demerits of BAKSAL can not be assessed as it was never implemented. BAKSAL died in infancy with the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975.

After 1975, it was the military, civil bureaucracy, and the politicians representing big business that the Awami League under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League under the present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina are two different things. First, the Awami League under Bangabandhu could not get the enthusiastic support of major then players in politics e.g., civil bureaucracy, military, big business, donor community and the USA. Bangabandhu's tragedy was that like many other revolutionaries, he could not decide on a clear goal and path. In the end he lost the trust of both the left and the right. The present Awami League under Sheikh Hasina took lessons from the party's experiences of 1972-75 and realized that the party would have to move towards the right. The book notes that the post-1975 Awami League leadership has consciously attempted to regain support of some of the dominant groups e.g., big business lobby, civil bureaucracy, military, donor agencies, even in some cases religion-based groups. The Awami League had to adopt many rightist policies and stances to gain these groups. The book makes it clear that the ruling vision of Bangladesh to day is very different from its vision at birth.

The book also notes the present government's few successes (e.g., Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace

accord, Ganges Water Treaty, growth in agriculture, trial of Bangabandhu's killers) as well as some major failures e.g., failure to improve law and order situation, failure to have rapid industrialization and failure to getting BNP back to the parliament.

Overall one can say that though at present there is very little policy and class difference between the Awami League and the BNP, there is a difference between the two parties in terms of history and tradition, and this had led the current Awami League government to take at least the few positive steps, mentioned above.

But it is difficult to say how durable these steps will be. The book also clearly demonstrates that after independence Bangladesh has made significant gains in all fronts as compared to its Pakistani period. For example, economic growth rate has more than doubled, poverty has been halved, literacy rate has more than doubled, fertility and child mortality rates have significantly declined, primary school enrollment rate has improved and gender disparities has been reduced. However, despite economic growth the gap between the rich and the poor has increased significantly.

In addition to politics, there are two other parts in the book 'Society' and 'Economy'. I shall not deal with these articles. Professor Rehman Sobhan has written the concluding article, which not only looks at the past and present but proposes a vision and strategy for Bangladesh in the 21st Century. This last concluding article deserves detailed discussion in future. I congratulate the authors and the editor Professor Rounaq Jahan for presenting such an objective and balanced book. This excellent book deserves wide publicity and readership. If young students read this book they will get an objective historical account of Bangladesh since her birth and would be served from the numerous blindly partisan writings on the same subject.

There is no difference between General Zia and Ershad in their strategies to gain and stay in power. But interestingly Zia's party BNP was able to legitimize itself while Ershad's party failed, perhaps, in politics playing the same game twice is not so easy. On the other hand the Awami League is a grassroots organization and its ascent to power came through a long struggle. The book, however, acknowledges that the Awami League under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League under the present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina are two different things.

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Fiction

An Asian Encounter with Romanian Communism

By Mohammad Amjad Hossain
Continued from last week

Gabriela wanted to know the system of marriage in Pakistan. Rouf said that practically three different systems exist in respect of marriage in Pakistan. According to Muslim law, marriage is conducted by an officially appointed marriage registrar while a priest in Mandir (worship place for Hindu community) can conduct marriage ceremonies in the Hindu tradition and custom. And marriage ceremonies are also conducted in a church for Christians. Apart from the existing traditional system of marriage ceremonies, marriage can be registered in the court of law as well. Gabriela said Gupta had promised to take her to Pakistan for the purpose of marrying her in the Hindu tradition after his release from jail.

Rouf kept the letter and bade her goodbye.

Having completed his desk work, Rouf was wondering whether he could pay a visit to any cinema hall to see a Romanian film.

He spoke to his secretary to find out a suitable film depicting the social scene of Romania.

While Rouf was about to leave the office, the telephone rang. He responded to the call and to his utter surprise, it was the voice of Carmen.

Rouf said, 'What happened to you? There has been no call from you for a long time.' Carmen replied, 'I was kept busy with official work. That was why I could not telephone.' Carmen invited Rouf for lunch the following Sunday at her mother's residence. Rouf said, 'It is a pleasure to accept your invitation. I am eagerly looking forward to seeing you parents.'

Days passed by. Rouf became excited and was counting the days to the meeting with Carmen. On the specified day, Rouf planned to visit the place where Carmen was residing with her parents. The day was wonderful. The snow had stopped falling. The sun was shining in the cloudless sky. The roads had been cleared of snow. It was about two kilometres from Rouf's residence. Carmen's residence was located at 27 Biruineti Strata. Rouf drove in a car, and on reaching the house knocked at the main entrance gate. A dog started barking. Rouf thought it must be a greyhound. A little later, the door was opened by Carmen herself and she welcomed Rouf with a smiling face. The dog was big and healthy too. She informed Rouf that the dog was well-trained to watch the pigs and their piglet, which were reared in the ground floor of the house. The reason was that thefts are committed to take away pigs which brought a good amount of money in the local markets.

At the doorstep, he was met by Carmen's father, Mihai Ion, and her mother, Maria. Her little sister, Christina, of midteen age, joined them at the dining table. Her only brother was at work. Mother Maria in an unusual way welcomed Rouf who looked very hefty while Mihai Ion maintained slim figure.

Carmen introduced Rouf to her parents and sister. Mother Maria took leave of them and went towards the kitchen to bring food.

Meanwhile, Mihai Ion spoke highly of Carmen. She was a meritorious girl in the educational institute who spoke French and Chinese fluently. Chinese, themselves, he added, were perturbed to hear Chinese from Carmen that she had developed a command over their language. Then he introduced his second daughter, Christina. Christina was in the tenth grade of a school in Bucharest which specialised in gymnastics. At the insistence of her father, Christina demonstrated two items of gymnastics. In the sport arena, Romania had a wonderful record. Romania became European champion in soccer many times, apart from securing second place in the World Cup. A number of gymnasts secured gold medals in the Olympics, of whom the name, Nadia Comaneci tops the list. Nadia set up a world record by obtaining three gold medals in the Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976. The Romanian gymnastics team (female group) won the World Championship held in Rotterdam in October 1987.

While her father was talking about family members, Carmen served juice for everybody. Christina assisted her father with English translations. Mother Maria brought a variety of food items from the kitchen for serving. Romanian popularly known food items like sarmale and mamaliga were placed on the dining table. Longbread, salad, Romanian cheese and butter were also made available for eating. Rouf was surprised to see so many food items on the table. Jokingly, Carmen told Rouf that it was the custom in Romania to eat whatever is available on the dining table.

Then her heart started softening again. No, something must have happened. She could no longer see his gloomy face. What on earth did happen at Ira's place ...? Was it some sort of accident or something untoward ...?

Fiction

Yet another Ahalya

By Usha Mahajan

Translation in English form original Hindi by Tarafdar Mohammad Mujtaba Ali

Continued from last week

But she was very hesitant to ask Ira whether Aju was still there. When Aju came back she pulled all her courage and asked him whether at this old age she was destined to suffer in the hands of her own child in this way. But she consoled herself saying that the girl was not that bad after all. She had adjusted herself so much with the changing time that she could tolerate this one too. Considering Aju might hesitate she took the initiative to suggest that the two should get married quickly. So she herself sent Aju to Ira, because the latter needed the support of the mother and son both at this hour. She needed the assurance of her own security. She decided that she would bring Ira home as bride according to Arya-samaj custom. She did not use to go downstairs usually unless it was an emergency because of the excruciating pain she suffered while negotiating the steps. Otherwise she would go herself to Ira on this occasion.

She had given all her ornaments to her other married children one after another except the modest necklace. She gave it to Aju and said, 'Give it to my daughter-in-law on my behalf.' Leaving yesterday Aju returned home this morning. And since then he was simply sitting in front of his table. Normally he would not tolerate any interference while he was writing.

But was he really busy writing or he did not even tell whatever had transpired between him and Ira. What was her reaction seeing that necklace? When was her daughter-in-law coming down to see her? What would she do now with her flat? She had so many questions popping up in her mind. But this son of hers, she did not quite understand what kind of writer he was. She did not know whose story of happiness and sorrow he used to write bothering little about his mother's suffering. He did not understand her feelings. Only his own pain mattered to him.

He was the most selfish type. Then her heart started softening again. No, something must have happened. She could no longer see his gloomy face. What on earth did happen at Ira's place ...? Was it some sort of accident or something untoward ...?

Oh! The knee joint had become so painful. Once seated it was very difficult to get on her feet again.

She slowly pulled herself up supporting both her forearms over the armrests of the couch. She directed her cloudy eyes towards his room. He was there resting his head on the back of his chair perhaps with his eyes closed. Suddenly she had a surge of affection for him in her mind.

With her obese and trembling body she treaded towards her son.

Hearing the footsteps he woke up. He saw his mother standing right in front of him as he quickly gathered himself up.

'What is it mom?'

She never quite anticipated to face him so close. She stammered, 'What ... er ... what happened to you ...?'

He stood in front of his chair looking as if he too did not expect an encounter with her. He kept looking down and slowly said, 'You won't understand it mom.'

And then suddenly he opened a drawer of his table, took out his car key, brought something out of his shirt's pocket and threw it on the table. Said he, 'She has returned this ...'

He was about to rush out of the room. Before closing the door behind him he turned around and shouted, 'She said that it was her baby, her very own ... I should not try to establish my right over it ... Bloody bitch! She is not a woman, she is a statue of stone ...'

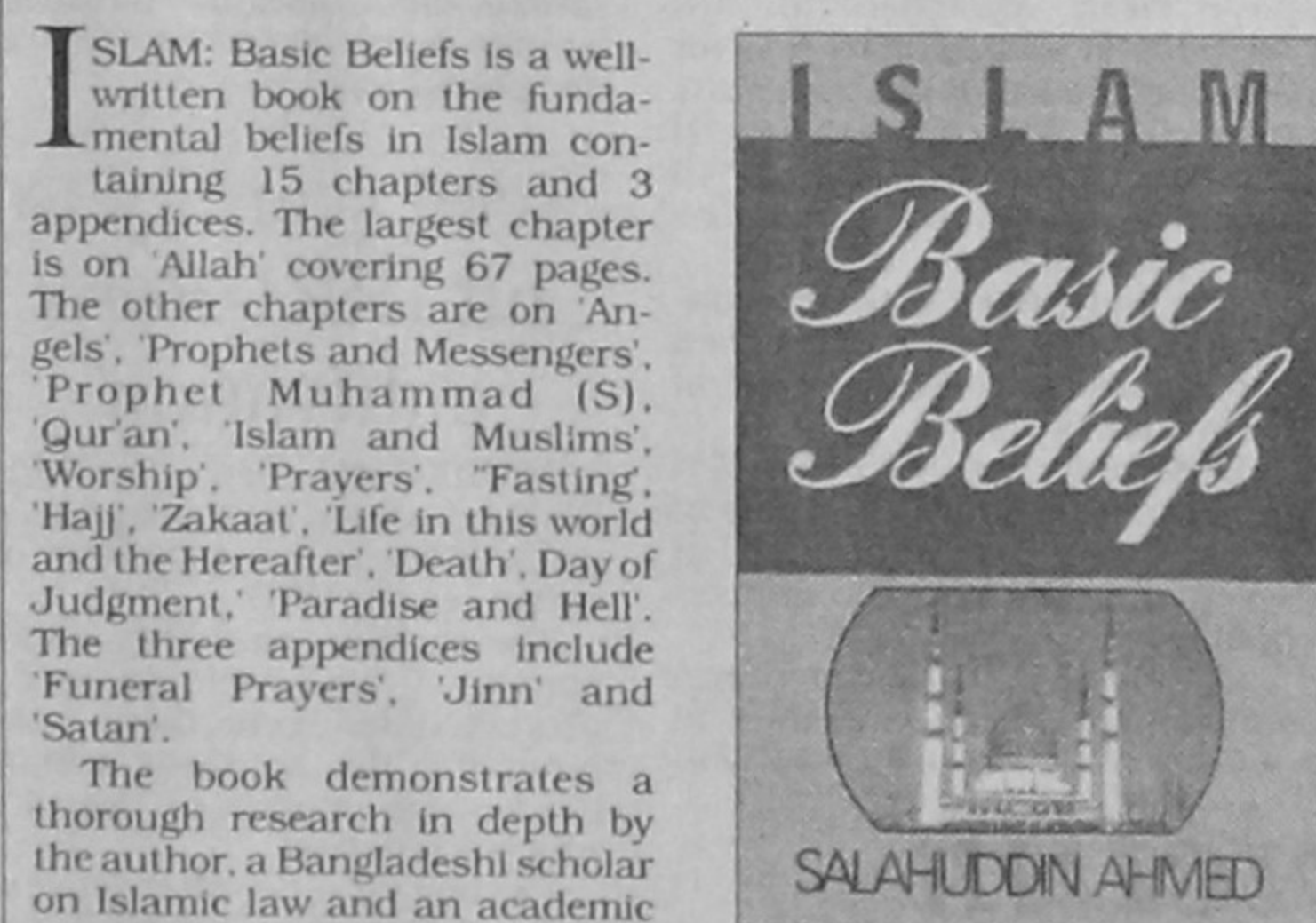
She saw him go away and felt cheated clenching his empty chair. She did know for whom her broken heart was bleeding. 'Why should not I understand son? I understand everything ... you and her as well. I don't blame that statue of stone. You too failed to raise your self to the status of that dignified great man whose mere touch would have brought life to this statue of stone.'

Book Review

Labour of Love

By Syed Badrul Haque

Salahuddin Ahmed makes a conscious and highly commendable effort to educate the reader with the original Arabic words, concepts and expressions. He does not leave out anything that ought to be said on any of the basic issues. All the Qur'anic verses are arranged in the most lucid logical sequence. All the dimensions of the subject are discussed to help the reader to create a complete picture in his or her mind. The author has spared no opportunity to provide useful information to the reader who might thirst for it.



Islam: Basic Beliefs By Salahuddin Ahmed The book has been published in 1999 by the well-known Malaysian publishers, AS Noordeen of Kuala Lumpur.

ISLAM: Basic Beliefs is a well-written book on the fundamental beliefs in Islam containing 15 chapters and 3 appendices. The largest chapter is on 'Allah' covering 67 pages. The other chapters are on 'Angels, Prophets and Messengers', 'Prophet Muhammad (S), Qur'an', 'Islam and Muslims', 'Worship', 'Prayers', 'Fasting', 'Haji', 'Zakaat', 'Life in this world and the Hereafter', 'Death', 'Day of Judgment', 'Paradise and Hell'. The three appendices include 'Funeral Prayers', 'Jinn' and 'Satan'.

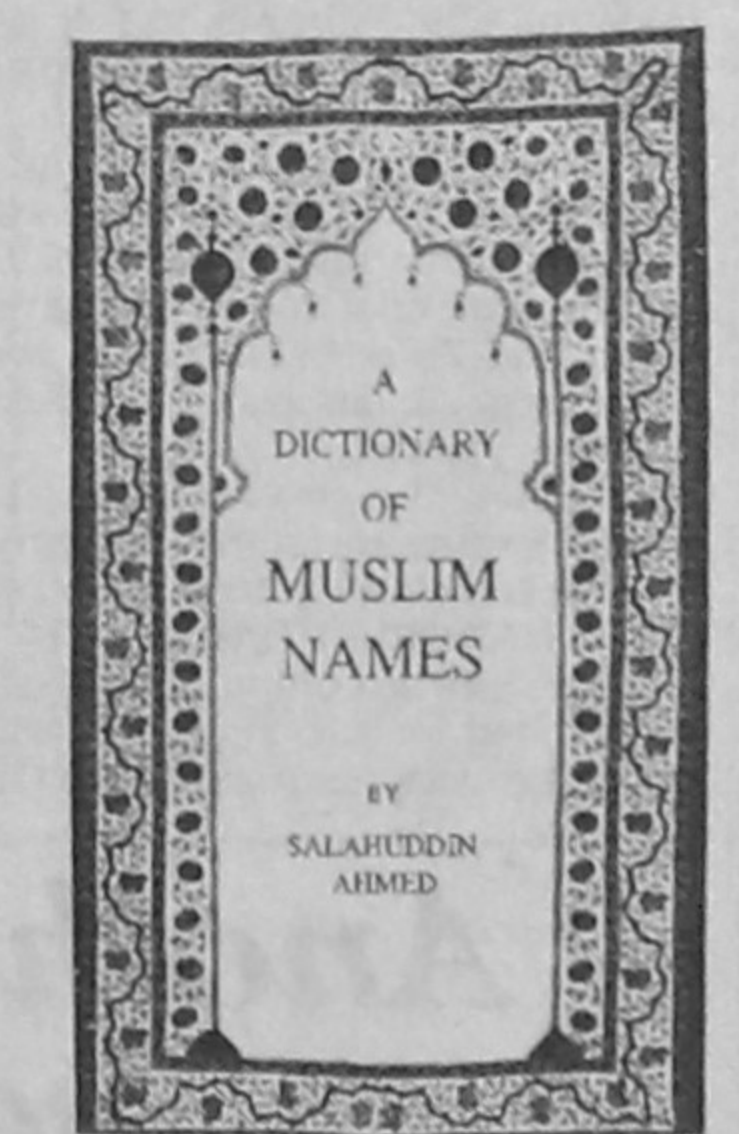
The book demonstrates a thorough research in depth by the author, a Bangladeshi scholar on Islamic law and an academic at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. The many years of deep study and keen research on the part of the author to arrive at the most correct conception and the most proper expression of it is immediately visible. The hard work and intense patience in producing such a valuable work is highly laudable. Although some background would be helpful to utilise the book in full, it is useful for the general readers who wish to omit the extensive footnotes given at the end of each chapter. The book is fully authenticated by giving a large number of the verses of the Qur'an and the citation of Hadith, whenever found to be relevant. Simple translations of the Qur'anic verses have been provided without losing the authenticity and accuracy. Sometimes transliterations have been provided for important and well-known Qur'anic verses from a view to creating interest in the readers who would like to refer and read those verses from the Qur'an themselves. Whenever possible, the transliteration of Arabic word in a Qur'anic verse has been mentioned to satisfy the readers who wish to use those words whenever an appropriate

opportunity arises. A good selective bibliography has enhanced the usefulness of the book. Unlike other books, the author has discussed the various issues of Islam not only on traditional lines but also from the point of view of current surrounding complexities facing Islam and Muslims.

The author makes a conscious and highly commendable effort to educate the reader with the original Arabic words, concepts and expressions. He does not leave out anything that ought to be said on any of the basic issues. All the Qur'anic verses are arranged in the most lucid logical sequence. All the dimensions of the subject are discussed to help the reader to create a complete picture in his or her mind. The author has spared no opportunity to provide useful information to the reader who might thirst for it.

The book has been written primarily for the modern educated Muslims who have specialised in studying 'secular' subjects and depend very much in religious matters upon those who have specialised in religious studies. The author has given a pen picture of an average modern educated Muslim in the following words. 'A modern educated Muslim must not think that acquiring of knowledge of the guidance of the Qur'an is not his domain or function, but that of a mulla or a Maulawi. In this materialistic age, a young Muslim aspires to attain degrees from a reputable university or an institution of learning, preferably from the West, and wishes to be a member of the intelligentsia of his community commanding respect from its members. He may not feel greatly concerned, for not knowing the fundamental principles of Islam as laid down in the Qur'an and the Hadith. It needs to be stressed that an educated Muslim must realise that the primary responsibility of knowing the essential principles of Islam with reference to the Qur'an and the Hadith lies upon him, and not only upon those who specialise in the study of religion.' The book would certainly help a modern educated Muslim to acquaint himself with the basic beliefs in Islam, making him feel really conversed in the religious field as well.

In the present-day world there is a perceived interest in the study of Muslim names due to the resurgence of Islam throughout the world. A special characteristic of the Muslim community is that its members share similar names, whether they live in Bangladesh or in Egypt. As a matter of fact the author himself bears the great historical name, 'Salahuddin', Sultan of Egypt, who is known to the Western world as Saladin. The other part



A Dictionary of Muslim Names By Salahuddin Ahmed The book has been published in 1999 by the Hurst & Company (London), New York University Press (New York), Global Books & Subscription Services (New Delhi), Vanguard Books (Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad) and Pioneer Direct Learning (Dubai, Riyadh). Price: Tk 800. In Bangladesh, the book is available from Pathak Shamabesh Phone 9662766.

of the author's name, 'Ahmed' is one of the names of Prophet Muhammad (S). Both 'Muhammad' and 'Ahmad' are familiar male Muslim names. Muslims have preference to bear names associated with one of the ninety-nine names of Allah.

I am very pleased to find my name, Badrul Haque, mentioned in this book under 'Badr', which means, 'full moon' and under 'Haque (Haqq)', which means, 'truth'. Al-Haqq (The Truth) is one of the names of Allah, mentioned in the Qur'an. Badul Haque, means, 'full moon of the Truth'. A

Muslim is pleased to find his/her name, or a derivative of it, mentioned in the Qur'an or that it bears the name of a companion of the Prophet. The book contains the names of ordinary Muslims, male and female and also the names of illustrious Muslim men and women who left their marks on the pages of history. The predominant language used in Muslim names is Arabic, followed by Persian (Farsi). Both languages are major repositories of Islamic culture and heritage. Due to the patronage of the Mogul emperors to Persian (Farsi) language, one can find popular Farsi names borne by the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent including Bangladesh.

The book is primarily divided into two main chapters, 'Male Names' and 'Female Names', arranging in English alphabetical order. Each name has been spelt in its original language using the Arabic alphabet, identifying whether Arabic or Farsi. The correct pronunciation of names is indicated through their formal transliteration. Whenever a name or its derivative is in the Qur'an a relevant verse has been quoted in Arabic with English translation, citing the sura and ayat numbers. The brief meaning of each name, its bearing on Islamic heritage and where relevant, annotations have been provided. The book is meant for Muslims all over the world and for non-Muslim scholars on names. However, one can notice a good number of names of eminent Bengali Muslims with historical annotations.

This book will satisfy the pressing demand for an authoritative book on Muslim names sought eagerly by the Muslim parents and guardians, who face the daunting task of avoiding the phonetic influence of names with no real meaning or bearing on Islamic culture and heritage.

To be continued.