

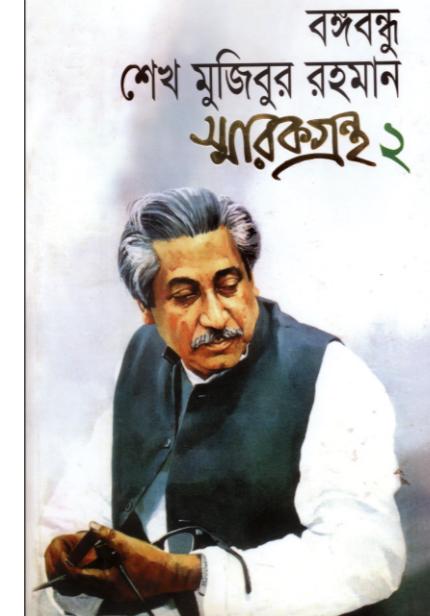
When the wolves began to prowl

Syed Badrul Ahsan appreciates two volumes of commemorative writings on Bangladesh's founding father

In life, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman truly played out the role of Bangabandhu a grateful Bengali nation conferred, indeed imposed on him once he was free of the Agartala conspiracy case in February 1969. In death, he appears to have far exceeded the limits of a posthumous reputation for greatness that was expected to be associated with his memories. The two volumes of reminiscences and reflections on his life and politics, edited creditably by M. Nazrul Islam, are but a sign yet once again of the magical hold the founding father of Bangladesh holds on people who have either been part of the history he almost single-handedly created in the 1960s and 1970s or have irresistibly been drawn to his legacy through endless discussions of his role in the making of his free nation and his later, problem-ridden stewardship of it.

These two volumes are certainly not much revealing about the life and times of a man who clearly has assumed the position of Bangladesh's foremost historical figure, at least where politics is the issue. Despite everything his detractors have been doing since his assassination in August 1975 to undermine his contributions to the Bengali nationalist struggle, Mujib's reputation has remained almost intact and indeed continues to hold huge political significance in a country that clearly ought to have done more to uphold his principles. The fact of the matter is that with Mujib's death came along a period which not only was a symbol of darkness in the history of his people but also perhaps a sign of stumble upon some rather serious and unavoidable impediments. Justice Habibur Rahman, one of the contributors to this volume, speaks for many when he reflects on the acracy with which Bangabandhu's popularity began to slip soon after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state. Should Mujib have stayed away from assuming the position of head of government on his return from incarceration in Pakistan? The question is not answered by Rahman, but there is the feeling in the air, one that has exercised minds through the decades, that free Bangladesh's tragedy may actually have begun when Mujib pushed Tajuddin Ahmed aside to take charge of the new country.

There were all the pitfalls associated with leadership to a damaged country. In early 1972, it was a fractured land that Sheikh Mujib Rahman took charge of. The wounds were all over the place --- three million people dead, ten million trekking their way back home from refugee camps in India, tens of thousands of women raped by Pakistan's soldiers, destroyed bridges, blown up roads, young men with guns, rising prices and a general fall in law and order. And there were too the very grave issues of the trial of Pakistani prisoners



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
Sharok Grantha (Volumes 1 & 2)
Edited by M. Nazrul Islam
Jyotsna Publishers, Dhaka

of war and the repatriation of a hundred thousand Bengalis trapped in Pakistan. Added to that was the pretty tenuous legal process initiated into putting on trial the local Bengali collaborators of the Pakistan army in 1971. Bangabandhu promised, on his return from Pakistan in January 1972, to have all Pakistani military personnel accused of genocide put on trial for crimes against humanity in Bangladesh. He got nowhere with it. Eventually whittling down the figures to 195 Pakistani army officers for those who needed to be brought to justice, he reassured the country that those who had raped and killed would not get away with their crimes. But they did, through the tripartite deal reached by Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, one that had the Pakistani POWs going home and the Bengalis in Pakistan making their way to their newly independent country. Opinion has long differed on whether or not Sheikh Mujib Rahman demonstrated, through jettisoning the idea of a trial for the POWs, the kind of sagacity expected of a national leader of his stature. After all, he was by then keen on playing a bigger role on the South Asian stage, particularly in light of the recognition accorded to Bangladesh by Pakistan on the eve of the Islamic Conference in Lahore in February 1974. His arrival in Lahore was in a huge

sense of the term a vindication of his own politics. It was in Lahore in 1966 that, as a fast rising Bengali politician in Pakistan, he had first articulated his Six Point plan for regional autonomy. It was now Lahore that was welcoming him again, he who had gone much farther than the Six Points to wrest Bengali political freedom and thus say farewell to Pakistan. And yet a question remained: to what extent did Mujib sacrifice his secularist credentials, those that his Bangladesh identified with, by taking the country into a body that emphasised the Islamic character of the member-nations of the organisation?

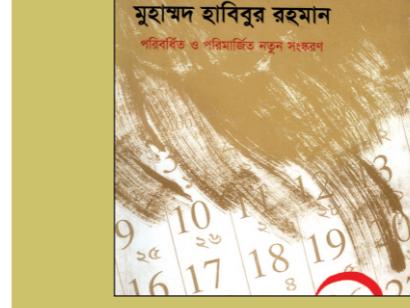
Ananda Shankar Roy's plaintive piece, composed days after Bangabandhu's assassination, speaks of a great man who, in true Greek fashion, thrived in struggle and perished in tragedy. The qualities that ought to have made a statesman of Mujib, in the way they did in the case of Gandhi, went missing once the Bengali leader began to tamper with the constitution he had himself given shape to. A bigger shock for Roy came when the venerable writer watched Mujib install a one-party political system in Bangladesh. It was a negation of all that the foremost Bengali politician of his times had worked towards all his life. And yet Mujib is on record as having told Justice A.S.M. Sayem (who through a curious twist of history would one day become Bangladesh's president amid the chaos of Bangabandhu's murder) that Baksal was a temporary measure that would be discarded as soon as matters went back to being normal. Would he, given the exigencies that had propelled him toward Baksal, have actually retraced his steps to parliamentary democracy? Or was he, finally and rather belatedly, responding to the concerns of Cuba's Fidel Castro and Algeria's Houari Boumediene, two men who saw in Mujib's pardon of the 1971 collaborators and an administration run by individuals who clearly had not shared his vision of Bengali freedom a recipe for disaster? But disaster already loomed. By the end of 1974, when a state of emergency was imposed on the country, Sheikh Mujib Rahman was a marked man. The wolves were beginning to prowl around his tent.

Bangabandhu's failings post-1971 aside, these commemorative volumes are a rich re-creation of the life of a man whose transformation from communal student activist to secular political leader was a remarkable commentary on the history of a nation. Contrary to what his detractors, and even some admirers, have been saying all along, Mujib's dreams of a free Bengal republic sprouted first in the late 1950s when his mentor Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy served as Pakistan's prime minister. And thenceforward, until his exposition of the Six Points in 1966, he worked assiduously and shrewdly towards accelerat-

ing the course of Bengali freedom. After 1966, it was history that took its own course to fulfillment. Within the broad ambience of Mujib's struggle come the stories of his multifaceted contributions to the growth of Bengali nationalism and, eventually, the rise of the state which he had decided, as early as 1969, would be known as Bangladesh. Amartya Sen, Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, Serajul Islam Choudhury, Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled are among the splendid group of intellectuals who pay tribute to the Father of the Nation. Some of the most moving accounts of Bangabandhu's life come from his surviving children, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana. Abu Mohammad Delwar Hossain's essay on the reactions in Pakistan to Mujib's assassination reflects, once again, the inability of its politicians and general masses to come to terms with the changed realities in the subcontinent. It is an attitude that comes close to Yakubu Gowon's. The Nigerian military ruler wondered, as he met Bangabandhu, whether Bangladesh and Pakistan together could not have been a strong country had the Bengalis not gone their separate way. Mujib's response was classic and close to the philosophical. 'Mr. President', he told Gowon, 'if Pakistan had not come into being, a united India would be a powerful entity. If the whole of South Asia had been a single country, imagine how much more powerful we would all be. But, Mr. President, do we get everything we want out of life?'

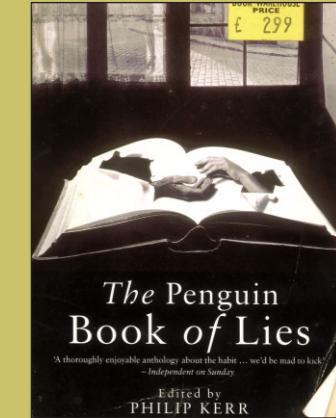
At the height of the Agartala conspiracy case in June 1968, Sheikh Mujib Rahman told a Western journalist present in court, 'You know, they can't keep me here for more than six months'. He was almost right in his arithmetic. He was a free man seven months into the trial. In these volumes, it is the old courage and the legendary confidence of the man that come alive once again. They do something more, which is to draw Bengali attention to the mediocrities that has been in place since his purposeful and inspirational leadership was shot down in August 1975.

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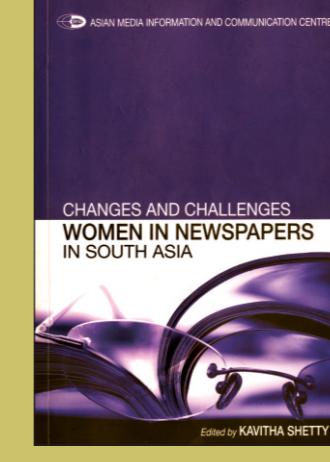
Bangladesh Tareekh
Muhammad Habibur Rahman
Mowla Brothers, Dhaka

Anyone looking for the little details of Bangladesh's history, especially in the post-1971 period, will find this book extremely handy. Rahman has gone to meticulous detail in recalling and noting down all the significant political events the country has gone through over the years. It is a work that needs a good place on your shelf. And constant flipping through.



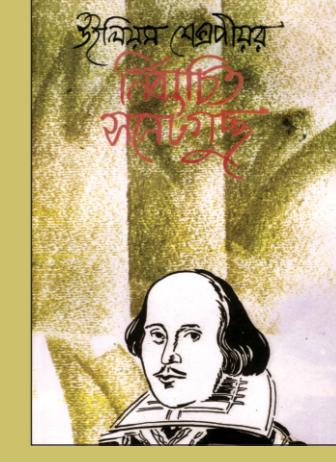
The Penguin Book of Lies
Edited by Philip Kerr
Penguin Books

Here you have a book that will tell you all about the lies we have heard about, and not just in modern times. There is Herodotus, called the father of lies by Oscar Wilde. And then there is Samson famously lying to Delilah about the secret behind his strength. Come down to modern times and what you get is the web of lies Nixon and Kissinger used to destroy a beautiful country called Cambodia.



Changes and Challenges
Women in Newspapers in South Asia
Edited by Kavitha Shetty
Asian Media Information and Communication

It has been quite a revolution in Asia. With increasing numbers of women making their way into journalism, the region now has an array of reporters, feature writers and editorial staff that speaks of the dynamism taking hold of the media world in the region. Read the pieces in this volume.

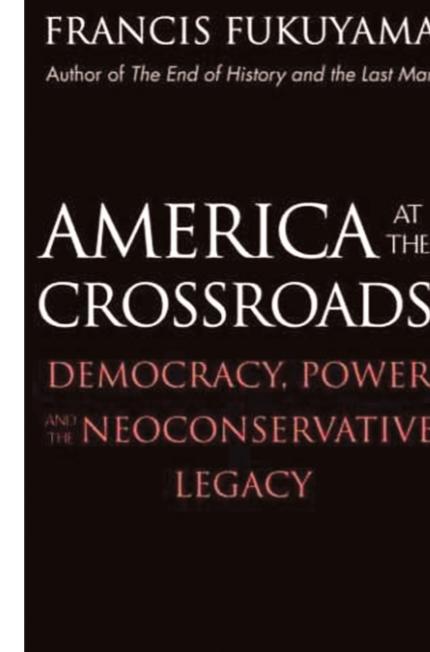


William Shakespeare Nirbachito Sonnet Guccio
Translated by Selim Sarwar
Bangla Academy, Dhaka

Students of English literature may not be as enthusiastic with translations of Shakespeare as they are with his original work. Even so, Selim Sarwar's translations of the bard's sonnets should be giving Bengali-speaking people a good insight into the mind that once shaped some of the most powerful and riveting literary thoughts in the western world.

Tale told by a soul-searching neoconservative

Shahid Alam studies the theoretical underpinnings of George W. Bush's foreign policy in a compelling new book



America at the Crossroads
Democracy, Power, and the
Neoconservative Legacy
Francis Fukuyama
New Haven: Yale University Press

Fukuyama's words, "by invading Iraq, the Bush administration created a self-fulfilling prophecy: Iraq has now replaced Afghanistan as a magnet, training ground, and operational base for jihadist terrorists, with plenty of American targets to shoot at".

Fukuyama traces the roots of neoconservatism to a group of mainly Jewish intellectuals who attended City College of New York in the mid-to-late 1930s and early 1940s, but, many of whom had, ironically, started out as Trotskyites. He provides a compelling account of how and why this group of disillusioned Left metamorphosed into neoconservatives, and dwells at length on Leo Strauss and Albert Wohlistter, two theorists who have had much influence on leading neoconservatives, including Paul Wolfowitz.

The author then encapsulates the four basic principles characterising neoconservative thought: (1) a belief that the internal character of regimes matters and that foreign policy must reflect the deepest values of liberal democratic societies; (2) a belief that American power has been and could be used for moral purposes, and that the United States needs to remain engaged in international affairs; (3) a distrust of ambitious social engineering projects, and (4) skepticism about the legitimacy and effectiveness of international law and institutions to achieve either security or justice. The American projection of an aura of exceptionalism and messianic bent of mind, which not infrequently rubs others the wrong way, may clearly be discerned in these

themes, and, while one may reasonably disagree with the philosophy, the principles themselves, and what they potentially entail in practice, are clear enough.

Fukuyama manages, rather defensively, to squeeze in a clarification on the critical barbs aimed at The End of History during his discussion of the neoconservative legacy. Huntington, for example, contends that the end of history's fallacy is that many forms of authoritarianism, nationalism, corporatism and market communism (China) are alive and well (The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, 1996). Fukuyama captures the essence of the critiques thus: the critics take exception to his thesis that "there is a universal hunger for liberty in all people that will inevitably lead them to liberal democracy, and that we are living in the midst of an accelerating transnational movement in favor of liberal democracy". He thinks that this is a misreading of his argument, and that The End of History is, all said and done, an argument about modernisation, and that liberal democracy is one of the offshoots of this modernising process, and one which "becomes a universal aspiration only in the course of historical time".

In spite of his apology, one which appears to be a chastened response to some spirited critiques of his hasty euphoria, one is not convinced if his real intention was indeed as he said it was. But Fukuyama, in the book under review, does admit, no doubt after observing events over more than a decade since The End of History was published, that new democracies had failed to consolidate in Haiti, Cambodia and Belarus, and established democracies faced setbacks in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. Getting a reality check on events, as Fukuyama has done, is to be applauded, as is his willingness to take on neoconservatives like William Kristol and Robert Kagan, who, in Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy (2000), argued explicitly in favour of a policy of benevolent hegemony in which the US would exercise its power to create a benign, peaceful and democratic world order.

Kristol and Kagan's proposal is a prescription for disaster for the international system, one that can only fuel further the currents of anti-Americanism that have emerged across the world after the Cold War. Fukuyama has felt the dangers of the George W. Bush doctrine of pre-emption, regime change, unilateralism, and benevolent hegemony. Especially worrying is the blurring of lines between pre-emption and preventive war. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had appropriately called preventive war "committing suicide for fear of death", and Fukuyama believes that the US has become trapped in that syndrome. He has some astute observations on the United States' current predicament: "Despite the fact that the United States spends roughly as much on its military as the rest of the world put together, the Iraq war has demonstrated that there are clear limits to the

U.S. military's effectiveness. It is not well configured for fighting prolonged insurgencies; the strains of the Iraq war has already forced the Pentagon...to question the ability of the United States to fight two simultaneous regional wars". Incidentally, Paul Kennedy, in his monumental The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (1987), had concluded two decades earlier that the US had by then reached the height of its strategic overstretch.

Fukuyama suggests a few foreign policy options for the US to follow, one based on a "realistic Wilsonianism" that recognises the importance to world order of what goes on inside states and that better matches the available tools to the achievement of democratic ends. Such a policy would take seriously the idealistic part of the old neoconservative agenda but take a fresh look at development, international institutions, and a host of issues that conservatives, neo- and paleo-, seldom took seriously". What this entails are the following: a dramatic demilitarisation of American foreign policy and reemphasis on other types of policy instruments, cessation of rhetoric about World War IV and global war on terrorism, and promotion of both political and economic development, all used judiciously.

Francis Fukuyama makes no apology for being a neoconservative; equally, he does not deviate from his brand of neoconservative prescriptions to cure his perceived flaws in the George W. Bush foreign policy, mistakes which have placed America at a crossroads of history. But, that is his position to hold, even if he unwittingly or willingly went along with the neoconservative agenda of the Bush administration that has exposed the limits of American power, while its application has thrown the international system in a major flux. Nonetheless, Fukuyama presents the neoconservative agenda and his suggested modifications in its application to US foreign policy with a good deal of thought, embellished by an impressive survey of literature on the subjects, and careful construction of arguments to support his contention. *America at the Crossroads* is no light reading. It offers a compelling insight into the theoretical underpinnings of the George W. Bush foreign policy in practice.

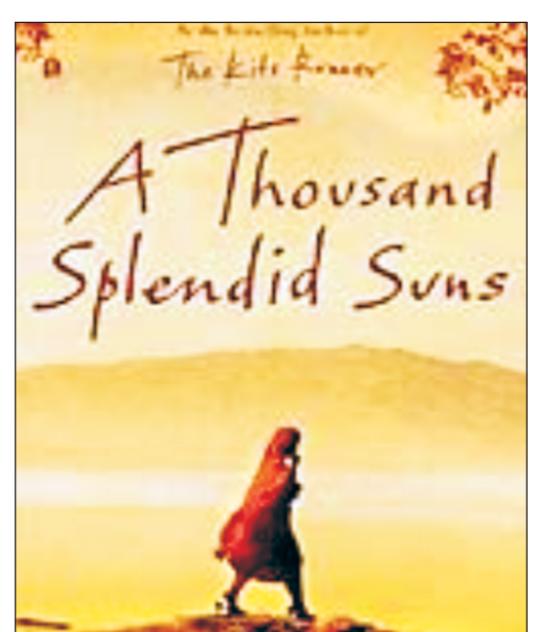
Shahid Alam is a writer, former diplomat, filmmaker and Visiting Scholar at Independent University, Bangladesh

Tortured souls in a troubled land

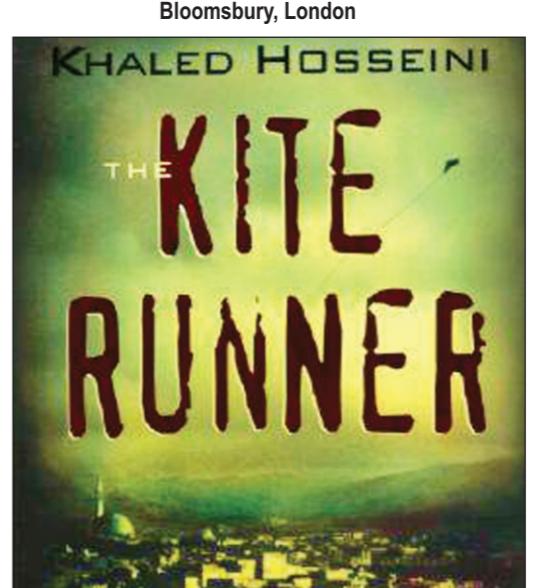
Farida Shaikh reads Khaled Hosseini's works and empathises with his country's relentless pains

THE book begins thus, I became what I am today at the age of twelve...and ends, on I ran. Amir witnesses the brutal act of savagery inflicted upon Hasan, his constant companion who gives him, all the time, unflinching protection from danger. From then on, Amir suffers from a guilty complex, until the day, when at risk to his own life he rescues Hassan's son, already a victim of Taliban terrorism. Does this act of redemption bring solace to the troubled soul in Amir?

In the past, quite unknowingly, Amir has tricked and cheated Hasan, read him stories though never teaching him how to read and yet learning from him The connec-



A Thousand Splendid Suns
Khaled Hosseini
Bloomsbury, London



The Kite Runner
Khaled Hosseini
Bloomsbury, London

tion between the two boys and their fathers remains a guarded secret, causing quite contrarily, no guilt feelings in the adults.

This connection is revealed many years later by Kaka Rahim, which revelation of course comes after much pain and suffering, coincidental to the differing religious sects of the two boys, have been caused. The title of the book symbolises the relationship that binds and breaks the various characters, as fragile as the kites the boys fly or run after. As a first book by the writer it is a good insight into the mind that once shaped some of the most powerful and riveting literary thoughts in the western world.

At a recent meeting of The Reading Circle, everyone enjoyed reading The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini's first novel which has sold over eight million copies worldwide. This new work is another Afghan saga that shows the writer's story telling talent and nostalgia for Afghanistan, his homeland.

The title of his new book is based on a poem on Kabul, by Saib-e-Tabrizi, the 17th century Persian poet. In 1999, Dominique Lapierre authored the non-fiction work, titled A Thousand Suns, which chronicled the events and the heroes who had shaped his author-philanthropist life. The title of the book was after the Indian proverb, There are always a thousand suns beyond the cloud. And now it seems that 'Splendid' is the bridge between the poet and the proverb.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a multigenerational story of forty five years, with many characters and more details on the recent political history of Afghanistan than in The Kite Runner. However, the same theme runs through both the novels: the supremacy of humanness over cruelty.

The debut novel is a story told from a male perspective and is about friendship and loyalty where Amir witnessed the brutal act of savagery inflicted upon Hassan, his constant companion who constantly gave him unflinching protection from danger. After that incident, he, Amir, suffered from a sense of guilt, until the day, when in the face of danger to his own life he rescued Hassan's son who was already a victim of Taliban terrorism.

The new book centres around the lives of ordinary women, their subjugation within the domain of patriarchy, such as forced marriages, restrictions on their movements, ban on education and work. The two women, Mariam and Laila, who are bound together in a personal war against the cruelty of their husband Rasheed, are also dependent on him for their own survival in combination with the day to day harassment and humiliation they go through. The narration is against the larger canvas of hostilities raging in the country for nearly half a century.

The title of the first book symbolises the relationship that binds and breaks the various characters as fragile, just as the kites the boys fly, or run after. The book is in three parts: Kabul, out of Kabul and return to Kabul. Reading is smooth, with intermissions of tribal cultural characteristics such as "...Afghans cherish customs, but abhor rules"; wisdom and moral "Better get hurt by the truth than comfort with a lie"; keen observation "...Time can be a greedy thing ---- sometimes it steals all the details for itself"; and sensitivity "Emptiness of a womb was like a child sleeping between us"; or "all my life I had been around men, that night I discovered the tenderness of a woman". Khaled Hosseini's new book has been labelled as a portraiture of "the resilience of women".

Farida Shaikh, a sociologist, works as an independent management consultant