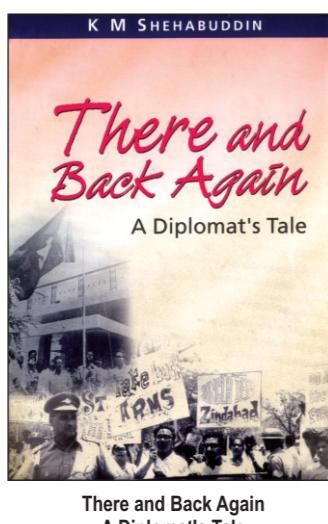


History, from one who helped shape it

Syed Badrul Ahsan recommends a diplomat's memoirs to readers

THE war that was fought for Bangladesh on the diplomatic front was as intense as that on the fields of battle. While at home and in the refugee camps it was political mobilisation of a people toward the establishment of a free state that took centre stage, in the hamlets and villages it was a focused armed resistance to Pakistan that underpinned the goal. But all of that happened, in the true sense, after the emergence of the provisional Bangladesh government with Tajuddin Ahmed as prime minister. What has not been much remarked upon, in all this celebration of the contributions of individuals and groups to the rise of Bangladesh is the concerted movement on the part of Bengali diplomats, wherever they happened to be in 1971, in favour of the national struggle. K.M. Shehabuddin carries out a necessary responsibility in recording the story of the uphill struggle he and his colleagues, then in the Pakistan Foreign Service and yet mortified by what the state of Pakistan was doing to their fellow Bengalis, shaped and carried to a successful culmination.

There are of course the known episodes of how diplomacy came to be part of the larger struggle for political self-assertion. Think here of Hossain Ali's role, in Calcutta, in the making of the story. Ali made headlines with his rejection of Pakistan on 18 April 1971. And then there are the other tales that one needs to be reminded of, nearly four decades after the collapse of Pakistan in this coun-



There and Back Again
A Diplomat's Tale

K.M. Shehabuddin
The University Press Limited

try. Shehabuddin's work is an instance of how we as a people need reminders. And he is in an eminent position to assume that role, for he and his colleague Amjadul Huq, both of whom were positioned as diplomats in the Pakistan high commission in Delhi when Pakistan launched its genocide in its eastern province, were the first Bengali diplomats to publicly renounce their allegiance to Pakistan and align themselves with the Bangladeshi cause. That was on 6 April 1971. It was risky business, given especially that there was at that point of time hardly any reassurance that Bengalis would survive Pakistan's military onslaught. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in

incarceration somewhere in West Pakistan; and his political associates were nowhere to be spotted. There was, in all this atmosphere of gloom, hardly any indication of any war being planned to push the Pakistanis out of the province. The Mujibnagar government was yet many uncertain days away.

Shehabuddin's act, as also that of Huq, was clearly emblematic of courage. The two men did not appear at all ruffled. No second thoughts came in the way of their belief that Bangladesh was on the way. This much became clear as they faced a battery of newsmen in Delhi following their decision to turn their backs on Pakistan. 'From now', said they in their statement, 'our allegiance is to Bangladesh, which derived its authority from the unambiguous mandate of the 75 million Bengali people.' A process of history was thus set in motion. In the weeks and months that followed, what Shehabuddin and Huq consciously chose to work for was a task that other Bengalis would emulate. But of course there were all the difficulties and irritants involved as well. Unlike these pioneers, there were quite a few who found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place as they pondered their future. And some Bengali diplomats there were who would not take a position until it was rather late in the day. That is where Shehabuddin's book turns out to be a substantive record of events. Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, as he notes, as head of chancery at the

Pakistan mission in Delhi, would initially look upon any pro-Bangladesh sentiment with disfavour, even hostility. He would take a long time to ally himself with Bangladesh, and that too after the Mujibnagar authorities served him and a few others with an ultimatum. But if spontaneity in declaring allegiance to Bangladesh was being looked for, it was to be spotted easily. A.H. Mahmood Ali, Pakistan's vice consul in New York, opted to serve Bangladesh on 25 April. There was, in addition A.M.A. Muhith, economic counsellor at the Pakistan embassy in Washington, who defected on 30 June. There was too Mohiuddin Ahmed, in Shehabuddin's opinion a firebrand nationalist, whose desire to link up with the Bangladeshi movement on 10 April was stayed largely by Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury on the ground that he could renounce Pakistan only after instructions were received, obviously from Mujibnagar. Mohiuddin Ahmed eventually made the move on 1 August, through an impassioned speech at a rally in London's Trafalgar Square. The author notes that Reaz Rahman, at the Delhi Pakistan mission and initially sympathetic to the Bangladeshi cause, clearly had a change of mind following a call from his father-in-law Hamidul Huq Chowdhury. In November 1971, a time when Bangladesh's liberation appeared to have turned into a fait accompli, Rahman travelled

from Delhi to Islamabad. There were others who would not leave Pakistan's Foreign Service until early 1972, despite being asked to do so. Some would remain hostile to Bangladesh, until compelled to leave Pakistan after December 1971.

The work goes beyond an enumeration of the diplomacy involved in the struggle for Bangladesh. It is a *tour d'horizon* for anyone curious about the history of Bangladesh's diplomacy during and after the war. And yet it is more than that. There are the incidents that he relates. In 1993, Shehabuddin is amused by newspaper reports back in Bangladesh (he was in Paris at the time) about the observance of the death anniversary of artist Noverta Ahmed. Bengali intellectuals, he tells readers, remained 'blissfully unaware that she was still alive but living incognito and in oblivion in her beloved Paris.' Soon after Bangladesh's liberation, a ruling party lawmaker travels abroad and insists on being put up at Shehabuddin's residence on the plea that he cannot bear expenses that might be incurred in a hotel (and this despite the allowance he had on him). Within hours of his arrival, as the writer discovers to his amazement, the man wishes to enjoy certain pleasures through sight-seeing. He certainly does not complain about expenses this time, but he surely has put the diplomat's family through much inconvenience. Shehabuddin does not complain about expenses this time, but he surely has put the diplomat's family through much inconvenience. Shehabuddin

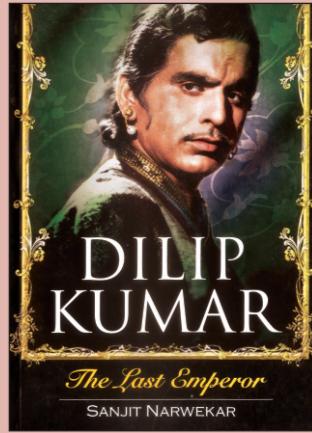
Ziaur Rahman and Begum Khaleda Zia at his Paris residence in 1973. In his position as deputy chief of staff of the army, Zia was then a member of the Bangladesh Wages Commission and was touring Europe to familiarise himself with wage structures there. Zia felt clearly proud in relating to Shehabuddin that what he had done in 1971 was in the name of Bangabandhu. 'Both he and Begum Zia', writes the diplomat, 'held Bangabandhu in the highest esteem.'

There and Back Again is, in broad measure, the memoirs of a diplomat who has served his country with distinction. K.M. Shehabuddin notes the triumphs of Bangladesh's diplomacy as also the difficulties it has regularly been confronted with. As an individual who served all governments in the country until his retirement (his final call was as ambassador to Washington during the period of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government), he remains a living record of some of the most intense and purposeful phases in Bengali nationalist politics. This is a book to be savoured, for it comes from a suave and distinguished citizen of this land. You cannot put it down without wanting to flip through the pages yet one more time.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

At a glance

Dilip Kumar
The Last Emperor
Sanjat Narwekar
Rupa & Co.



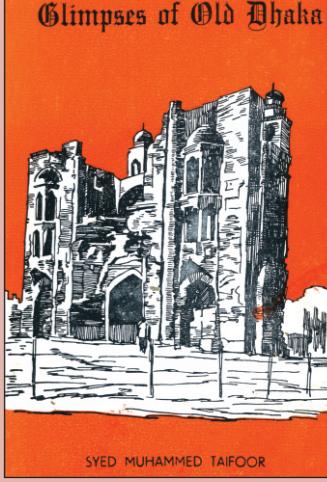
With the paucity in literature about a man who is perhaps the greatest thespian of his generation in the subcontinent being what it is, this book will reveal details of his early days as a fruit-seller's child and his later career as an actor. His leading ladies, his marriage to Saira Banu and his secret, brief second marriage to Asma Begum are all highlighted here.

Hadees Shahityer Itihas
Sa'ad Ullah
Shomoy Prokashon



Interpretations of the Hadith being so numerous and so varied, this work on how the Hadith took off as part of Islamic social thought is revealing. Anyone intrigued by theology or plainly interested in the history of the Muslim faith ought to go swiftly into Sa'ad Ullah's analysis of things. A good number of doubts will be cleared. The information is rich.

Glimpses of Old Dhaka
Syed Muhammed Taifoor
The Pioneer Printing Press



An old work, published as far back as 1956, Glimpses provides an insight into how Dhaka used to be before it got lost in a maze of urban squalor. Those who knew Old Dhaka first hand cannot but sadly reflect on the images that come alive here of a lost town. And those who have not experienced Old Dhaka will enrich the social history they have studied over the years.

Azizul Jalil

Where Angels Fear to Tread
and Other Essays

Where Angels Fear to Tread
And Other Essays
Azizul Jalil

The University Press Limited

It is the prolific writer in Azizul Jalil who comes through once more. The book is a collage of published articles on a variety of subjects, one that is as gripping as the other. The writer talks of his travels around the world and then takes you on a journey through certain annals of history. And, of course, there is always that bit of nostalgia about the home country.

Of private passions

Tulip Chowdhury admires a man's life

A triumphant novel of love and

devotion, passion and fulfillment, Irving Stone's *Adversary* in the House captures the reader's imagination with the opening of the first page. It is about Eugene V. Debs, the pioneer labour leader whose life is a tug of war between his dedication to helping his fellow men and his love for two women. His private life is as violent and impassioned as the dedication that raises him to the heights of greatness and drives him to the depths of public scorn. Growing up in Chicago, Eugene learns about the interdependence of men on one another from his own family. His parents have shown him how compassion and kindness can open the way to a greater world. They are a happy family, loving each other and living in perfect harmony.

When Eugene begins work as a clerk in a store his heart finds no peace. He moves on to the fire service. Along with the work for saving lives he also finds a worthy cause to fight for, ameliorating the sufferings of thousands of low paid workers. Soon the union of firemen comes to depend on him to look into their problems and take the problems to the seats of government. This is the stepping-stone for Eugene. He finds a cause to live for. Next he stands beside the workers of the railway. He recognises the need for unity among the workers and calls on them to be together. He realises that anyone who works for human equity undertakes a double task: the duties of his particular job and fighting off the wolves who devour freedom. Eugene is determined to bring this freedom to the workers. He becomes their leader in standing up for their civil rights. This step is the opening chapter of his life as a labour leader, and as a socialist.

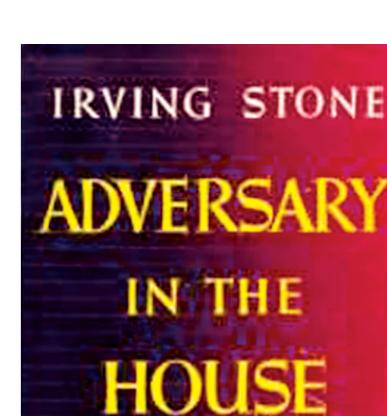
Even as he is driven by his dreams of service to humanity, he is tormented by his love for the two magnificent women of his life. Gloria is his passion, young, beautiful, adoring, always to love him but never to take his name. There is Kate, his wife, fiery, determined, forever to oppose him, never to share his dreams. Even when he is ready to stand as a presidential candidate Kate swears that she will never stand by his side, that he is only a fool to have such big dreams. And elsewhere Gloria quickly gets her own house ready to turn it into an office for Eugene's campaigns. It is Kate's dream to have a quiet home, free of public hassle. And yet Eugene cannot keep himself far from the people who depend on him to secure their rights and privileges. Gloria is ready to sacrifice her own ease and comforts to stand beside Eugene while he fights for his people. Eugene is tormented, driven by his wife's criticism under his own roof. There are times when he feels like staying with Gloria, as she leads the life of a widow, and yet his loyalty to his wife is like an

invisible wall that he can never get across.

Eugene is a die-hard socialist. He is able to organise millions of people under his banner. It is in the beginning of the twentieth century, when people are looking forward to new ideas, new plans that Eugene comes up with as components of his socialism. At one stage he is to serve three long years in prison but that does not take him away from the people whom he has united. He is with his people through thick and thin.

Adversary in the House is a book that is gripping and relates how strong a man's beliefs can be, how ruthlessly he can pursue his beliefs. Eugene's ideologies are so interwoven into the reader's mind that the reader is led to wishing that things would turn up as Eugene wants them to. Eugene's brother Theodore sacrifices his life to follow his brother to the nooks and corners of the country as he propagates his reforms. The brothers' unity does not fail to touch the heart of the reader. Irving Stone is a natural word artiste when it comes to portraying his characters, with remarkable vividness. One is able to put the book down only when Eugene finds himself able to deliver the message of liberty to his people and the people stand on solid ground, knowing the value of their beliefs. Reading *Adversary in the House* leaves the reader with an extremely gratifying experience, a feeling that a good book is supposed to induce.

Tulip Chowdhury is a teacher and writes fiction.



Adversary in the House
Irving Stone
New American Library

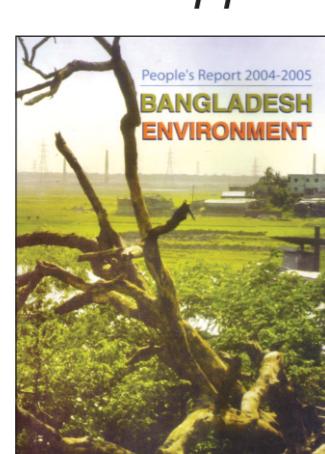
A rich diversity of development perspectives

Niaz Ahmed Khan is appreciative of a work on specialised subjects

ALTHOUGH there has been a burgeoning of literature on the Bangladesh environment in recent times, a comprehensive treatment covering the complex nexus of environment, poverty and development has been strikingly rare. The principal worth of the publication under review lies in the fact that it attempts to fill in the above caveat in the contemporary literature, and moves beyond a mere techno-centric explanation of environmental problems in favour of a more humanistic and down-to-earth 'People's Account'. The report makes the case in the following manner:

In the case of Bangladesh, the poverty-environment relationship becomes a subject matter of interest from three perspectives, viz., (i) economic growth driven environmental degradation affecting the poor, (ii) natural disasters damaging people's livelihoods, and (iii) poverty having unfavourable consequences on the environment. This is the backdrop for the thematic focus of this Report.

The Report's above perspective of analysis is in conformity with the country's key national guiding policy document and the



People's Report 2004-2005:
Bangladesh Environment
Edited by Atiur Rahman and
Mahboub Hassan
Unnayan Shammany, MoEF and
UNDP

government's commitment to international development frameworks. The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), for example, also views environment within the broader perspectives of poverty and sustainable development, and argues that: "Human lives and livelihood in Bangladesh are intricately intertwined with nature. Consequently, no process of

development and eradication of poverty can be conceived of without putting caring for environment and sustainable development at the centre stage" (PRSP/GoB, p.156). The Report's analytical perspectives are also very much compatible with the government's commitment to broad philosophical thrusts expressed in such international development frameworks as the government's commitment to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), and the social targets laid out in the *Partnership Agreement on Poverty Reduction* (PAPR).

The report is organised in nine chapters. Besides an introductory overview and a concluding chapter, the remaining seven chapters focus on such specialised topics as 'Background' (the theme of environment-poverty nexus), 'Demography and Poverty', 'Spatial Dimensions of Poverty', 'The Eco-System', 'Urbanisation and the Environment', 'Challenges and Initiatives', and 'Development Poverty Alleviation and Policy Interventions'. These broad titles, however, do not adequately reflect the range of

'subsidiary issues'. Under the title 'Demography and Poverty' (chapter 3), for example, the discussion sweeps across a wide gamut of issues, including the plight of tribal/indigenous populations and the ultra-poor in the environment-poverty nexus, area-specific (e.g. CHT, North Bengal, central Sal forest tracts), gender and feminization of poverty, a conceptual paradigmatic discussion on property, power and poverty; a collage of relevant media reports.

The presentational style of the Report is particularly interesting. Each of these discussion topics is pursued through two complementary perspectives (i) the concerned common citizen's views and perceptions on the topic together with (ii) analyses and specialist treatments of leading experts in the respective fields. The stylistic get-up and format of the publication is impressive, and the readers will find the rich collection of relevant photographs valuable and soothing.

In the concluding chapter, the Report recapitulates the core conceptual and theoretical arguments concerning the complex dynamics of the 'poverty-environment-development' linkages. It provides an alterna-

tive perspective on the traditionally held notion that blames the poor for environmental degradation. The poor are often not the agents of environmental degradation (example: encroachment of state forest lands). Poverty in fact becomes a direct outcome of environmental degradation. In this context, the Report argues and pleads for a deeper understanding of the poverty-environmental nexus on the part of all those involved in policy making. Drawing on a host of empirical and theoretical evidences and arguments, it concludes by putting forth the following rationale and proposition:

Why the analysis of the poverty-environment nexus? In looking to the future, we focus on the policy perspective. An understanding of the nexus is important because it has consequences for the allocation and administration of public resources for poverty reduction and for mitigating environmental problems. And therefore the linkage between environment and poverty should get proper attention of the policy-makers for promoting sustainable development in Bangladesh (p.325).

Some discussions are, however, rather terse and lack the needed elaboration for non-

specialist readers, some examples being the accounts of 'Logit Regression of Modelling Poor' or 'Regression of Poverty Status' (pp.206-208); 'Water level trend in the Barind' (pp.107-117); 'Climate change' (25-27) etc. Although for the most part the language of the Report is generally lucid, there are spots of obscurity in a few areas of the text. It would have been very useful for readers if the photographs had been appropriately captioned and labeled.

On the whole, this work should be worthwhile reading. It makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the Bangladesh environment and development by addressing a major gap (i.e. the 'poverty-environment-development nexus') and bringing in a rich diversity of analytic perspectives. This report, thus, deserves to be studied widely.

Happy reading!

Professor Niaz Ahmed Khan teaches in the Department of Development Studies, Dhaka University.