

Face of news in new world order

Binoy Barman peeps into a journalistic affair and finds it engrossing

TECHNOLOGY has changed, by degrees, the face of journalism throughout history. The invention of printing machine, telegraph, camera, radio, television, satellite, computer and lately internet and cell phone have had a profound impact on journalism. The impact is realised through changes in the mode of news collection and presentation, determination of objectives of journalism and the relationship between media and society. Vincent Campbell in his book, *Information Age Journalism: Journalism in an international context*, has measured how information technology has influenced journalism. The theme is curious because we all live in the information age which determines our patterns of thought and action in a distinctive way.

Declining readership is seen as one of the major problems of print journalism today. Readership is consistently falling all over the world mainly due to opening up of alternative avenues of information. Internet, satellite television and mobile telephony have played a vital role in changing people's engagements. Surveys show that British national daily newspaper circulation fell from about 15.5 million in 1988 to 13 million in 1998; US national daily newspaper circulation fell from about 63 million in 1988 to 56 million in 1998; and German national daily newspaper circulation fell from about 30 million in 1989 to 25 million in 1997. There might be similar trends in Bangladesh too. Here people prefer right-on-the-day television news to one-day-after newspaper news. The impact of online news and mobile news is not yet clear as these are at their fledgling stage and people here have just started to avail themselves of the opportunities.

Shrinking diversity of newspaper, growing tabloidisation and concentration of ownership in a few hands are identified as other problems of journalism today. In the market economy, financial problems have forced many publishers to stop their ventures or merge with others. Some have resorted to the levity of tabloids to attract readers. Some have to depend more on advertisements with weakening moral stand since the advertisers have direct and indirect influence on the media. In Bangladesh's context, we can say few will write against the malpractices of estate companies and mobile phone companies as they give advertisements to newspapers and television channels. A big pitfall of market-based journalism is its ownership mould. Media entrepreneurs are usually moneyed men who have their political affiliations and in most cases doubtful sources of income. This kind of ownership has two repercussions: first, the owners try to use the power of the media to protect their personal and party inter-

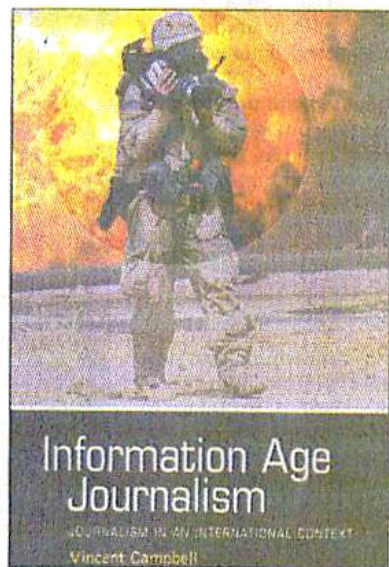
est, and second, they influence news activities in an ominous way close to distortion. Journalism in Bangladesh is little exception to it. Just look at some newspapers and TV channels, and see who the owners are. Black money holders have captured the media here. Consequently, we do not get people's journalism -- we get corporate journalism, always profit-oriented and sometimes anti-people.

The relationship between journalism and the state is intriguing as it is explained with four well-known theories of the press proposed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956). The authoritarian theory, libertarian model, social responsibility model and community model have their intrinsic weaknesses and to a large extent lose their value in the present day context. Colin Sparks' media/state model fixes six possible roles for the state -- patron, sensor, actor, masseur, ideologue and conspirator. The state plays one role or the other in relation to journalism. In Bangladesh we get a mixture of several roles for the state, more negative than positive. Asians (especially in the Far East) have a different value and it is where the concept of development journalism emerged. Journalism is seen there as a development partner of the government and journalists inform people as well as share development ideas with them.

Journalism takes distinct shape depending on the political and economic systems of a particular country. Nations may be divided into three categories 'free', 'partially free' and 'not free', and journalism may also be categorised accordingly, as it enjoys varying degrees of freedom. Journalism enjoys maximum freedom in a 'free country', moderate freedom in a 'partially free country' and minimum freedom in a 'not free country'. Freedom House's Press Freedom Survey of 2001 reveals that 100% countries have free press in North America, 75% in Australia, 60% in Europe, 55% in South America, 28% in Southeast Asia, 11% in Africa and 7% in the Middle East. In total, 39% of world nations had a free press in 2001. The survey makes it clear that the economically underdeveloped and politically more authoritarian parts of the world have smaller proportions of press freedom than in the developed world.

Powerful institutions and people as source of news tend to influence news coverage. They make the primary definition of an event which the journalist follows as a secondary definer. Sources always try to get their voices positively heard in the media and they resort to various strategies toward that aim. Spin is one of the commonly used tactics for governments to influence the media. Campbell observes, "In Britain and the

USA (and in some other countries) the extent to which governments and political parties have developed sophisticated methods for dealing with the news media is something of a persistent concern." (p. 88) In the US, Thomas Jefferson carefully kept his name out of the newspaper, and it was President McKinley who first allowed journalists into the White House, which led to the formation of a White House press corps, of late much criticised as a 'propaganda machine'. Cunning information management has been heavily exercised by recent US Presidents, including Clinton and Bush. They laboured mightily to generate favourable headlines to protect their preferred image on the vast screen



Information Age Journalism: Journalism in an international context
Vincent Campbell
Arnold

of the media establishment.

The criteria of news value and process of news selection are tricky matters. News selection accomplished by news desk working under some organisational framework often comes down to subjective judgement. While selecting news, the 'gatekeepers' have to weigh the newsworthiness of a report. Newsworthiness is principally determined by news value, intrinsic properties of a report that make it presentable to the readers/audience. Several models of news value are found in theoretic literature -- Galtung and Ruge (1973), Gen (1979), Golding and Elliot (1979), Hetherington (1985) and Shoemaker, et al (1985). All the models have their own sets of criteria with particular area of focus. It seems there is no elaborate universal formula. News values are not necessarily consistent and realisable, nor are they universally held and

adhered to.

Ethical questions in journalism are equally important. Journalists are sometimes alleged to take to unethical, if not immoral, practices. A 1995 survey showed that some 77% MPs in Britain regarded journalists as having 'low' or 'very low' standards of honesty and ethics. They are often engaged in naming and shaming of personalities, breaching confidentiality, intrusion into privacy, gory depiction of story, bribery, fabrication and libelling. National authorities usually try to control the behaviour of the journalists by imposing professional codes of ethics on them. These codes, however, are not comfortable for the people intended for, as these undermine their personal and professional pride.

The moral strength of the media stems from the exercise of objectivity. Objectivity, i.e., presentation of news without any subjective view, may be achieved through separating facts from interpretation and constructing reality in a reliable way. In practice, objectivity is difficult to attain and maintain because there is no 'pure objectivity' *per se* and partly because a reporter is part of the reality he/she reports about. Therefore, everything is bound to be biased in one way or other, although it may not be discerned easily, since in most of the cases it remains implicit. Bias may be directed towards particular ideology, system or practice -- towards democracy, communism or secularism -- towards truth, beauty or welfare; or towards the whole negative paradigm. The 'journalism of opinion' and 'journalism of attachment' -- as opposed to hardcore journalism -- have given bias some sort of legitimacy, but not without debate. Journalism viewed as 'impartial chronicles of facts' and journalist as 'neutral witness to history' is still most desirable. Objectivity, however illusory it may appear, is still the most valuable principle in journalism, as Campbell notes: 'Objectivity retains a forceful presence at least in Western discourses' (p. 176).

When we talk of hardcore or mainstream journalism, putting utmost importance on political, economic and such news in newspapers, radio or TV, we set up a sideline of issues which are subsumed in what is called alternative journalism. It comprises sports, entertainment and lifestyle, among other things. Over the years these particular fields have matured via television shows and magazines with growing popularity. HBO and Star Movies are popular in the west and east alike. Channels like ESPN, Star Sports and TEN Sports are tremendously popular with sports enthusiasts in our country. Very few domestic viewers in the subcontinent would like to miss 'Kasauti Zindagi Kay' on Star Plus or 'Desperate Housewives' on Star World. The young generation will proba-

bly be more interested in music programmes on MTV, Channel V and Zee Music. Some may be attuned to Radio Forth, Radio Today and Radio Amar. Knowledge seekers would certainly like Discovery, National Geographic Channel, Animal Planet and The History Channel. Give your children a choice between Cartoon Network and candy, they will opt for the former, I bet.

Other forms of alternative journalism are talk shows, investigative satire (as 'Private Eye' in Britain), development talks (as 'Hridoye Mati O Manush' in Bangladesh), literary pinch (as 'Down and Out in Paris and London' by George Orwell) and true crime writing (as 'In Cold Blood' by Truman Capote). But alternative journalism might have a bad side of it. Think about photojournalism and celebrity chasing. Diana was killed in a car accident while being chased by paparazzi!

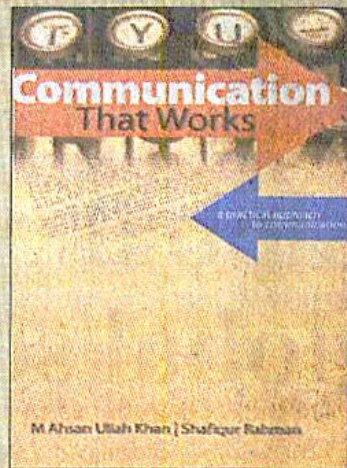
The tasks of global and local media are changing rapidly with the impact of new technology and rocking events. International news agencies AP, AFP and Reuters and news channels like BBC, CNN and Fox News are trying to cope up with a new world order. The terrorist incident of 9/11 and subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have also had a profound impact on the plane of journalism. People have witnessed the emergence of Al-Jazeera in the tussle of east-west interest in the media. The journalistic job has been more significant and challenging than ever. In Campbell's words, "The only thing that can tentatively be said is that journalism, in its multiplicity of meanings, is absolutely central to the emergence of the information age." (p. 256)

Now, from all these accounts, what idea do you get about contemporary journalism? Campbell rightly draws our attention to the information and communication technology (ICT) while recounting its widespread impact on journalism. He analyses journalistic phenomena in an international context, touching on theory and practice relevantly and sufficiently. *Information Age Journalism* is the result of Campbell's hard-laboured research evident in the list of references, 496 in total. The book is rich in information, extensive in scope but intensive in investigation. While shedding light on contemporary scene, the writer delves deep into historical background for better understanding of different journalistic concepts. His observation is acute and apt, and analysis unequivocally cute and compelling. I am confident his scholarly work will be appreciated by people concerned -- practising journalists, media activists, researchers and students.

Dr Binoy Barman is a writer and Assistant Professor at Bangladesh University.

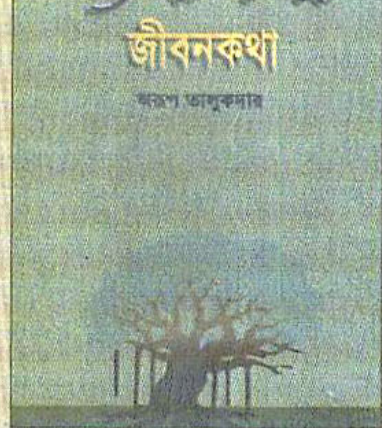
At a glance

Communication That Works
M Ahsanullah Khan, Shafiqur Rahman
Panjeree Publications Limited



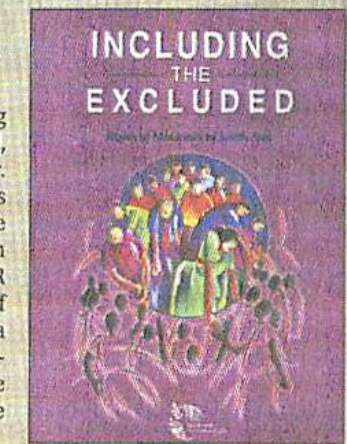
The work promises to be of immense benefit to those using English as a means of communication. And with the paucity of good English, and books on the language, in this country is a welcome move. A variety of communication methods are applied here, in style and substance that bring out the modernity in the approach.

Shoto Bangalir Jibonkotha
Arup Talukdar
Boshundhara Prokashon

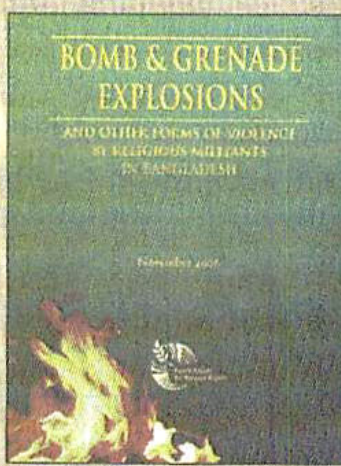


This work is a useful handbook for anyone who wishes to have primary knowledge of the individuals who have enriched Bengali life over the decades. There are poets, politicians, scientists, educationists and others who have made it to the pages here, of course very deservingly. The book promises to be a worthwhile reference for all.

Including the Excluded: Rights of Minorities in South Asia
South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR)



It is a compilation of fact finding reports on Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Edited by Dr. Meghna Guhaathakurta, the reports were prepared by members of the South Asian People's Commission on Rights of Minorities formed by SAHR in 2004. This analytical summary of communal tendencies in South Asia includes recommendations for further campaigns which can guide the work of human rights defenders in the region.



Bomb & Grenade Explosions
And Other Forms of Violence By Religious Militants in Bangladesh
South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR)

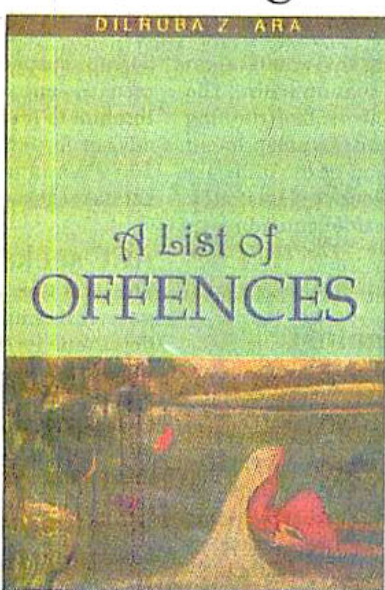
The work is based on investigative reports in national and local newspapers of Bangladesh. It seeks to trace acts of violence to the rise of obscurantist politics and extremist militancy in the country. The volume analyses emerging threats to individual security, democratic practice and human rights in the context of a lack of deterrent action by the state.

Love, marriage and hard realities

Mohsena Reza slices through a novel and rediscovers some old truths

WHEN you see the title, *A List Of Offences*, you tend to believe that it might be a crime thriller. In truth, though, there could not be a more ornamental descriptive narration of picturesque Bangla, of human emotions and of mundane affairs. The cover shows a girl sitting alone on a boat, looking far off and lost. In fact, the portrait depicts the girl's search for her own identity as an independent human being. Entangled by the roots of the huge banyan tree of the village where she had longed to stay all her life, she muses, "Be a good wife. Please your husband. Give him a child. Obey him. Obey your in-laws. Do not disgrace your parents. Have patience." These were the magical words that her mother had taught her for a very successful and happy married life!

It all commences from a description of the rural landscape of Gulab Ganga and to the depictions of pathways, rivers and houses. Human physique too has been portrayed in a most amazing form. Family environment, ceremonies throughout the year, description of highlands and lowlands all have been encompassed in this one book. A conservative family like that of Azad Chowdhury is in total contrast to the post-modern clan of the "BABAS", and a medley like this is possible only in the



A List of Offences
Dilruba Z. Ara
The University Press Limited

calligraphy of a writer like Dilruba Z. Ara. The legend is about a much-longed for daughter who shocks the midwife into wetting her garb, being born with silvery hair. Daria grows up affected by

the rumours revolving round the impropriety of her birth. She is born of a woman Jharna Begum who is extremely loyal to all traditional values. But against all odds Daria is adamant to cultivate her own integrity and cut the Gordian knot of rules set by her mother. Daria's father Azad Chowdhury, with his mundane philosophy of life, has a young man in view for his lovely daughter Daria. She, however, falls in love with handsome Ali Baba, a friend of Mizan. Mizan was rescued by Azad Chowdhury during floods and brought up like his own son, at the same time preparing him to be his son-in-law.

Mizan in the meantime begins to fall in love with Daria who is completely unaware of his deep feelings for her. Daria is tormented by her infatuation for Ali Baba and seeks fulfillment in his arms. *A List Of Offences* has been appropriately chosen as the name of the book. It is so because this is the turning point in the story. The maid Gulabi did not miss any chance to demean Mizan who in turn made a list of all her brutality. If this list had not been discovered and brought to Azad Chowdhury's notice, he would not have taken the decision to bring Mizan up like his family member. It was precisely the very cause to send him

away for higher studies where the encounter took place between him and Ali Baba.

Consequently they became the best of friends only to accompany him to his village and carry off the princess of Mizan's dreams. Totally mesmerised by her elegance and simplicity, Ali Baba could think of nothing but to make Daria his lawfully wedded wife.

Ali Baba, a young lawyer born and brought up in the sea-side town, Firingi Para in Chittagong, departs with Daria for Baba Lodge, his ivy mantled house. His post-modern family includes his father, the maladroitness one-eyed Kasim Baba, his grandiose sister Rani who seems to harbour quasi-incestuous feelings for her brother and portly Alia, his mother, who is totally frustrated at the recent turn of events.

Daria at first feels lost among the people who chide her for no rhyme or reason, unbelievable but true because she is a country bumpkin. It takes her quite a while to adjust to the weird oddities of her in-laws. Daria is adamant to do so for the sake of her mother, Jharna Begum. Blinded by tradition she carries Ali Baba's child with the hopeless mission to come closer to her husband. The author at this point introduces a new character, Bina Biswas, who is in fact the

epitome of women's liberation and a revolt against the standard role of women in our society. The tempest within her is the raging fire inside the bosom of every downgraded woman in our society, whose ambitions are not only looked down upon but trampled under the elephant foot of traditional values. It is she who inspires Daria to put her foot down and stand up for her own rights as a mother who would not allow her daughter to lead the same wretched and miserable life that was once her dowry and recompense for not listening to her parents and choosing a life-mate by herself. It is hard to contemplate the end of a story with such diverse characters, and Dilruba Ara has done justice to the cause of women when she gives a revolutionary end to a very ordinary and common happening of a village girl.

The writer, who lives in Sweden and is an accomplished painter, definitely leaves an imprint of her profession and the country she resides in, on her work. It is only for us to discover a totally different style and approach to illustrate the life of the uneducated women of our country.

Mohsena Reza studied English literature at Dhaka University and is involved with social organisations.

Muslims before their Creator

Syed Badrul Haque appreciates a new work on Islam

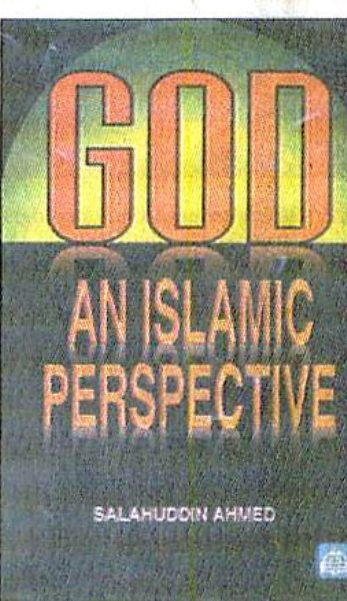
TODAY Islam is in the spotlight on the world stage when presidents, prime ministers and ordinary people in non-Muslim countries are eager to know more about Islam. The book under review has illuminated the concept of Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of mankind. Muslims believe that Allah pervades the life of man from the time of his birth until his soul returns to Him at the time of his death.

The book under review contains six chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the traditional concepts about Allah as the Supreme Lord of the world, emphasising His strict monotheistic character and the distinct aspects that flow from it. Chapter 2 deals with the Prophets and Messengers of Allah whom He sent to the world to convey His message for the right guidance of mankind. Unlike the Jews and Christians (People of the Book) Muslims believe in all the Prophets of Allah, which include Prophets Ibrahim, Musa, 'Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad(s). Chapter 3 deals with the Qur'an, the last Book of Allah confirming His earlier Books. Chapter 4 deals with Islam, the religion acceptable to Allah. All the Prophets of Allah preached strict monotheism, i.e. Islam, which will prevail over all other religions. Chapter 5 deals with worshipping Allah, emphasising that all aspects of the life of a Muslim are meant for worshipping ('ibadah) Allah. The various modes of worshipping Allah are performing Prayers (salat), Fasting (siyam) in the month of Ramadan and performing Hajj. Chapter 6 deals with the role of Allah as the 'Master of the Day of Judgement' emphasising the importance of the Hereafter (al-akhirah) and the distinction between Paradise (Jannah) and Hell (Jahannam).

The reviewer believes that readers who have spent some time in the study of Islam, particularly the Qur'an, will find this book interesting and helpful in

appreciating the transcendent position of Allah in Islam. Readers who have general interest in Islam will find this book opening a new dimension in their vision of Allah. The work will help Muslims adopt the role of 'the moderate community' in the challenging circumstances of the twenty-first century. There is a duty upon Muslims to project Islam as the same religion that was preached by the Prophets Ibrahim, Musa, 'Isa and Muhammad(s), who all proclaimed worshipping only Allah, for the right guidance of mankind and establishing peace and harmony in the world.

Syed Badrul Haque, formerly Public Relations Officer to President, People's Republic of Bangladesh, is a contributor to the Daily Star.



God: An Islamic Perspective
Salahuddin Ahmed
A.S. Noordeen, Kuala Lumpur

The Chinese are coming

Razia S. Ahmed reflects on ideas of a rising power in a new work

"CHINA will probably be the second biggest power in the world in the future", concludes the author. One could not agree more because of the pragmatism of the Chinese leadership demonstrated so far, and in this context one may offer Zbigniew Brzezinski's rationale that "China will not adopt a confrontational policy, due mainly to its unparalleled economic growth and the possibility of loosening the grip of the communist party over its people."

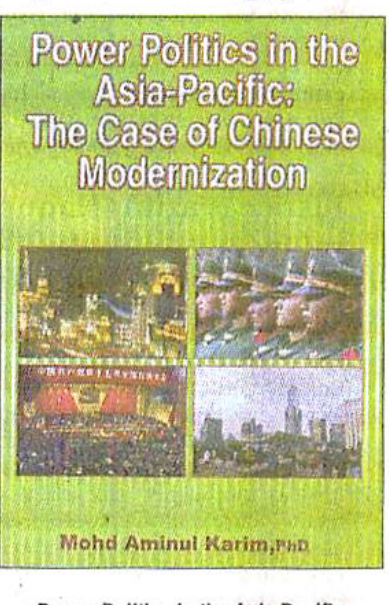
Generally speaking, this is a book on power politics in the Asia Pacific region, with special focus on the People's Republic of China (PRC). It deals mainly with (a) China's strategic rise, both economic and military (b) an analysis of the strategic and power scenario of China vis-a-vis Asia Pacific and the USA and (c) the relationship between political and military institutions in the PRC and other nations.

Like all academic research work, the book begins with theoretical rhetoric and builds conjectures such as the "Middle Kingdom" and theories of

"compellence and deterrence." In this regard, the author emphasises values of the progenitor Confucius in shaping the moral sentiments of the Chinese people, with which one would disagree because of the current-day frenzy of wealth creation and consumption points more towards a pattern of Western capitalist society.

The book then moves on to a discussion of possible variables in the strategic environment and security issues such as offering solutions of "containment" and "engagement" followed by an excellent analysis and balanced analysis of relationships. The "objectives matrix" is a useful summation although without the much-used and necessary explanatory variables.

The most significant chapter, and thus, the focus of the work, is the formulation of scenarios of future US-China confrontations in the South China Sea. This reviewer, for one, denies any impending confrontation although it is possible, not probable. As one Chinese diplomat in Dhaka expresses "himself strongly on existing perceptions of



Power Politics in the Asia Pacific
The case of Chinese modernization
Md Aminul Karim
Academic Press & Publishers Library

impending confrontation, "it is not an issue at all because we are not parallel." One wonders if this is due to the "extraordinary technological strides exhibited in two Gulf wars by the US military."

The next few pages introduce the reader to scenario building, which is a simulated game of the real-life problem common in academic exercises. It applies the balance-of-power concept arguing that the post-cold war scenario is conducive to People's Liberation Army weapons development. This idea is fairly plausible and, for this reviewer, augments the mystery of a long-term wait-in-the-wings theory. The Chinese are not in a hurry; from Deng in 1978 to Hu Jintao in 2007 is a long time. The entire period was a gestation for an economic turnaround and defense reinforcement. Md Aminul Karim has created his own artifact towards the end of his thesis (which one is supposed to do) and offered different combinations of strategies, hierarchies, and defense theories. Though it is interesting reading, we can only visualise such scenarios and it does not provide a basis for theories which are at best con-

jecture.

Finally, in terms of methodology, the author uses an archive analysis which is perfectly acceptable both holistically and academically. The tying up of case studies to the theories is done for generalisation, with the application of a methodology which advances the hypothesis. Then again, any academic knows that measuring tools are artifacts and can be created and applied for endorsement. Probably the author could have quantitatively analysed his cross-sectional country matrix with "power variables."

To conclude, the book offers a clear-cut, powerful and rational reading and the author's practical experience makes it more credible. With careful reading, one can detect the policy nuances offered between the lines for strategists and decision makers.

Professor Razia S Ahmed is a graduate of the Kennedy School of Government and Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. A Ford Foundation scholar at MIT, she has conducted research on China for the last twenty five years.