Ambitious soldiers, ineffectual politicians, coups and destroyed dreams

Two strands in recent history are studied by Syed Badrul Ahsan

NSTANCES of an army continually occupying its own country are rare. L Yet the Pakistan army has systematically been engaged in the job for the past fifty years. It was Justice M.R. Kayani who first made note of this occupation factor, drawing in the process the very great ire of General Ayub Khan, known today as Pakistan's first military dictator. Or you could even say, without batting an eyelid, that Ayub was the man in Pakistan's, or South Asia's, history who first taught soldiers the art of overturning civilian governments and then giving themselves a very wide berth in statecraft. In all these years since October 1958, when Ayub and Major General Iskandar Mirza first went into the business of clamping martial law over Pakistan, Pakistan's soldiers have spread their wings nearly everywhere, to the extent that Ayesha Siddiqa recently spilled all the beans about the army's hold on the economy in her disturbing (for the army) Military Inc.

Unlike Siddiqa, though, Shuja Nawaz stays clear of any controversy around the army. Little indication is there of the army's having transformed itself into a business organisation. But that it has consistently and carefully turned itself into a supra-constitutional body, or even become a state within a state, is not left in doubt. That was not, however, Nawaz's intention. What he brings forth in this extensive tome is what the subtitle points to. The army has had its own wars, first in the early 1950s when Ayub Khan began maneouvering to have the soldiers enter the corridors of power (a clear hint he first made in his 1967 memoirs Friends Not Masters); and later in the times of his three military successors. Nawaz is in a unique position to inquire into the way the Pakistan army has evolved since the partition of India, given that he is the younger brother of the late General Asif Nawaz, the chief of staff who died of what was subsequently given out as a heart attack. Of course, the Nawaz family has always suspected poisoning to have been behind the general's death. He had, after all, not been on friendly terms with the man then in power, Nawaz Sharif. Shuja Nawaz's links to the top brass in the army have been there for years, and not just because of his brother. Judging by the meticulously put details he brings into

his work, there remains little doubt as to Kutch episode in early 1965; and then he the kind of friends he has in the military establishment.

In Crossed Swords (which is actually the logo of the Pakistan army), the writer throws up intriguing bits and pieces of information on the doings of powerful men over the years. Take the matter of



Crossed Swords Pakistan: Its Army, and the Wars Within Shuja Nawaz Oxford

Ayub Khan promoting himself to the rank of field marshal before handing over charge of the army to General Muhammad Musa. And who advised him to become a field marshal? None other than Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the young upstart with ambitions of his own laid out for the not so distant future. Ayub was Pakistan's saviour, so felt Bhutto, and so he needed to be above every other general in rank and esteem. What better way to ensure such a position but by becoming (or appropriating the rank of) a field marshal? The Ayub years were a time when the army grew in strength and yet found itself mired in pointless military operations. Nawaz speaks of the Rann of

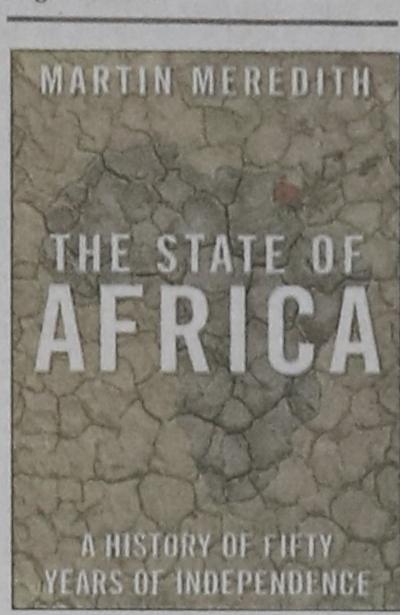
raises the matter of how the army may have miscalculated the strategy and intelligence of the Indian army in the runup to the September 1965 war. The Ayub regime was forced into a climbdown when it agreed to a ceasefire twenty three

days into the war. If in the ten years of Ayub Khan's rule Pakistan's army became a wellentrenched presence in the Pakistan state structure, in the brief period of General Yahya Khan it certainly mutated into a morally decadent force. Yahya's ambitions had been growing in the years since he replaced Musa as army chief in the mid 1960s; and they nearly came to fruition in 1968 when Ayub succumbed to long illness. By early 1969, as a political movement against Ayub Khan gathered pace, Yahya saw the opportunity, and took it. He would go on to preside over the breakup of the country through refusing to hand over power to the electorally triumphant Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was the worst moment in its history for Pakistan's army when it capitulated before a combined force of Indian soldiers and Bangladesh's Mukti Bahini. But that is precisely where the author, in a manner typical of many Pakistani intellectuals, falters. He stays away from all mention of the genocide that provoked the Bengalis of East Pakistan into opting for independence after March 1971 and in almost cursory manner records the surrender of the Pakistani forces in Dhaka on 16 December 1971. But Nawaz does record the chaos and the catcalls that greeted General Abdul Hamid Khan as he tried to gauge officers' reaction, three days after the loss of East Pakistan, to a possible taking over of power by him from Yahya. Expletives and loud denunciations forced Hamidinto a retreat.

The section on the ZA Bhutto administration and the prime minister's use of the army, to the extent of appointing Ziaul Haq over a whole range of senior officers to the position of army chief of staff, brims over with unknown details. And detailed too is the narrative on Bhutto's fall and his subsequent agony as Zia's prisoner. For the first time, perhaps, Pakistan observers are treated to information on the physical beating the fallen prime minister may have endured in his

cell at the hands of majors and colonels. It makes morbid reading. And similar is the experience with the author's enumeration of the rise of army's Inter-Services forlorn in 1972. Intelligence, a body noted for the sinister way in which it has undermined politicians at home and destabilised conditions abroad, as in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's army, never a well-meaning body of soldiers, comes off even worse in Shuja Nawaz's work. The book is a smooth study in how an army can leave a country writhing in perpetual suffering. Pakistan keeps going through the pain. And, lest we forget, so does Burma in our neighbourhood.



The State of Africa A History of Fifty Years of Independence Martin Meredith Free Press

It was a disbelieving Kwame Nkrumah who was taken out of jail and installed as prime minister of what had been the Gold Coast in 1957. As independent Ghana's leader, he thus turned into an instant symbol of African liberation. Eight years later, pampered and corrupt and having proved ineffectual as president, he was forced out of power by his army while on a

visit to China. He spent the rest of his life in Guinea, where his friend Sekou Toure had given him sanctuary, before dying

Martin Meredith brings into focus the long tale of Africa's political evolution, or its decline, in the fifty years between 1957 and 2007. There was promise when the process of decolonisation began, indeed when Harold Macmillan spoke of the winds of change sweeping across the world. And yet that promise was to wear down, and patience was to wear thin, as time went by. Algeria's independence came about after years of a protracted struggle, in 1962. Within three years, Ahmed Ben Bella would be ousted by his defence minister Houari Boumeddienne and put away for years on end. Men like Sekou Toure and the Ivory Coast's Felix Houphouet-Boigny would turn autocrat and chances of an African renaissance through democracy would swiftly recede. In Nigeria, where hope remained high, tribalism would come in the way of democratic politics. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was murdered and his body was left lying in a ditch. The country would slide into one military coup after another, with an interlude of Biafra for three years between 1967 and 1970.

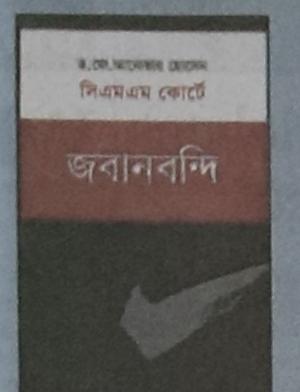
Nigeria remains corrupt. And the Congo, where Patrice Lumumba launched a blistering attack on King Baudouin and his ancestors on the eve of independence in 1960, soon gave notice of what was ahead. Lumumba was ousted, captured by Moise Tshombe and murdered, with Belgian officers complicit in the crime. Uganda lurched from possibility to chaos to sheer buffoonery, the last in the person of Idi Amin-Tanzanian socialism, even with mwalimu Julius Nyerere in charge, did not work. Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda failed to deliver. And Robert Mugabe, having struggled mightily to free his country of white racist rule, then went on to destroy it.

Only Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor and South Africa's Nelson Mandela were to prove the exceptions to

Read on. Your interest will not wane.

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

AT A GLANCE



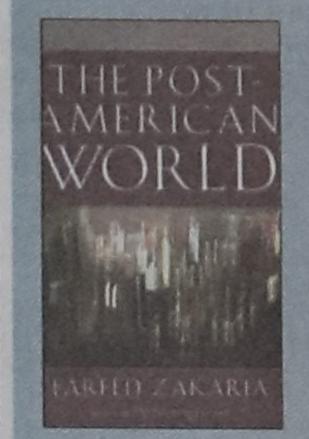
CMM Court-e Jobanbondi Dr. Mohammad Anwar Hossain Agami Prokashoni

It is now all part of history. The respected academic, so recently under conditions of suffocation, now throws up before readers the story of his stout defence of himself in court. The statement he makes is testimony once again to teachers remaining the moral shield for all of us worried about the future of the

Binoshto Shomoyer Column A.Z.M.AbdulAli Agami Prokashoni

Having been part of the civil service, Abdul Ali is today a respected commentator on various national issues. In this compilation of articles earlier written for local newspapers in Dhaka, the author makes readers sit up and reflect on the issues he deals with. Obviously, they are matters that reveal what has been going wrong in Bangladesh.



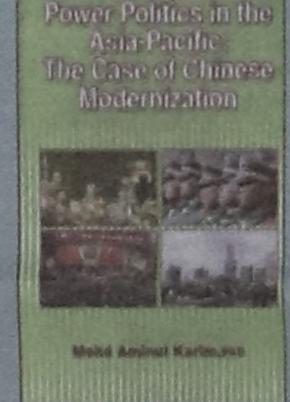


The Post-American World Fareed Zakaria W.W. Norton and Company

These are reflections on a world as it promises to be in a post-America situation. Zakaria notes that the issue is all about nations poised to rise to prominence in a time when American influence will likely wane, creating a new set of global conditions altogether. For him, what he calls the other nations will soon be in the ascendant, and properly too.

Power Politics in the Asia-Pacific The Case of Chinese Modernization Mohd Aminul Karim Academic Press and Publishers Library

As the title makes clear, the work wrestles with the idea of a growing China and everything that comes with it. Based on research work, the book examines the question of the country's rise to strategic prominence, economically as well as militarily. Included in the study are the possible ramifications of power politics, played out by Beijing and



Trapped in the darkness of purdah

A study of prisoners behind a veil interests Tulip Chowdhury

ROGS in a Well is a case study of the women of the pirzada families. The pirzada families are the custodians of one the most sacred Sufi shrines of India, that is, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. Hazrat Nizamuddin Muinuddin Chisti. The shrine lies four miles to the south of Old Delhi. Patricia Jeffery delves deep into the life of the pirzada families and the secluded life of their women. The life of the pirzade (plural) around the shrine has a pulse of its own and has its own beliefs, rules and regulations.

The custodians of the shrine of Saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia and their families are called the pirzade. They claim to be descendents from the saint's relatives and disciples. The pirzade women live a secluded life within the shrine. Their life is of primary concern about home, marriage and child rearing. They have no voice in the family economy. Their life, their society is all around the shrine and the other families there. They are not expected to go out of their social system for education or reach out for any economic benefits. They are to be clad fully in burqa whenever stepping out of home or any place where males happen to be. There is a strict code of conduct where males are concerned. The system of purdah is inseparable from their life. However, the writer, when she meets these women, finds them lively conversationalists when not in the company of men. They even revert to complaints about the restriction of their movements outside their homes, about the sheer

clothes with the burqa, especially in hot weather, about the shame they feel when strange men taunt them in the streets and their total seclusion from the affairs of the shrine. The pirzade women, they said, were like "kue ke meyndak" a frog in a Aulia.(1240A.D1325) was one of the four well; as people with intellectual and Sufi saints who followed Khawaja physical horizons limited to the tiny patch of sky directly above.

The author is of the view that the seclusion of pirzade women appears to be a particular type of social system rather than being a purely religious tradition. The system of purdah is accepted by the women as social and religious aspects of their lives. It carries questions of honour and shame for the women. For the pirzade women Islam permits men and women to attain success, honour and progress in their own natural spheres. For a woman those spheres are motherhood and creating a stable home life. For the pirzade there is a marked spatial separation between the shrine --- the world of pirzade men --- and the bounded area of the village where the women spend most of their lives. The pirzade women do not go to the shrine regularly. If they do they do so at night or dusk so that the visiting pilgrims will not see them. They cannot go there at all during their periods of menstruation. No woman, pirzade or outsider, may ever enter the actual tomb chamber of Hazrat Nizamuddin. The shrine is a world of which the pirzade women are completely ignorant. They get to hear about it only what their men tell them. The men, on the other hand, keep the women out of any direct involvement with the shrine. As a middle aged man remarks, "Naturally my wife does not discomfort of having to cover their understand these matters. Why should



Frogs in a Well Patricia Jeffery Manohar

she? She is far too busy with housework for me to bother her about how the festivals are organized."

In all ways women are marginal to the shrine. They are in total ignorance of what goes on there or how the shrine is organized. From a very early stage of life a girl is taken care of by her father or brothers until her marriage and then her husband becomes her guardian. A daughter is often called a "guest" for she will soon be taken away to her real home with her

husband. The daughter has to be given movable goods as her dowry. She receives trickles of gifts from her parents or brothers until she dies. Upon death the white shroud used for burial has to come from the parents or brothers. Thus the pirzade women remain economically dependent and socially secluded in their domestic

The purse strings are in the omplete control of the pirzade men. The income from the shrine is totally in the men's hands. The men buy the food and other requirements of the family. The pirzade women do not go shopping. The total exclusion of women from the financial aspects of life reveals their subordinate place among the men. There is a rota system through which the income of the shrine is distributed in turn among its people. Although the women are tutored about it, in practice they are denied their share. The Islamic law of inheritance clearly defines the woman's share of property. But pirzade woman usually give away their shares to their brothers for they have families to support. Anyone who refuses to do so is looked down

are marginal, for they spend most of their waking lives at the shrine or conduct business elsewhere, meeting guests, buying stocks for their stalls. They rarely visit other pirzade and only occasionally visit their married sisters or brothers. For many men home is the place to take a quick bite or to snatch some sleep before more work in the shrine. The incomes of the men are solely dependent on the upkeep of the shrine. Religious and economic roles outside the home are the concerns of men. The main resources of the pirzade are solely derived from the cash which pilgrims present at various points during their expressions of devotion to the saint.

According to the writer, economic dependency throughout life is a prudent course for the pirzade women. There are some women who remark that their present comfortable life makes inheritance rights and marriage settlements unnecessary. All their wants are provided for and they rarely need to spend money themselves. However, the truth of it all is that all their "comforts" depend on the goodwill of the men. The keystone to the system of purdah among the pirzade in the shrine is the asymmetry between the sexes and the economic powerlessness of the women.

While holding up the life of the pirzade women, Patricia Jeffery examines laws relating to purdah, laws of inheritance and many other aspects of Islam. She also holds up the social aspects of Indian women's lives and their roles in the labour force. And along it all she holds up the case of the pirzade women and their The village is the world where the men life. The author very skillfully probes the context of gender and class politics in India and aims to capture the ambiguities of purdah: the women's (partial) acceptance of the status quo and their critiques of it. Her major concern lies in the pirzade women's ignorance of the stark realities of life outside the home. Frogs in a Well is indeed an eye opener of a book.

> Tulip Chowdhury is a poet, short story writer and teacher.

Crystal clarity, or what?

A novel leaves Efadul Hug thinking

house with a ghost! If you are thinking that's an indication of an A ordinary horror story then you are gravely mistaken. Nobel laureate Toni Morrison weaves a tale of slavery, torture and despair behind a ghastly shell which shrouds the lives of a mother and a daughter at 124 Bluestone Road, outside Cincinnati, Ohio.

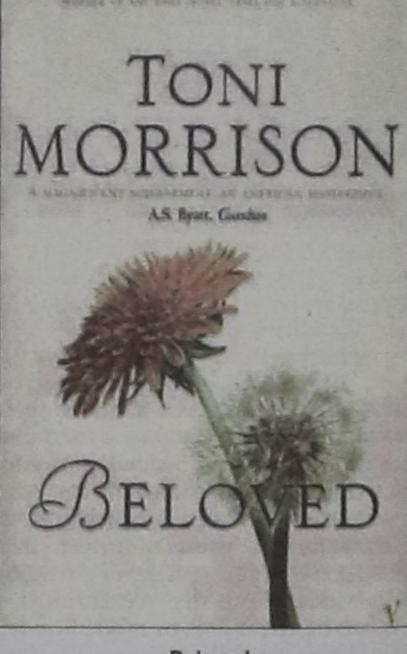
The resident ghost is violent towards the inhabitants of the house, breaking items, throwing things and ruining food. Afraid of the ghost's violence, the two sons of the family have left their mother, Sethe, and their sister Denver behind. Surprisingly, it is disclosed later that this ghost is none other than the spirit of Denver's older sister who died before she was two and whose tombstone was a payment for the sexual favours that Sethe provided the stone mason.

Left alone by themselves, Denver finds comfort in her friendship with her ghost sister but when Paul D, a former slave and companion of Sethe, enters the lonely life of Sethe he is frightened of the ghost at first and then later on violently chases the ghost out of the house. Having found a dependable person, Sethe is comforted but Denver is left friendless once again. The story takes an eerie turn when Sethe, Paul and Denver after returning from a carnival find a fullyclothed, wet stranger sitting on a tree stump outside their house. Beloved, the stranger calls herself. And over the next few days the weird habits of Beloved unfold across the pages.

Beloved is obsessed about Sethe and is jealous about sharing Sethe with anybody. She follows Sethe around and she wants Sethe to tell her stories. Paul does not trust Beloved and Denver is not happy with her either.

While keeping the story alive with its haunting plot, Morrison tells the story of slaves and plantation workers and the mistreatments that every slave ever faces in a harsh world of arrogant masters. These painful situations are introduced through sporadic infusions of memory in the active plot of the novel. The past achieves a near to perfect picture as it is blended with the present and in it Morrison discloses her compassionate messages. She says that circumstances must be judged, not the person who was merely a victim of them. She professes that everyone has the capacity to be civilised, and it is the cruelty of others that turns people uncivilised. Moreover, she confirms, under every dark skin, there is not a jungle. Morrison depicts through Paul's condition how a slave man finds life to be dead because a rooster has more freedom than he has. She portrays through the states of women how sexuality is a foreplay to power.

At times, in Morrison's mystical prose Beloved stands for a gloomy memory or perhaps a sin that is better left alone and



Beloved Toni Morrison Alfred Knopf

repented for than to be carried along forever; Beloved stands for obsession, cruelty and the frailties of human nature that ultimately lead to madness and destruction of a person's soul.

Some of the chapters are crystal clear in narration and some of them are pseudo-spiritual ramblings or selfconversations that might be a little bothersome to read. But for this reviewer's part, untangling the knots in Morrison's

prose is worth the effort. Say, for instance, what will Denver and Paul do about the strange Beloved? How does Sethe view Beloved's infatuation for her? Above all, who is Beloved? Did the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter return to claim its mother? And what is the mystery lurking behind the death of Sethe's baby in the first place? For straight answers to those twisted questions, this book keeps you on a run. So if you are ready to run, grab the book as soon as you see it.

Efadul Huq reviews books regularly.

Homes abroad, hearts being the same Jackie Kabir has some points to make about Lahiri's new book

HE writer of Interpreter of stories have some very interesting and satiate her readers' thirst. Unaccustomed subject for her. Another aspect of her Earth, for that is the book, is also a collection of short stories all of which are about second generation immigrant experiences. Her first book, Interpreter of of different characters. In one it is a Maladies, was also mainly based on immigrant experiences and the next book, The Namesake, is about an Indian Bengali family living in the United States and going back and forth from India to the US. Lahiri was honoured with numerous awards for her writings.

Jhumpa Lahiri has acquired a specific style of writing which may be considered as unique. Her environment has always been around the Bengali-American experience. There is a problem here too. For her Bengalis mean Indian Hindus as she puts in her recent book through one ofher characters:

"My mother was wearing the red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women, and a common Tangail sari, and had a thick stem of vermillion powder in the center parting of her hair.....

The fact that there is a huge Bengali

population who are not Hindus but are Muslims somehow escapes her. Apart from that, her new book has an

easy flow which attracts readers. All the

Maladies and The Namesake has intriguing facts in them. The element of yet produced another book to assimilation has been always a keen writing which makes her book interesting is her point of view. That means she essentially writes from the points of view mother's or a woman's point of view; in another she writes as a young boy who has lost his mother. She knows this variety will make her readers help avoid the monotonous tone that might otherwise leave her stories just as a repetition of her previous writings. In the last story of the book, 'Going Ashore', Lahiri has used several voices.

The collection of eight short stories gives an insight to the immigrant consciousness once again. The first story is Ruma's unwillingness to accept her widower father who comes to spend a holiday with her family. As she is married and has her own life, she thinks that it would be a burden to have an elderly person in the house. The next story is about Pranab Chakrabarti, whom this narrator's parents befriend in Cambridge. People can sometimes be intimate with people they have just met and be heartbroken when they move away. This story is from a child's point of view and about a clandestine romance

UNACCUSTOMED EARTH JHUMPA LAHIRI THE WAMESARE

> Unaccustomed Earth Jhumpa Lahiri Random House India

that blossomed between Pranab and his boudi. But it is of a kind that never means to cause any harm to anyone. In the other three stories, relationships are drawn with expertise that is more than life-like. Both the positive and negative sides of the Bengali and non-Bengali marriages or

inter-racial marriages are pointed out with utter accuracy. What this reviewer spentall their life together. finds most interesting about Lahiri's writing is that she is bold enough to show The author may have had felt that the last some events that would normally be left out as unpleasant. The aged couple do have fondness for each other through accepting their shortcomings. In a 'Choice of Accommodation', Amit brings his wife Megan to the wedding of an old flame where they end up making love in a dormitory he had stayed in as a teenager. While depicting the love making of a quarrelling couple, Ms Lahiri gives a description of a mother's body, a lover's

"He placed his hand on her hips, over the stretch marks that were like inlaid streaks of mother of pearl that would never fade, whose brilliance spoke only for the body's decay. He put his mouth to one of her breasts, flattened and drained after nursing two children....."

The stories evoke the predicament of Bengali students' assimilation in the US as in all her writings. Even though Amit was born in Massachusetts, he had always been complimented for his English and his accent. In 'Only Goodness', Sudha's parents fail to acknowledge their son's alcoholism, a trait most Bengalis have. Sudha is exasperated by her parents' lack of emotion in the relationship, even though they have The book is divided into two parts.

three stories are loosely connected to one another. The first story of this part had appeared in The New Yorker a while ago These two characters meet one another as children and again meet in a foreign land just before Hema is returning home to her wedding. Kaushik finds his father's second marriage disturbing, but his placid behavior does not give it away. It is only when his two step-sisters fiddle around with his mother's photos that he is appalled and drives away from home and across the border.

In the third and last story, Hema and Kaushik meet and spend a week in a sweltering relationship that does not have any promise of a future. They are only linked by some threads from their past. Kaushik's not being anywhere describes the immigrant way of life. Lahiri shows that to belong to two cultures is in fact not belonging anywhere. It is like one having only a few possessions which can be packed and left for a new destination on short notice. Kaushik does leave, eventually towards finality.

Jackie Kabir is a teacher and critic.