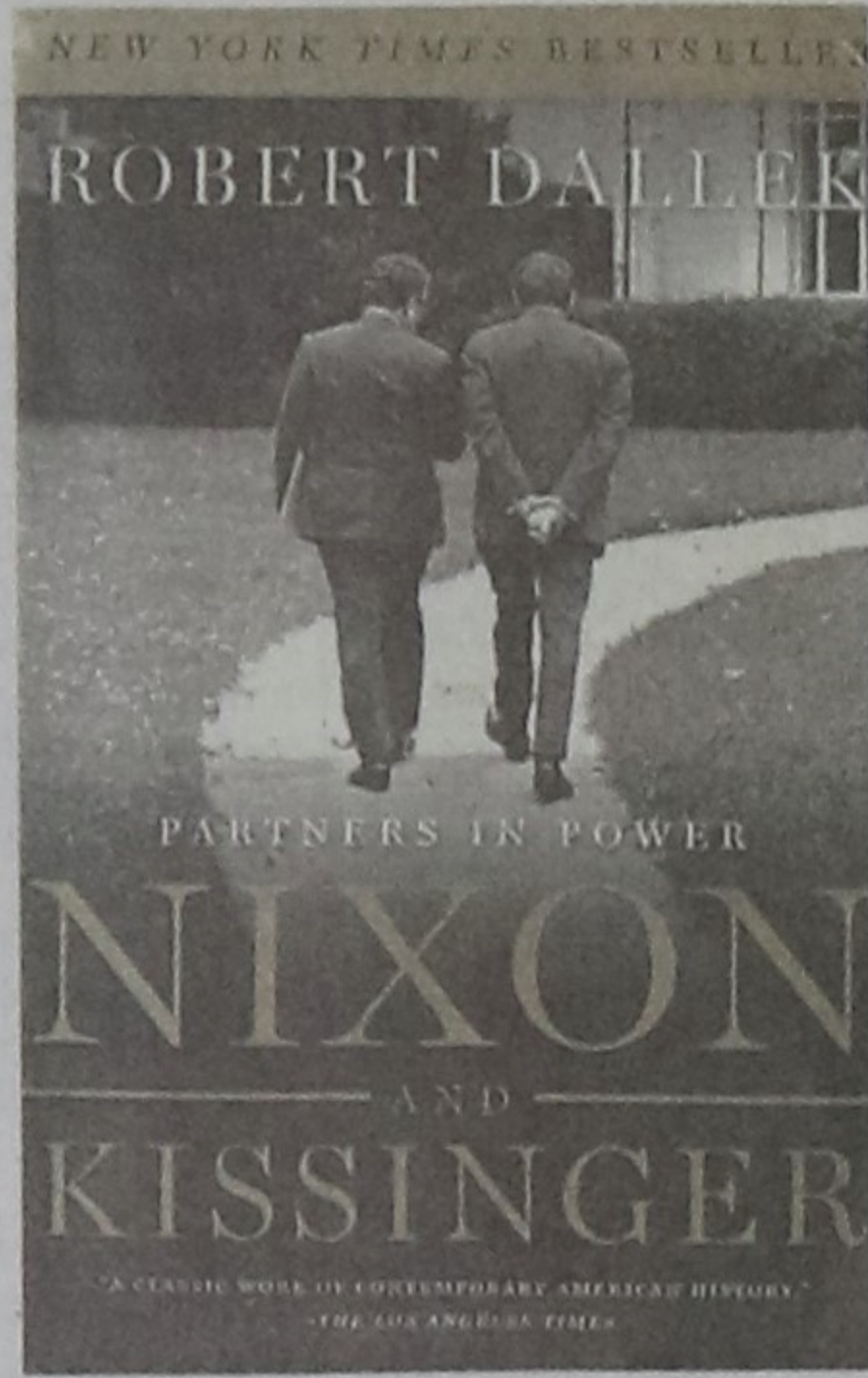


Syed Badrul Ahsan reviews three books on hubris, pain and struggle
Two arrogant men obsessed with themselves...

Henry Kissinger was not averse to letting his aides know what he thought of Nixon behind his back. The president was a 'madman'. Equally maddeningly, Nixon thought Kissinger was an overgrown child in constant need of reassurance.

BOTH men were obsessed with ambitions of coming by power and using it to the full. Both were arrogant and looked down on the world around them in huge disdain. And both, in the end, were recipients of less than admiration in the world of geopolitics. That is the core message which springs from Robert Dallek's analysis of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in *Partners in Power*. If there are people who still think Nixon and Kissinger were meant for each other, in that political sense of the meaning, they must brace themselves for some very hard truths. One of those truths is the degree of dislike the 37th President of the United States had for his secretary of state-cum-national security advisor. And Kissinger returned the favour in equal measure.

Begin with Kissinger. His has been a lifelong tale of looking for acceptance, in that schoolboyish sense of the term, by his peers. As a refugee from Germany, having fled to the United States with his parents, Kissinger developed the usual syndrome of the dispossessed trying to overcome their past by aiming for the future. And he did well academically, eventually making his way to Harvard, as a student and then as a teacher. But that did not whet his appetite for power and influence. When the Kennedy



Partners in Power
Nixon and Kissinger
Robert Dallek
HarperCollins

administration came in, he went all the way trying to find a place in it. It was only people like McGeorge Bundy who blocked his path. They clearly felt Kissinger was an upstart who obviously meant to upstage others. President Kennedy was not impressed by him. In the next few years, though, a Republican presidential hopeful, New York governor Nelson Rockefeller, was quite awed by Kissinger's brilliance. The Harvard academic would go on to be a senior advisor to Rockefeller, in the belief that the latter would someday make it to the White House.

One of the biggest ironies of modern American politics is the way Nixon and Kissinger found each other. In his years out of office, prior to becoming president, Nixon burnished his foreign policy credentials through travelling and writing for such prestigious journals as *Foreign Affairs*. For his part, Kissinger did almost likewise. More importantly, perhaps acknowledging the reality that Rockefeller's presidential ambitions now amounted to nothing, Kissinger made careful overtures to the Nixon camp which, for its part, had already begun to take interest in his analyses of foreign policy at a time when the Vietnam War threatened to tear American society apart. By 1968, as Nixon took his second shot at the White House and as opinion polls indicated a victory for him in November, Kissinger kept watch on the Paris peace negotiations between North Vietnam's Xuan Thuy and President Johnson's representative Averell Harriman. It was at this point that Nixon launched his 'peace with honour' campaign for Vietnam, prompting speculations that his staff were going busily into the job of convincing an increasingly hapless President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam that he ought to keep any deal over the war at bay --- because a Nixon presidency would have better propositions on offer.

And that was the beginning. In the years after January 1969, when Nixon was sworn in as President, and until August 1974, when Watergate forced him to quit office, Henry Kissinger and the president enjoyed a partnership that was as bizarre as it was constructive. The bizarre was in the huge degree of distrust that underlined relations between the two. Kissinger's temperament, always massaged by Nixon, constantly undermined Secretary of State William Rogers. Through gradual steps, Kissinger

arrogated to himself the rights and responsibilities relating to foreign policy that were properly Rogers'. He and Nixon took almost perverse pleasure in speaking of the State Department with contempt. The contempt would go so far as to keep Rogers out of the whole deal on the national security advisor's secret visit to Peking in July 1971. And yet the truth was that the president was not initially keen on sending Kissinger to meet China's leaders. Nixon was right in believing that Kissinger would in future take credit for initiating Washington's China policy. The president, obsessed with his place in history, wanted everyone --- and that included Kissinger --- to know and spread the word that the new turn in America's China policy was fundamentally his innovation.

Henry Kissinger was not averse to letting his aides know what he thought of Nixon behind his back. The president was a 'madman'. Equally maddeningly, Nixon thought Kissinger was an overgrown child in constant need of reassurance. Between them, though, they left a whole world changed, for better or worse. Their flaws were monumental. Both undermined governments they did not approve of, Chile's for instance. They looked away from Pakistan's atrocities on its Bengali population; and they dragged Cambodia into a conflict in their perverse belief that extending the war into its territory would halt supplies to the Vietcong.

In the end, both men saw their reputations take a nosedive. Nixon went through the humiliation of Watergate and became the first president in United States history to be forced to resign. Kissinger has been repeatedly excoriated by analysts for what they see as his Machiavellian contributions to global affairs. Dallek makes a compelling case for himself in this pretty revealing work.

AT A GLANCE

AYUB, BHUTTO AND ZIA
Syed Shabbir Hussain
Sang-e-Meel Publications
Lahore

A rather good analysis by a Pakistani journalist of three men who have had lasting impressions on their country's psyche. Of course, those impressions have not always, or for the major part, been positive. As the sub-heading makes it clear, all three men fell prey to their own flaws. A good read for any observer of South Asian history.

শামসুর রাহমান
Jibonmangoler Kobi
Ed. Mohammad Shahjahan
Bangla Prokashoni

This happens to be a well-documented work on the late poet. The degree of influence Shamsur Rahman exercised on the modern Bengali mind can never be in doubt. In this compilation of essays on him, various and often new aspects of his life are thrown up. Each one makes riveting reading. A good book for one who loves poets and poetry.

Understanding the Monga
In Northern Bangladesh
K. Maudood Elahi, Ifsat Ara
Academic Press and Publishers
Library

Every winter, monga takes ominous patterns in the northern regions of the country. With little or no work available to them, labourers and tillers find the going hard, to a point where starvation stares them in the face. Elahi and Ara explain the details and dimensions of the tragedy. They leave you worried.

Muslim Dharma Totto O Darshan
Dr. Aminul Islam
Mowla Brothers

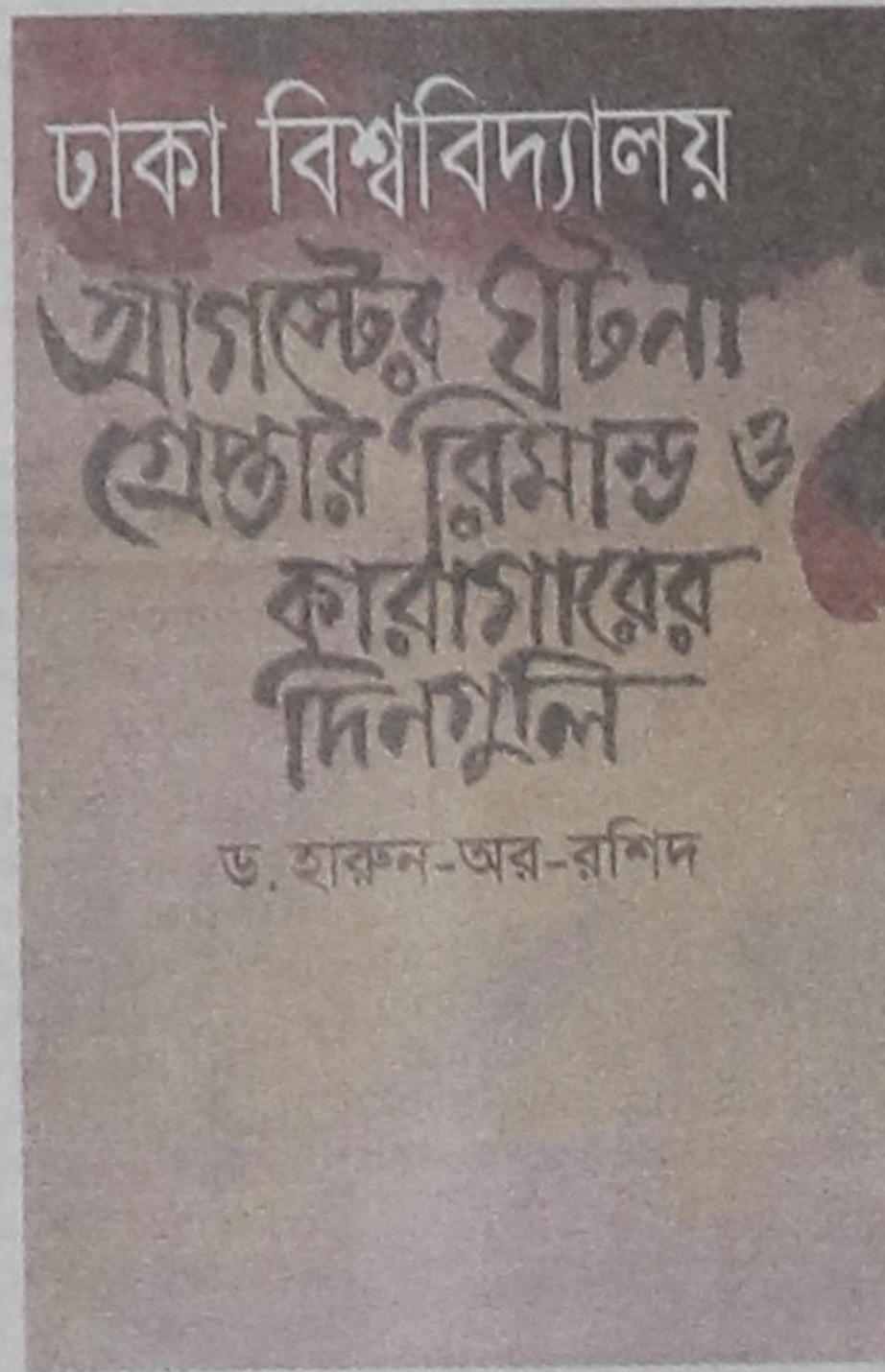
Aminul Islam's approach to life has been philosophical, in that literal sense of the meaning. As an academic involved in imparting the discipline, he has observed constantly the interplay of ideas in individual and collective life. In this work, he throws light, ample degrees of it, on the gems that constitute Muslim philosophical thinking.

Academics in incarceration and on remand...

The narrative makes depressing reading. Imagine the picture. An all-powerful state machinery, backed by a state of emergency enforced by the military, makes off with the two teachers, having first blind-folded them, into an area of darkness where they are both separately subjected to rigorous interrogation.

EVERYTHING that happened in August 2007 at Dhaka University, and around it, promises to remain a dark chapter in the history of this country. Of course, the university has seen some terribly bad, difficult days in the past. Take the 1960s, when the Ayub-Monem regime unleashed the corruption that would in subsequent times give student politics a bad name. The National Students Federation, with the support and encouragement of the Pakistani establishment, went cheerfully into the business of clubbing anyone and everyone promoting or upholding the Bengali secular democratic cause into silence. And then there was the scandal of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report on education. Finally, in the last phase of the Pakistan state in these parts, the frenzy with which Pakistan's soldiers went into murdering teachers and students alike at Dhaka University in 1971 remains a blot on civilization.

So how are the incidents of August 2007 any different from those Dhaka University witnessed earlier? One point ought to be enough to underscore the difference: in



Dhaka Bishwabidyalyo
August-er Ghotona Greptar
Remand O Karagarer Dinguli
Dr. Harun-ur-Rashid
Ananya

2007, the state machinery swooped on teachers, as it did on students, and carted off some teachers to prison on charges that were as unbelievable as they were untenable. Never before in the history of Dhaka University, indeed in the history of any university in the country for that matter, had teachers been subjected to the kind of humiliation that Harun-ur-Rashid and his colleagues went through. Rashid was --- and remains --- dean of the faculty of social sciences. That obviously did not earn him

any special favours from the state, governed as it was --- and is --- by emergency rules.

In this work, Dr. Harun-ur-Rashid records in the form of a daily diary the tribulations he, along with Dr. Anwar Hossain, went through between his arrest and eventual release from jail. A rather intriguing aspect of his telling of the tale relates to the meeting some senior military officers had with university teachers on the morning of the day Rashid and Hossain were taken into custody. The officers had done their homework, as evidenced by their inquiries into the whereabouts of Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique (who was abroad at the time). The officers even knew when Siddique had been scheduled to return home. That point taken note of, they sought the academics' cooperation in resolving the crisis that had arisen out of a bad incident between soldiers and students at the university playground. The officers promised that more such interaction with the teachers would follow. In the event, as Rashid notes, nothing happened. Rashid and Hossain were arrested; two other teachers on the list, Sadrul Amin and Nim Chandra Bhowmik, went on the run.

The narrative makes depressing reading. Imagine the picture. An all-powerful state machinery, backed by a state of emergency enforced by the military, makes off with the two teachers, having first blind-folded them, into an area of darkness where they are both separately subjected to rigorous interrogation. Rashid asserts that he was not subjected to physical maltreatment, but he does note that he was made to listen to the screams of others in torture nearby. Taken on remand twice, the academic, a noted observer of history, wondered if he would emerge unscathed into freedom. His thoughts on his family, the courage they were demonstrating under psychological

pressure, kept him going. So did the sympathy of his fellow prisoners, all of whom remained unconvinced about his and his colleagues' 'guilt'. But that is not enough to have them go home in freedom. Rashid and Hossain are forwarded to court, even as Sadrul Amin and Nim Chandra Bhowmik surrender to the authorities. In prison, Rashid spends time reading newspapers and listening to the radio. Freedom can only be comprehended in its fullness by the man deprived of it. That is precisely the way the author feels. He remembers the times when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spent year after endless year at Dhaka central jail. He recalls too other famous prisoners around the world. Courage of conviction kept them going. It is a similar situation for Professor Harun-ur-Rashid.

The author records in detail the gathering momentum in academic circles and across the country for his and his colleagues' release. The arrests of some Rajshahi University teachers, including a respected former vice chancellor, appall him. And then there is the matter of the trial. The military authorities promise to have the teachers freed within a specified time frame, as a way of staving off a threatened movement by the academic community. Eventually, they are all freed. But the freedom is tainted somewhat. Rashid, Hossain and Amin are all sentenced to two years' imprisonment each; Bhowmik is freed. Within hours, the three condemned teachers are 'pardoned' by the President of the republic and let off.

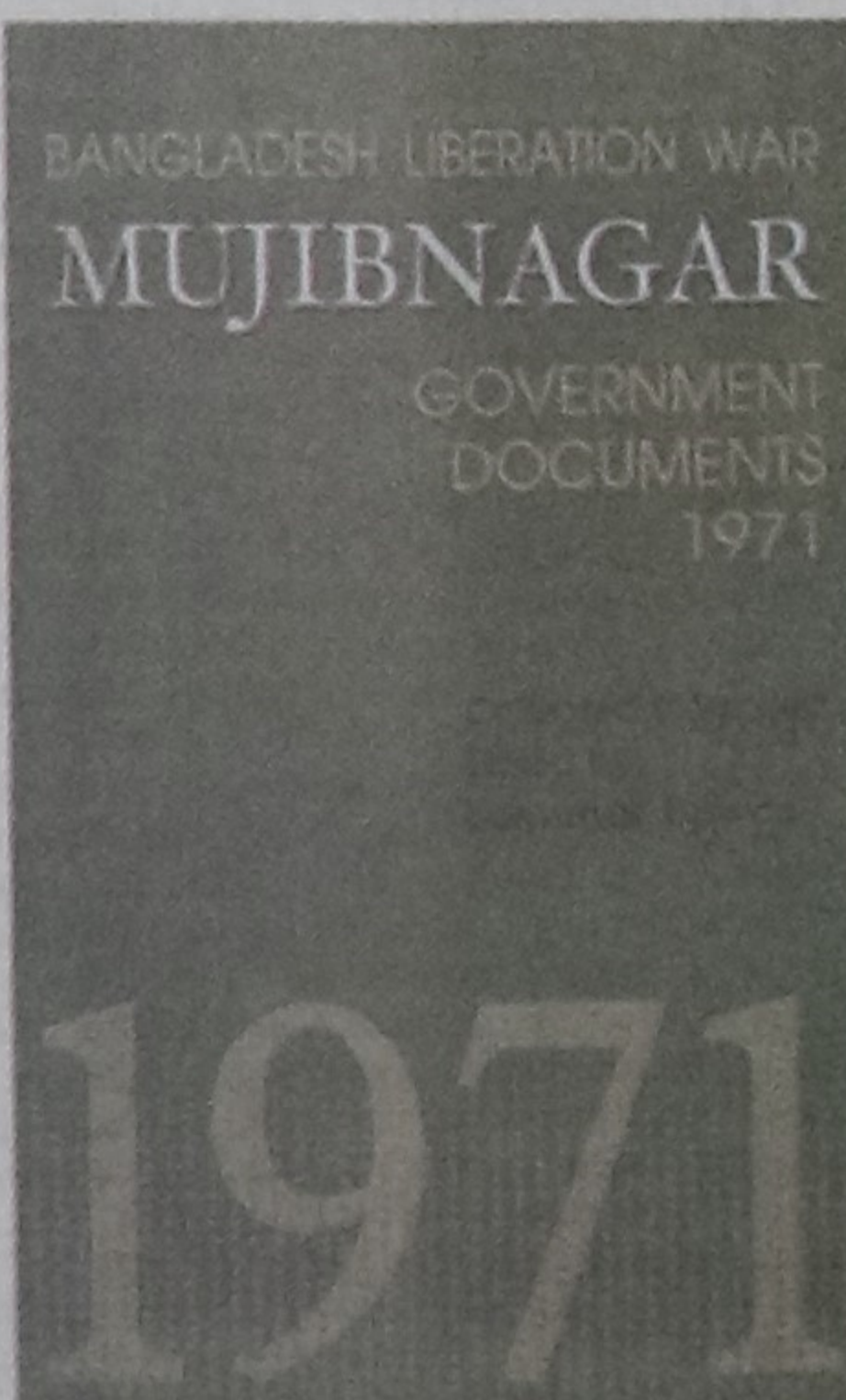
August-er Ghotona is a record of the darkness that consumed Dhaka University at a time when its students and teachers sought to uphold freedom of thought and expression. A price was paid for those ideals. Now you have the opportunity to read that story in detail.

Of a painful, beautiful war...

Even as the Pakistani occupying power sought to pass off the conflict as an internal crisis that the army was resolving through swift and ruthless action, the Mujibnagar government, through mapping strategy for the war, successfully convinced the world of the legitimacy of the Bengali struggle.

THE formation of the Provisional Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on April 17, 1971 remains a pivotal event in the history of this country. By and large known as the Mujibnagar government, it sketched the bare outlines of a nascent war of national liberation; and as the months wore on, those outlines were to be fleshed out in finer detail, to a point where the international community steadily began to acknowledge the gravity of the Bengali struggle.

This work is an appreciable record of that twilight struggle. Collected, compiled and edited by Sukumar Biswas, an indefatigable



Mujibnagar Government Documents 1971
Collected, compiled, edited by
Sukumar Biswas
Mowla Brothers

chronicler of the history of Bengali nationalism, it makes note of the tons of news reports which appeared across the globe in the nine months of the war, each report an update on developments on the battle front as well as the diplomatic scene. Even as the Pakistani occupying power sought to pass off the conflict as an internal crisis that the army was resolving through swift and ruthless action, the Mujibnagar government, through mapping strategy for the war, successfully convinced the world of the legitimacy of the Bengali struggle. Eleven zones were demarcated as focal points of the guerrilla struggle, an act that necessitated the formation of the Mukti Bahini. And, of course, decisions of that nature required the setting up of an administration, one that men like Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali and A.H.M. Quamruzzaman operated to the satisfaction of the nation. There were, to be sure, hiccups that threatened to derail the government, a threat that came from the Young Turks unhappy with Tajuddin Ahmed's assumption of office as prime minister. To his lasting credit, Ahmed was able to deflect all such onslaughts with firmness and the sharp intelligence he had always been known for.

Documents is evidence, therefore, of the poignant nature of the Bengali struggle. It

notes the significant role played by the journal published by the External Publicity Division of the Mujibnagar government as one more instance of the many steps taken by the political leadership to spread the word far and wide. News of the atrocities committed by the Pakistan occupation army was disseminated together with reports of the progress the country was making on the diplomatic front. Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury's presence in Europe was an enormous boost to the struggle; and with that came the regular defections by Bengali diplomats from their various positions at Pakistani missions abroad. For its part, the Mujibnagar government sent out emissaries to global capitals to generate support for the cause.

One of the invaluable contributions *Documents* makes to a preservation of national history is the inclusion in it of material, including government notes, press releases and photographs, as they were prepared and made available to the public in the course of the nine-month war.

In the month of victory, *Mujibnagar Government Documents* is a reminder of that long ago *annus mirabilis*.

Syed Badrul Ahsan's political biography of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is in progress.

Tapestry of an artist's life

Takir Hossain is fascinated by a biography

THE work emerged from Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy quite a while ago. Art aficionados have enjoyed Murtaja Baseer's painting from 1950 and all the way up to 2003. Baseer's major specialty is painting and drawing and it is this inclination which has helped him to hold his position in the forefront of the Bangladeshi art scene. But his profound grasp and expression regarding other mediums are equally praiseworthy. He is exceedingly fond of experimenting and trying out new forms and techniques. To search for fresh themes and present them with a novel approach is one of his characteristics.

The book has mainly focused on Baseer's major works of the last sixty years. The photographic quality is remarkable and encompasses many horizons. Hasnat Abdul Hye has written the only essay in this book. The article is thought-provoking and cerebrally enlightening. Hye has known the artist long and so could easily interpret the artist's life.

Murtaja Baseer has carved a path distinctly his own in our art arena with significant lines, forms and themes. Baseer joined Dacca Government Institute of Arts as a student in 1949 after the establishment of the institute the previous year. At the Arts Institute, Baseer developed a bonding with Aminul Islam, who was a year senior to him. Both shared certain political beliefs and values. Artists Rashid Choudhury, Quayum Chowdhury and Abdur Razzaque and prominent lyricist Altaf Mahmood were his batch mates. Baseer came under the influence of left politics when he was a student of class nine in 1947. He became a member of the student wing of the communist party. In 1950, he was arrested while putting up a party poster on a wall. After five months in prison, he was released. After appearing in the final examination in 1954, Baseer went to Calcutta to attend an art appreciation course at the Ashutosh Museum. On returning from Calcutta, Baseer taught at Nawabpur Government High School, Dhaka, as an art teacher for a short time. He decided to go to Florence for higher studies in 1956 but his father wanted him to go to Paris. Baseer preferred Florence because Aminul Islam was already studying there. His father agreed to pay for all expenses for his study in Florence for two years. But before Baseer reached Florence, Islam had left. Baseer was disappointed and depressed, but gradually he settled down in the city of the Renaissance. In 1958, his first solo exhibition was held in Florence. After two years in Florence, Baseer left Italy for London, where he worked for the

BBC Bengali Service as a broadcaster.

Baseer returned home from London after six months. His mother was seriously ill and his father told him to come home. After returning to Dhaka, he started looking for a job. Finding no employment in Dhaka, he went off to Karachi. He came in contact with Mr. Watson, the Director of American Friends of the Middle East. In 1959, he invited Murtaja Baseer to organise a solo exhibition in Karachi. His next exhibition was held in Dhaka in 1959. That year, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the famous Urdu poet, came to Dhaka. They had met each other in London. Faiz proposed organising a Baseer solo exhibition in Lahore. In 1960, Pakistan Arts Council, Lahore organised the exhibition; it earned Baseer much acclaim. The year 1962 was a remarkable year in Baseer's life. That year, he got married. In 1971, Baseer left the country for Paris with his family. Baseer stayed in Paris till June 1973. During those years, he studied mosaic and etching at Beaux Arts, a recognised arts institute. In 1973, he returned to Dhaka and joined



Murtaja Baseer
Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Ed Subir Choudhury

Chittagong University as an assistant professor. This was the first full time job in his life. It gave him a steady income and freed his family of worry. In 1975, he received the Shilpakala Academy Award and in 1980 the Ekushey Padak.

Baseer's creativity has spanned other areas as well. He wrote the story and screenplay of the Urdu film *Karwan* in 1963. He worked as a screenplay writer, art director and chief assistant director in the Bangla film *Nadi O Nari* in 1964 and as art director for the Urdu movie *Kaise Kahoon* in 1965. Baseer published *Kancher Pakhir Gaan*, a collection of short stories, in 1969. He has a number of collections of poetry. *Ultramarine* is one of his Bengali novels, published in 1979.

Takir Hossain is a journalist and art critic.