

Policies, priorities and the way forward

Mustafizur Rahman examines some key issues in a work

THIS volume, published by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), is an important contribution to the current discourse and debate on a number of key issues which inform Bangladesh's developmental choices and options from near and medium term perspectives. The volume is the outcome of a two-day conference on "Development with Equity and Justice: Immediate Tasks for the Newly Elected Government" organised by the CPD in Dhaka on March 28-29, 2009. The volume contains seven articles on a broad spectrum of areas that include macroeconomic management issues, particularly in view of the global financial crisis as also sectoral issues that include food and energy security, employment generation, boro production and restructuring of the jute manufacturing sector. A distinctive feature of the volume is that it also contains reports on the discussions held on the five papers presented at the conference which provide succinct summaries of the rich exchange of ideas that took place following presentation of the papers.

The first chapter on *Macroeconomic Management in the Face of Global Challenges* is authored by Mustafizur Rahman, Debapriya Bhattacharya, Md Ashiq Iqbal, Towfiqul Islam Khan and Tapas Kumar Paul. The chapter concentrates on the nature of the ongoing financial crisis, transmission channels through which the crisis is impacting on the increasingly globalised Bangladesh economy including export, import, remittance, aid and FDI flows. The chapter evaluates the impact of the crisis on the real economy and documents the demands put forward by major stakeholder groups in view of this. The paper comes up with a number of recommendations to stimulate domestic demand, provide incentives to export-oriented industries, encourage domestic and foreign investment and address adverse impacts of the crisis on the

Bangladesh economy. Indeed, some of these recommendations have been subsequently reflected in the stimulus packages that had since been announced by the GoB in April 2009 and subsequently in the budget for FY 2009-10.

The chapter on *Food Security and Containing Price Escalation: Facts and Implication for Policy* by Mahabub Hossain and Uttam Deb provides a detailed analysis of the state of food production and import, food availability, and the dynamics of food prices in domestic and global markets. The chapter points to the challenges related to containing food price volatility and comes up with a number of policy suggestions geared towards increasing domestic production, stabilisation of food prices in the domestic market, fiscal-monetary measures to contain food inflation, strengthening marketing infrastructure in food and maintaining food security through collaboration with South Asian countries.

The chapter on *100-Day Employment Generation Programme: Challenges of Effective Implementation*, authored by Fahmida Khatun, Kazi Mahmudur Rahman and Ashiqun Nabi, provides an assessment of the EGP based on data generated through primary survey and information gleaned from secondary sources. The article undertakes a critical assessment of, *inter alia*, design and planning of the programme, targeting, timeframe, selection of beneficiaries, fund release mechanism, wage rates, record keeping and monitoring of the employment generation programme. The authors have put forward concrete recommendations with a view to raising the efficacy of the programme in each of the aforesaid areas. The chapter also reviews the experience of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of India and draws useful insights for implementation of the EGP in the Bangladesh context.

The article on *Energy Sector: Addressing Challenges of Adding New Capacities*, authored by M

Fouzul Kabir Khan, reviews the most current data and information on the energy sector focusing on availability of natural gas, offshore gas exploration situation, gas reserves, transmission and distribution of power, generation, consumption and distribution of electricity. The chapter makes an assessment of recent developments in various power sector components and attendant policy reforms undertaken in the recent past to address the related problems. The chapter provides a criti-



Development of Bangladesh with Equity and Justice: Immediate Tasks for the New Government
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

cal examination of key strategic initiatives to stimulate power sector development including procurement, design of national coal policy, implementation of projects, corporatisation of the energy sector, energy conservation and the state of overall governance in the energy sector. The chapter focuses on challenges facing the government regarding the power sector and the opportunities that it could explore in this regard. The chapter comes up with a number of practical suggestions with

regard to energy security and energy sector development over both short and medium term.

The chapter on *Information and Communication Technology for Development: Immediate Doables* by Ananya Raihan starts with an overview of the state of the ICT in Bangladesh and makes an assessment of the key institutions involved in this sector. The paper presents a road map for moving towards a knowledge-based society in Bangladesh through best use of ICT and offers an outline for prioritised activities that could be undertaken as part of a five-year plan of development. The chapter articulates the important role that various relevant actors including institutions, government ministries and private sector should play, and highlights infrastructures that need to be put in place to move towards a digital Bangladesh. The chapter also spells out the basic building blocks that implementation of a comprehensive plan of action in this regard will entail.

The chapter on *Higher Boro Production for Food Security: An Integrated Study* by Uttam Deb, Nafisa Khaled, Subir Kanti Bairagi, Muhammad Al Amin and Ashiqun Nabi looks at production of the boro crop from the vantage point of ensuring food security in Bangladesh. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of the spatial features of boro production in Bangladesh. It reviews the input delivery mechanism in place and the attendant institutional arrangements for input delivery and credit distribution and undertakes a close examination of the various strategies being pursued in those areas. The chapter also presents a detailed analysis of the policies pursued over the recent past with regard to distribution of inputs and subsidy as well as the output and suggests policy interventions that are required in some key areas including seed supply, fertiliser delivery, procurement strategy and agricultural credit.

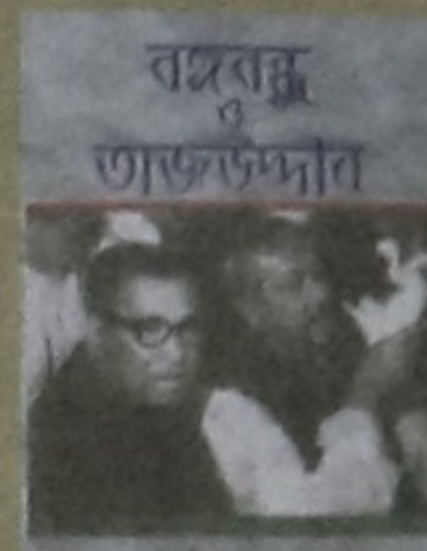
The chapter on *Restructuring of the Jute Manufacturing Sector in*

Bangladesh at Cross-Roads: Challenges and the Way Out authored by Khondaker Golam Moazzem and Sharmin Chowdhury analyses the performance of public and private sector jute mills in a comparative setting, and examines weaknesses that undermine the performance of the public sector jute mills in Bangladesh. The discussion in the chapter is based on an extensive survey of a large number of jute mills carried out with a view to have an indepth understanding of structure of production, technical and operational aspects and the dynamics of cost, productivity, revenue earnings and profit and status of debt in the jute industry at the enterprise level. The chapter provides a number of practical suggestions to raise the level of performance of the jute industry in Bangladesh through improvements in productivity, reduction in production cost, enhancement of marketing efficiency and raising the efficacy of related institutions. The chapter recommends a number of steps towards reform and restructuring of public sector jute mills under the BJMC with a view to making these enterprises operationally profitable and viable.

As the preface to the volume from Debapriya Bhattacharya states, "the present publication needs to be considered in the context of CPD's sustained efforts to use its analytical research and policy dialogues to catalyse an inclusive and participatory development process in Bangladesh." In continuation of this spirit, one would like to hope that this volume will be extensively made use of by policymakers, development practitioners and experts who have an interest in identifying policy initiatives and strategic interventions that are required to address attendant problems related to each of the areas taken up in this volume.

Professor Mustafizur Rahman is Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue.

AT A GLANCE



Bangabandhu O Tajuddin
Amir Hossain
Adorn Publication

The ties between Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Tajuddin Ahmed were instrumental in preparing and leading Bengalis to independent nationhood in 1971. In this rather enlightening work, Amir Hossain explores the nature of the collaboration between the two men. Their falling out was to prove a disaster for the country.

The Bangladesh Economy
Diagnoses and Prescriptions
Ed. Syed Saad Andaleeb
The University Press Limited

This happens to be an extremely informative compendium on the many issues that confront Bangladesh, in that economic sense of the term. In other words, the work is a representation of all the ills the country has been home to, along with suggestions vis-a-vis corrective measures. Andaleeb does a good job of editing the book.

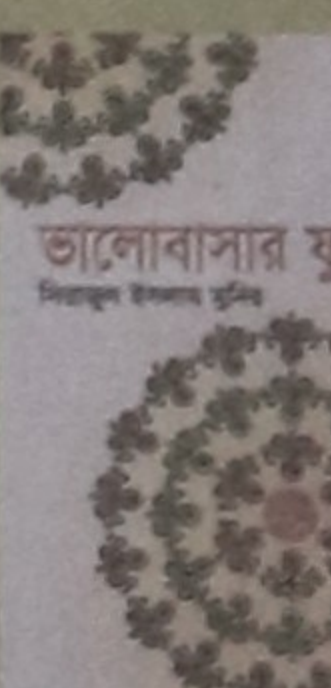


America Back On Track
Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Viking

Edward Kennedy died a few days ago. In this work, which was published three years ago, the late American politician spells out his thoughts on the various issues he believes concern the future of the United States. As a senator who has been instrumental in seeing as many as 3,000 pieces of legislation passed, Kennedy speaks with clarity here.

Bhalobashar Phool
Sirajul Islam Munir
Pearl Publications

These are the thoughts of a young man whose devotion to things literary comes through in the write-ups here. Call them essays or call them stories. The fact is that Munir explores ideas and in doing that brings all his modern sensibilities into work. This is definitely a pointer to the future. The author has his future marked out, to our delight.



Relationships and then the complexities

Tulip Chowdhury prances down a street of human emotions

TRUST Me, a collection of short stories by John Updike, is like an assortment of priceless valuables. This book contains one gem after another. The stories have to be savoured one at a time and returned to for more. All most all the twenty-two stories are about white, middleclass men and women caught in turmoil of life, what could be and what could not be and different paradoxes of life.

In the opening pages is a story of a betrayal of trust. A child's trust in jumping into the water in the belief that his father will catch him goes awry. The same father as a husband assures his frantic wife of a smooth flight as they travel by air. And yet the journey ends with an emergency landing. The man is confident of himself and his beliefs and yet fate seems to intervene and things go topsy-turvy. When his children are grown up the father trusts them in different aspects of life. But his own trust is breached as his son persuades him to take hashish in a biscuit.

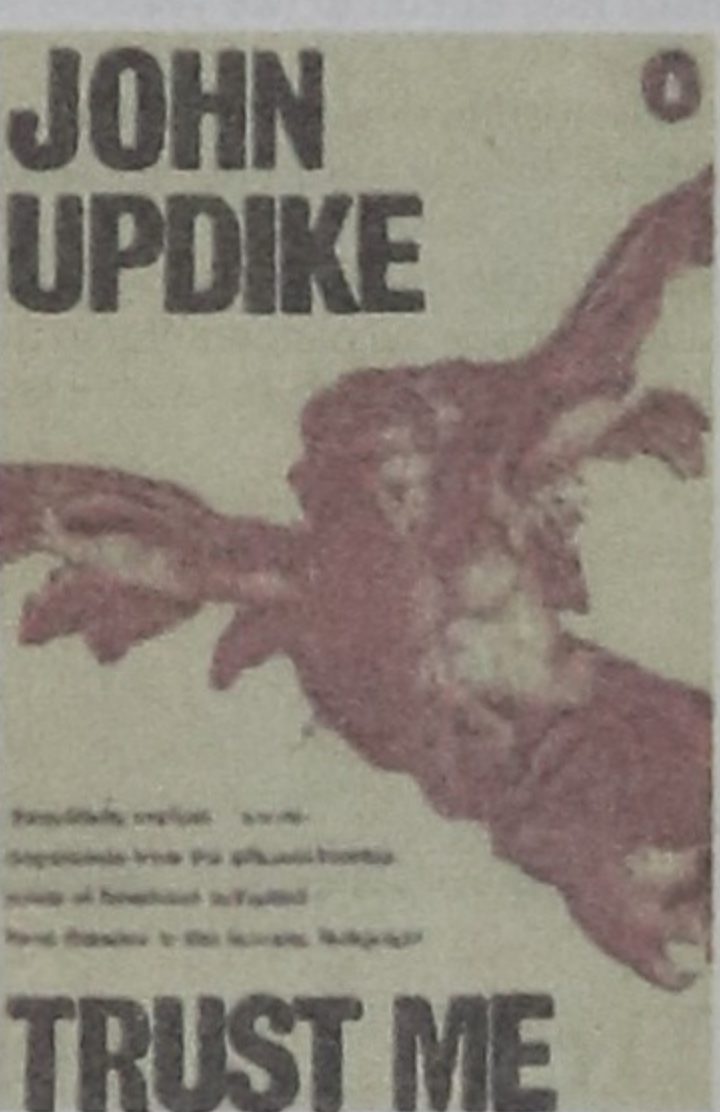
Moving on to 'Killing', the reader comes to a tale in which a daughter is forced to make the decision of not putting the terminally ill father on life support. She does so because it is her father's wish. And yet there is in her heart a guilty feeling that she is killing him, that he could have lived much longer if she had forced him onto life support. This terrible feeling of

guilt takes away the peace of her soul. Like many human beings she is unsure of herself, she faces a dilemma. Has she done the right thing by listening to her father? Will the people around her accuse her of killing her father?

'Unstuck' comes with the story of a husband stuck in deep snow early in the morning. He had moved to the place with his wife only few days back. A neighbor shouts out something that he fails to understand. But he imagines that she may be making fun of him. He feels foolish as passing people make various remarks. However, at the end the wife turns up and together they are able to move the car. The story focuses on the companionship and love of a husband and wife. The story, 'Learn a Trade', is the tale of a father's earnest request to a son to become a doctor. The son is totally absorbed in making mobile phones in his basement. The man's second wife also tries to help the son with a steady job. However, the son's mother, the protagonist's first wife, is convinced that a person should be allowed to be in the profession that interests him or her. While the protagonist argues with the first wife she tells him that she had allowed him to do what he liked all along. The story seems to shake adults who demand from children what they did not give into life.

Midway into the book, 'Death of Distant Friends' comes with

reminiscences of friends who have lived for their destined time and left behind memories upon their death. This is like a character analysis of some dead friends, points to ponder about them. For instance,



Trust Me
John Updike
Fawcett Crest Books

after Miss Merrymount passes away the narrator of the story concludes,

"I imagine Miss Merrymount's death, not too many months after this, as a final, serenely flat line on the hospital monitor attached to

her. Something sardonic in that flat line too, of unviolated rectitude, of magnificent patience with a world that for over ninety years failed to prove itself other than disappointing."

'The Other' is a tale of two twins. The protagonist Hank is in love with one of them, Priscilla. When they are very much in love and ready to get married Priscilla tells him of her identical twin sister. From then on Hank is obsessed with thoughts of Susan, the other twin. He wonders if physically she is just like his fiancée or may be a little different. He wonders if the other sister's character is like Priscilla too. He is unable to shake off thoughts about Susan and when finally he meets her he finds himself totally engrossed with her. He is surprised at his own feelings for her. The question is, will Susan too have feelings for him? Closely following comes the story, 'Leaf Season', a tale that arouses the reader's feelings of the contentedness of family life. In it Updike allows himself a rare sally in the present tense to give this picture of families who come together on a New England farm for the weekend, a feeling of immediacy that is indeed powerful.

The story, 'The Other Woman', leads the reader towards the end of the book and leaves the reader with a sad feeling that all good things must come to end. In this story, Ed suddenly comes upon his wife

Carol's extramarital affair. As it happens he is glad to find an excuse to tell his wife that he wants to end the marriage. Lately he has been finding life with Carol a drag. And yet his wife is ready to give up the affair. Still he moves away and his wife continues to have her affair with Jayson. Jayson's wife is in the dark about her husband's affair. Ed continues to caution Carol about Jayson's wife. He had met her and somehow he did not want to hurt her. Ed is surprised at himself for his own sympathy for the other woman. The story reflects upon human emotions caught in different relationships.

Among the twenty-two stories in *Trust Me*, six of them focus on men-women relationships and the complexities that often arise among them. It makes a reader sometimes wonder if Updike could not have gone to other plots, chosen form a wider array of life. However, the stories are thought provoking. Updike throws himself into the voices and hearts of his characters. He has created characters that are so fully realized that the reader feels as though they are well known people and so the short stories linger in the mind. The climax of each story is reached with twists and turns and often takes the reader by surprise.

Tulip Chowdhury writes poetry and fiction and is a teacher.

Celebrating women

Charles R. Larson hasn't a clue about the title of a novel

THE quotation from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* at the beginning of Ali Sethi's novel is a dead give away: "The difficult task of knowing another soul is not for young gentlemen whose consciousness is chiefly made up of their own wishes." Eighty pages into the story, one of the main characters is reading *Middlemarch*. At the novel's conclusion, there's a quotation from Tolstoy: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Granted, Tolstoy wasn't a Victorian, but his novels share numerous characteristics with his English counterparts: lengthy explorations of family dynamics, rapid social change, and so on.

These are also the stuff of Ali Sethi's sweeping debut novel, *The Wish Maker*. At a recent question and answer session after the author gave a reading in Bethesda, Maryland, he answered a query about Victorian novels-- confessed, in fact, that he enjoyed them. More importantly, he said that many Bengali novels also have the same shape and social consciousness. Certainly these characteristics work well for him in his own novel: covering, roughly, a period in Pakistani history from Partition (1947) to 9/11. Never, however, can it be said that Sethi's narrative employs chronological order. Rather, there are numerous lengthy flashbacks (some perhaps too long) with his characters locked into historical events in his country's often troubled history.

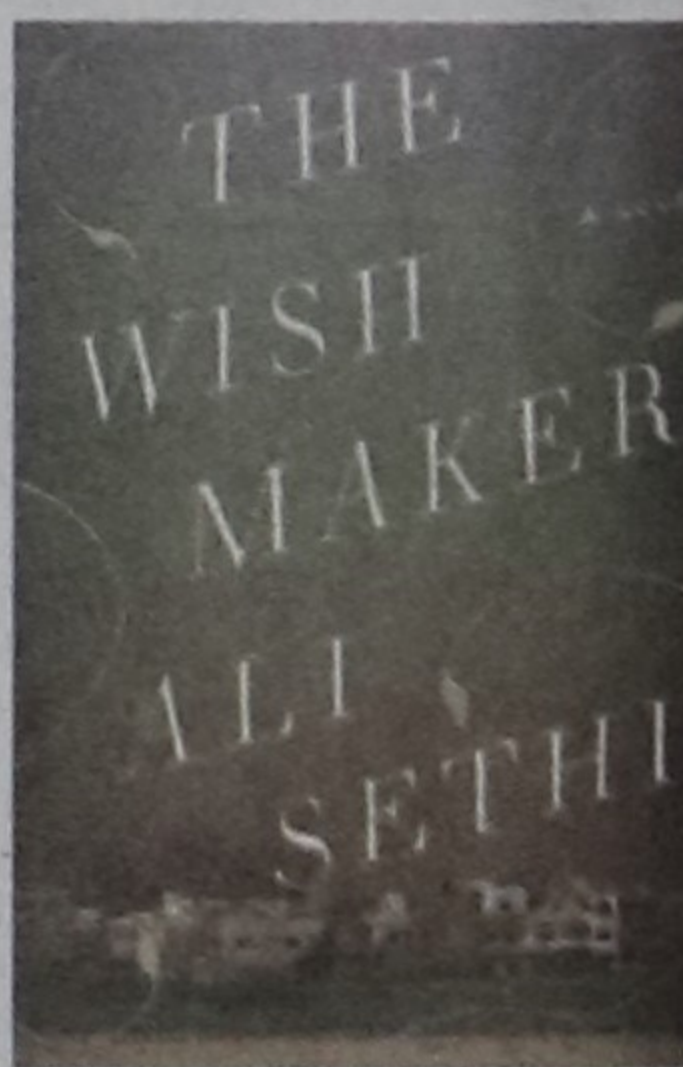
Two threads work well for this ambitious novel: the troublesome angst of adolescence and the slow but incremental advance of women's rights in a conservative Muslim culture. For the former, Sethi, surprisingly, uses his masculine narrator, Zaki Shirazi, not so much to chronicle his own awakening sexuality as that of his female cousin, Samar Api, as well as her often more worldly girlfriends'. The issue of women's empowerment is explored in parallel fashion by using Zaki's mother, a pioneer journalist, who began her writing career after her husband's (and the narrator's) death, two months before the birth of their son.

Vividly, tellingly, the author depicts an entire generation of Pakistani youths, mostly in the 1980s and 90s, exploring promiscuity, alcohol, and drugs all forbidden, of course, by their faith. Young men and women meet secretly without the knowledge of their parents (sometimes the result of Internet arrangements), watch pornographic films, get high, and sometimes get pregnant. It all seems fairly universal until you think about these activities in conservative societies. Needless to say, these indulgences are those of the children of well-to-do families, who often shower their offspring with too much money. Thus the focus, in part, is upon adoles-

cent rebellion getting away with what's possible, especially out of the eyesight of their elders.

While their parents are much more traditional, Zaki's mother, Zakia, is equally serious about her own attempts to shake up society. She becomes the editor of a publication called *Women's Journal*, boldly confronting the status of women in Pakistan. Politically, the journal becomes one of the early supporters of Benazir Bhutto's move into politics, but then when Bhutto and her husband are accused of corruption, the journal's staff (including Zaki's mother) realize that their own ideals have been compromised. The entire narrative of *The Wish Maker* is steeped in political reality: the rise and fall of Pakistan's leaders, the volatility and abuse of governments and their often short-lived leaders.

Late in the story, Zaki's own situation takes center stage, but by that time the female characters



The Wish Maker
Ali Sethi
Riverhead, 420 pp., \$25.95

have already been established as the novel's primary focus. These female characters are, in fact, the novel's imaginative center. Their lives shape most events in the story and tell us more about social change than a concentration on masculine characters would. In the final sections, Zaki has his own horizons to confront at a private boys' school, his own issues with education, and maturity, as well as his determination to continue his advanced education (as the author did) in the United States, but by that time the women in his extended family have become much more interesting.

The Wish Maker is an often lush and revealing story about the last fifty years of life in Pakistan, especially for the privileged. But don't ask me what the title means. I haven't a clue.

Charles R. Larson is Professor of Literature at American University, in Washington, D.C.

The man behind insurance

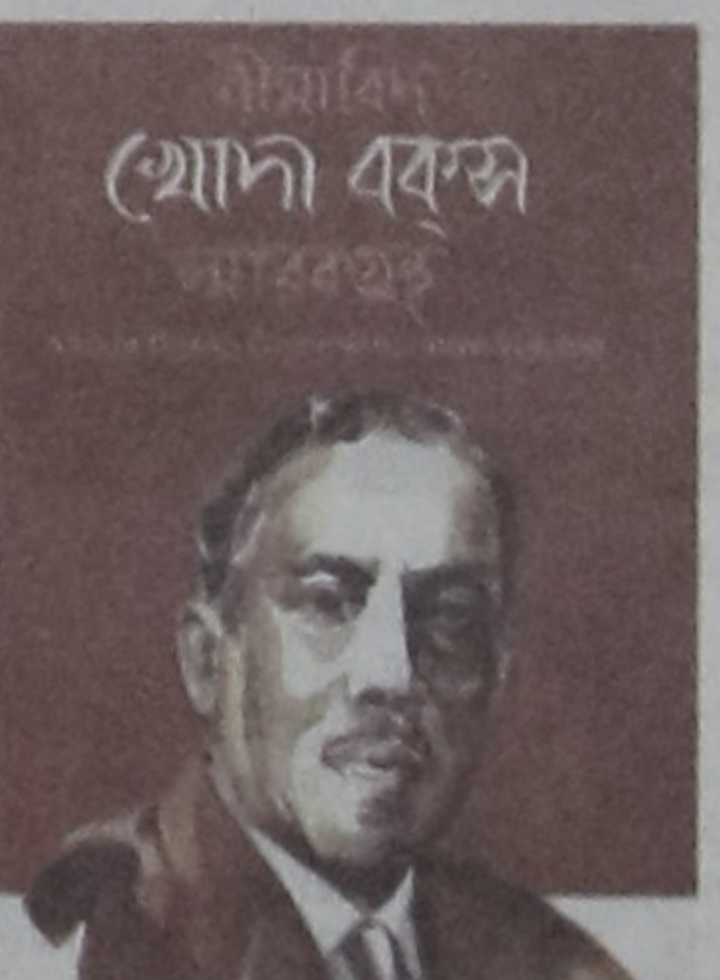
Subrata Kumar Das appreciates a commemorative volume

Khuda Buksh Memorial Trust and Foundation, Dhanmondi, Dhaka, has done a great job through publishing a bilingual (Bangla and English) commemorative work on Khuda Buksh, the pioneer personality in the insurance arena of Bangladesh. The formidable volume with an appealing cover will surely help many get acquainted with this exemplary personality who will remain an unforgettable part of the history of insurance in these parts. And he did that at a time when few people in the Indian subcontinent had any interest in it.

Khuda Buksh was born on February 1, 1912 in Damodra, Shariatpur (erstwhile Faridpur). He passed his entrance (matriculation) examination from Shamacharan Edward Institution, in 1929. Later on, he completed Intermediate Examination from Islamia College (presently Moulana Azad College), Kolkata, India in 1931. In 1933 he got admitted to B.A. (Hons) in Presidency College, Kolkata. In December 1935 he joined Oriental Government Security Life Assurance Company Kolkata, India (OGSLA) as a life insurance agent.

He was promoted to the position of Inspector of OGSLA in 1946. In 1952 Khuda Buksh left OGSLA and joined as Life Manager, Eastern Federal Union Insurance Company Limited (EFU), East Pakistan. As Life Manager, Khuda Buksh worked tirelessly to overcome ingrained religious and cultural prejudices against life insurance. His passion, devotion and unique sales strategies led him to train, motivate, and manage thousands of salesmen during his long career. He created a large number of field organizations from scratch and under his leadership life insurance flourished in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). During his overall tenure in East Pakistan, life insurance was synonymous with Khuda Buksh. He was subsequently promoted to Life Manager, Deputy General Manager and General Manager in 1960, 1963 and 1966 respectively of EFU Life department, Pakistan.

With the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1971 a new era started. In 1972 all life insurance companies were nationalised in Bangladesh. Khuda Buksh was chosen as one of the directors of the Surma Jiban



Khuda Buksh Smarak Grantha
Khuda Buksh Memorial Trust & Foundation, Dhaka

Bima Corporation. In 14 May 1973 Khuda Buksh was nominated Managing Director of Jiban Bima Corporation (JBC). However, he was relieved by the Bangladesh government from JBC in November 1973 following vehement trade union unrest. He died on 13 May 1974

Along with his activities as an administrator, he published a good number of articles on insurance; its prospects and possibilities. His articles 'Selling Life Insurance Successfully - A Career' (1961), 'Life Insurance Selling - A Profession' (1965), 'Your Duty Onerous', 'Symposium of Life Insurance' (1967), 'A Reminiscence: When I look back' (1967), 'Amar Sritikatha' (1967) are some very significant writings from his pen.

All this information about Khuda Buksh is a treasure that the book provides. Excluding the first three formal sections called *Mukhobondho* (Forward), *Bhumica* (Introduction) and *Kritojnata* (Gratefulness), the main section is divided into five parts. The first one comprises interviews and reminiscences of people who are or were associated with insurance. In the second part we come across insurance personalities of Pakistan who have given interviews or written about Khuda Buksh. The same sort of writing but by people belonging to his friends' circle and those close to him are presented in the third part. In the fourth, we get some writings by Khuda Buksh himself

and his directives to the people engaged in insurance. The speeches of Khuda Buksh along with his interviews, letters and others are neatly organised in the last, namely, the fifth part. The *Mukhobondho* of the books is by M. Harunur Rashid while the *Bhumica* has come from the pen of Sazzadur Rahman, on behalf on the editorial board.

There is no doubt that *Khuda Buksh Smarak Grantha* is a production on an iconic person who should not go into oblivion. The foundation has done a creditable job in bringing out the known and unknown facts about this personality three decades after his death. It might be worth mentioning here that another book, titled *Khuda Buksh: An Icon of Life Insurance*, is in the pipeline --- to be published through research by Obaidur Rahim, a member of the editorial board of the present book.

Subrata Kumar Das, a teacher and essayist, has set up a web site www.bangladeshinews.com