



DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

BOOK EXCERPT: NONFICTION

## Blood, sweat, and football

*Plaatik: An Anthology of Bangladesh's Football Culture*, published by The Mighty Press today (November 24) in celebration of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, is a collection of essays reflecting Bangladesh's passion for football. In this excerpt from the book, titled "Blood", Jamal Bhuyan, captain of the Bangladesh national football team, reflects on his experience of getting shot in Copenhagen, and how he eventually returned to the pitch.

JAMAL BHUYAN

I was shot four times. When you hear about a story of gun violence in the news, you hardly ever think about the details. You don't think about how loud a gunshot can get. You don't think about the aftermath of it all or how badly it would hurt if you get shot. Or how all your senses go numb as you try and run faster than the bullet.

I realise this is a very grim start to a football story. But life isn't always rosy—at least it hasn't been for me.

I was 16 at the time. A young boy ready to take on the world, ready to take on any challenge. Just a few months before the incident, I had signed my first professional contract with FC Copenhagen and I quickly established myself as one of the standout players for their youth team. Maybe that's why I cried as much as I did for as long as I did lying on that hospital bed. Life had been promising me the world at the time.

Every Friday, my friends and I would go for indoor football in one of our local grounds. I would play at every chance I got—before training, after school, with strangers, with friends. But this one Friday was unlike any other. I was with my friends in my neighbourhood, and we were getting ready to go to the ground. All of a sudden, a guy showed up and told us to leave the premises immediately. Leave? From our own hood? Not a chance. Maybe it was our teenage aggression that didn't listen, or just poor luck, because we stayed. And within a minute, even before we could realise what was happening, there were gunshots. We got

caught in the middle of a gang war.

I loved Copenhagen, but this was the side of the city that you didn't want any part of. Some of my friends got shot too that day. I still don't know how exactly I survived after getting shot on the elbow, and thrice on my ribs with one bullet narrowly missing my heart. All I remember was panic and a lot of red. I was in a coma for two days and the next thing I remember is spending four excruciating months on a hospital bed.

The doctors told me that I should forget about playing football. Their report said I was 35% disabled because of the damage caused by those four bullets. Three of my fingers on my right hand don't function even to this day. In fact, I don't feel anything if someone touches my right arm as well. I was told to focus on my studies and think of another career path.

But I just had one thing on my mind: I was going to be back on the pitch again and prove everyone wrong.

Prior to FC Copenhagen, I was at Brøndby playing for their youth team. I wasn't a regular starting XI player at the time, but I knew I had to play more often in order to develop my game. This one season, Brøndby made it to the final and I came off the bench to score the only goal of the match. I thought I had broken into the first XI for sure with that goal, but I still wasn't getting the chance to play. So I decided to talk to my manager to understand what was happening. I told him that I needed to play regularly or else I would have to look for a new club. When he asked me where I was going to go instead, I said FC Copenhagen. To this day, I remember his reaction clearly. He

laughed at me and told me that there was no way they'd take me because FC Copenhagen were the best team in the country.

As soon as he said that, I made up my mind. In my head I was thinking, "This dude doesn't even believe in me, so why should I even be here and play for him?"

Two days later, I was at FC Copenhagen for a trial. I must have impressed them, because after a few days, they offered me my first professional contract which I was more than happy to decorate with my signature.

I was killing it at FC Copenhagen. The team was great, and I was starting more frequently than I was before. Michael Laudrup's son was in our team, and we played in the same position, but I'd get the nod to start more often than not. I feel I was on the verge of breaking into the first team when the shooting happened.

Lying on that hospital bed and staring at the white ceiling, I had to be practical and think of back-up options but as the days went by, the fire in my belly kept getting stronger. That's why I went back to school and finished my education while still giving it my all to become a professional footballer. I did fight back to put myself in a position to play again and eventually, I made my senior debut at a Danish club called Hellerup IK while also teaching History and English at a high school at the time. I was finally back on the pitch and playing professionally.

This text has been condensed for brevity. *Plaatik: An Anthology of Bangladesh's Football Culture* is available for sale at [plaatik.com/book](http://plaatik.com/book).

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BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

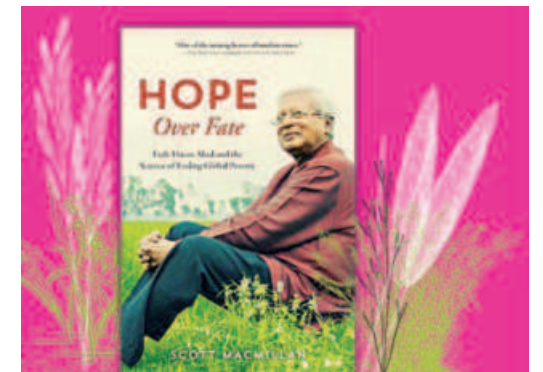
## Hope over fate

'Fazle Hasan Abed and the Science of Ending Global Poverty' by Scott MacMillan (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022)

MUNIR QUDDUS

Scott MacMillan serves as the director of learning and innovation at BRAC USA, based in New York. Having worked with the organisation for nearly a decade, he is a knowledgeable insider to the BRAC world, the anti-poverty mission-driven organisation founded and led by Fazle Hasan Abed for nearly five decades. He had close access to the book's subject, his family members, friends, and close associates. The research and writing for the book (originally planned as an autobiography) began well before Sir Fazle Abed was diagnosed with a brain tumour and bravely decided against treatment with an uncertain outcome. With his passing on December 20, 2019, the poor in Bangladesh and the world lost a great champion who had fought for them in the trenches as a foot soldier and as a leader, achieving unparalleled success.

In 27 concise chapters and under 300 pages, the author covers a lot of ground on Abed's family history, his childhood in an elite family in Sylhet, his education in East Pakistan, and later in the United Kingdom. Abed lived in England for nearly 10 years, first studying naval architecture in Glasgow and later



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

accounting in London. The book covers the period of his return home to take a managerial position as a foreign-educated professional, managing finance and accounting for Shell, an American multinational in the energy industry, with an office in Chittagong, East Pakistan.

The impact of the great cyclone (Bhola Cyclone) of November 12, 1970, and the subsequent civil and political upheavals leading to Bangladesh's Liberation War rudely disrupted his quiet life as it did for millions of his fellow citizens. These experiences eventually led to a radical shift in young Abed's career and life trajectory. It pushed him (and his friends and colleagues) to turn into citizen-volunteers and relief aid-workers who plunged impromptu into disaster-relief work.

Finding himself at the epicentre of the disaster, Abed realised that a large number of deaths (an estimated 500,000) in the "world's deadliest known tropical cyclone" were not necessarily caused by the natural disaster. He observed first-hand how the administration in Dhaka and Islamabad had largely ignored the tragedy and suffering of the victims, making it difficult for local and global relief agencies to do their work.

These experiences forced the young Abed to reconsider his priorities and core values. They led him to eventually pivot from large, global for-profit enterprises to a lifelong commitment to building an organisation which would be business-like in its management and operations, with a laser-like focus to transform the lives of the poor and vulnerable, through creative interventions for their upliftment.

A talented writer, MacMillan paints a moving and honest picture of the subject, often with intimate personal details, which makes the book such a compelling read. He takes the reader behind the scenes of Abed's larger-than-life public persona. This approach is a welcome relief from the practice of biographers who paint a glorified picture of the subject of their biography, discussing only the highlights, avoiding any narratives which may diminish their high stature in the public domain.

Sociologists use the term "wicked" to designate poverty as a societal problem, given the complex nature of the intertwining factors entrapping the poor. Sir Abed's lasting legacy is a commitment to outside-the-box thinking, data collection, analysis, experimentation, measurement, and continuous improvement. Hence the book's subtitle, "the science of ending global poverty" is most appropriate.

Sir Abed was meticulous and methodical about his work. Adopting the mindset of a scientist, he was fearless in his commitment to tinkering, borrowing ideas, learning from the best in the world, inviting other pioneers to partnerships, sharing credit, and remaining a bold champion of the poor for the greater good of the society. It is no hyperbole to conclude that through his work, he "changed the world" for millions of poor families in Bangladesh.

Consider the statistics—80 million reached annually through community health education and services; 1.6 million mothers counselled on breastfeeding and complementary practices; 700,000 pregnant women served by skilled attendants during childbirth. Multiply these numbers with 30, 40 or 50 years, and you get a sense of the enormous impact of BRAC (and Grameen Bank and other developmental NGOs). Their work in Bangladesh demonstrates that if we focus on the poor—empowering one woman at a time—economic growth and development will take care of itself.

This book is highly recommended for researchers and scholars interested in poverty, community leaders and staff working for NGOs and development organisations, political leaders and students studying development—in short, anyone interested in changing the world for the better, by helping those at the bottom of the economic pyramid enhance their lives for a brighter future.

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INTERVIEW

## What ails our publishing industry?

STAR BOOKS REPORT

On November 12, the ULAB Literary Salon 6 organised by the Department of English and Humanities at ULAB discussed the issues hindering Bangladesh's book publishing industry. Mahrukh Mohiuddin, Managing Director of University Press Limited, spoke with Professor Kaiser Haq, poet, academic and Advisor to ULAB Press, with the conversation moderated by Sudeep Chakravarti, writer, editor and Visiting Professor of South Asian Studies at ULAB.

**Sudeep Chakravarti:** Let me begin with the reality that in Bangladesh, the world of books revolves around the Ekushey Boi Mela. Is it really an ideal situation?

**Mahrukh Mohiuddin:** It is really concerning that much of the sales happen within one month of the year. A number of factors are involved, such as how the book sales should happen, and who should be ideally instrumental in making or ensuring these book sales.



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I like to say that the publishing industry is a part of a knowledge ecosystem and that includes educational institutions, libraries across the country and of course where the authors are coming from. If we don't have these other players, such as public libraries, we are not supported to bring out books.

**Sudeep Chakravarti:** What are other regulatory aspects of the publishing industry the government needs to address, such as intellectual property rights, duties, cost of paper? Or, is it even treating publishing as an industry or just as a pastime?

**Kaiser Haq:** I don't think any government agency is going to subsidise the book publishing

industry. Even if you do have subsidies, the agency, which is going to be giving the subsidies, may not be considering the merit of the books; external considerations may come in and that is likely to lead to corruption.

But institutions like Bangla Academy do have a budget for publishing and they are supposed to help the literary industry here produce translations among other works. They could do a better job I think. I would think that if the Bangla Academy went to co-publish with publishers in India, UK and North America, that would be an excellent way to push our literature. But it requires some smart negotiating with other publishers. I don't think they have even tried that.

**Mahrukh Mohiuddin:** I think I would like to humbly disagree with the role of the government in aiding the publishing industry. There is close to about 61% duty on imported paper. And the price we pay for the local paper takes advantage of that extra duty, and practically we are stuck with buying low quality local paper with questionable output often. Ultimately, it is the reader who is paying the price. What has happened in the last few months with the inflation and the rise in dollar prices is that there is a crisis in paper, and we are unsure if we will be able to publish the planned number of books for Boi Mela or Dhaka Lit Fest.

**Kaiser Haq:** Lowering the duties is a separate issue, one which we should really lobby for.

The quality of paper which is available for books is not appropriate. Next door in India, so many publishers are producing hefty books that are so light with paper of finer quality. I do not see why they cannot manufacture such papers here. If they can't, why not import it without crippling duties?

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