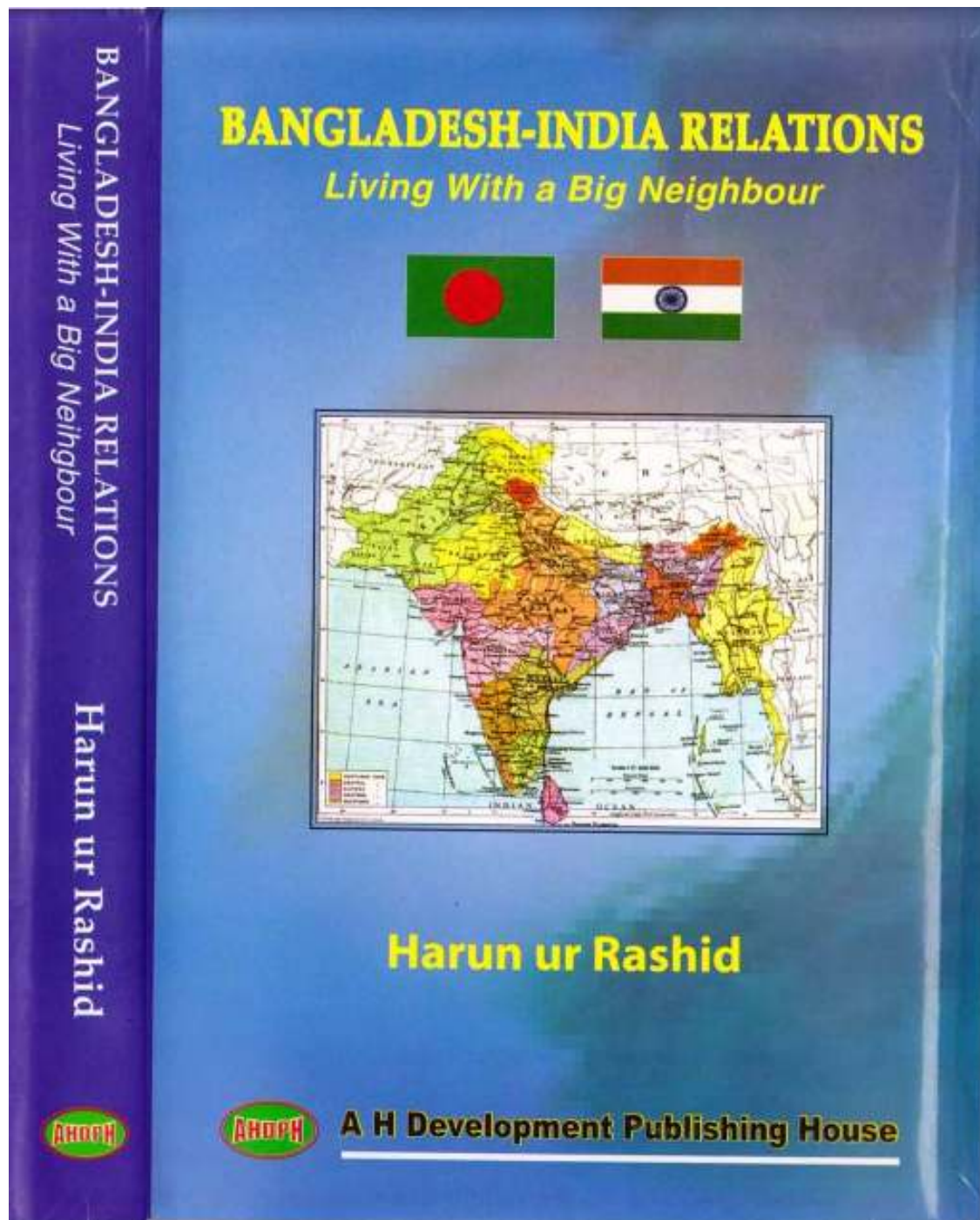


Book Review



The book, "*Bangladesh-India Relations-Living with a Big Neighbour*," written by former Ambassador and *Barrister* Harun ur Rashid, and published on 28th February 2010 by A.H. Development Publishing House, 143 New Market Dhaka 1000, encapsulates the whole spectrum of relations between the two countries since Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971.

The book contains ten chapters, each chapter dealing with a specific period from 1971 to 2009 and has added as appendices copies of important agreements between the two countries for the benefit of readers.

The subtitle of the book indicates asymmetrical relationship between the two countries. India is not only nearly 23 times larger than the territorial size of Bangladesh but also shares border with all the neighbours but no other country in South Asia shares borders with each other. Furthermore India is centrally located in South Asia and thus dominates the region not only in physical size but also in resources.

Former Ambassador Harun ur Rashid has argued that Bangladesh has often felt strains and stresses to live with a big neighbour and compared to a situation what the former Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau once said, living with the USA: “ It is like sleeping with an elephant: how friendly and even tempered the beast is, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.”

In Bangladesh foreign policy, “India factor” looms large. Many bilateral issues are pending for a long time and, some of them are “bread and butter” issues affecting common people of Bangladesh

Mr. Rashid has been closely associated with relations with India in various capacities from the Bangladesh Foreign Office as Director General (1973-79) and Additional Foreign Secretary (1986-87). During the 70s, he played a key role in almost all bilateral negotiations with India on issues, such as the Ganges water dispute, sea boundary in the Bay of Bengal, air services agreement, trade agreement, land border disputes and a host of other issues.

He has depicted his side of story in the book in discussing bilateral relations with India. The views of the author are candid and forthright, derived from his personal experience.

The book is built around the following themes:

- Causes of mistrust between Bangladesh and India
- Impact of India’s security interests on Bangladesh
- Critical appraisal of main issues in bilateral relations during the last 38 years
- Future directions of Bangladesh and India relations

The author critically examines major issues with India and suggests that in the days of interdependence of states, regional approach toward many contemporary burning issues may be adopted in such areas as utilisation of water resources, energy generation, food security and combating terrorism and global climate change.

The author suggests Bangladesh , Nepal , Bhutan and the northeastern states of India could be constituted as a sub-regional economic group, sharing of resources for mutual benefits. The sub-region could be made an engine for economic growth because there are many opportunities to explore and exploit the natural and human resources.

There is a saying that one can choose friends but not neighbours. Bangladesh and India are neighbours and they cannot re-fashion geography. The two countries are destined to live next to each other. Therefore both Bangladesh and India must establish a framework in which political, economic, social and environmental concerns are sorted out amicably to their mutual satisfaction.

Both Bangladesh and India needs each other during the days of globalisation and both countries need to develop a pattern and range of durable political and economic relations with each other for peace and harmony in South Asia and beyond.

Since the book was written in December 2009, Bangladesh Prime Minister's visit to India in middle of January 2010 and the joint communiqué issued in New Delhi was not discussed. However the author suggested the installation of the Awami League and the Congress party to power in the two countries created a congenial ambience to settle the long-standing issues through constructive negotiations. He has also broadly outlined future directions of Bangladesh-India relations under the AL and Congress governments.

In settling the disputes, the author argues Bangladesh's gains do not have to come at India's expense, or vice versa. "Win-win" solutions are possible on all the issues if mutual respect and understanding of each other's interests are recognized.

The author discusses in the book that both nations need to be mindful that the geo-political scene around South Asia is changing. Bangladesh is sandwiched between China and India and Bangladesh must explore and exploit its geographical position to advance its national interests.

An overview of regional and global security issues has also been described in the book and some of the regional issues such as Palestinian conflict with Israel, US confrontation with Iran on nuclear issue, Kashmir dispute and wars in Somalia, Congo and Darfur in Sudan need to be settled for regional and global peace through engagement and diplomatic dialogue.

Although critical in many aspects of India's policy toward Bangladesh, the author argues that there is no reason why relations cannot but be friendly given the right spirit and the desire to live together in cooperation. If France can live peacefully with Switzerland, why India can't live with Bangladesh?

Mr. Rashid's analysis is seen as a major contribution to the debate which attempts to fill many gaps in facts and interpretation of events in bilateral relations.

First of its kind in its exhaustive treatment of Bangladesh's relations with India, the book will be a useful resource for students, teachers, diplomats, journalists and others who are interested in the study of Bangladesh-India relations.