

Preface to "Looking Back"
by Asma Kibria

"Looking Back" is my late husband Shah AMS Kibria's unfinished autobiography. Unfinished because his death was not a natural death, but the consequence of a sinister and brutal conspiracy. Had he been alive, he doubtlessly would have made further contributions to his country and his people. Upon his murder, as I present this memorial to you, I sit here writing with hands that were powerless to prevent his death.

On the 27th of January 2005 at Boidder Bazaar in Habiganj, Shah AMS Kibria was fatally wounded by a grenade attack after attending a meeting. I know I am not capable of expressing his thoughts as he would have been able to were he alive, but I am undertaking this difficult task as I believe it is a historical necessity to know him deeply.

"Looking Back" was printed serially in the weekly magazine "Mridubhashon", of which my late husband was the editor. After completing each segment he would read it out to me and then make corrections. There are a few segments that are not completely finished as he had planned to add more to them. These unfinished segments have been organized and unified for presentation in this book.

Shah AMS Kibria had wished to release this book at the 2005 Book Fair. Because he had not been able to elaborate on some of the segments in time, he later decided to postpone the release to 2006. However, he did not have that opportunity.

In "Looking Back", the variegated experiences of my late husband's life are expressed in lucid prose. He has reflected on his experiences of childhood, student life, marriage and working life as well as on his interactions with different peoples and cultures. He has written about his involvement in the Language Movement, and his thoughts about the event. He wrote of his time in Washington D.C. during the Liberation War, about how he quit his job at the Pakistan embassy and subsequently contributed to his country's struggle for independence. Upon his return to Bangladesh following its liberation, my husband worked tirelessly to develop the nascent nation's foreign ministry, work that he provides details of in his book. From his writing, we can learn how Shah AMS Kibria developed a close relationship with the Father of the Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the pain and grief that he felt with the brutal murder of Bangabondhu and his family on the 15th of August 1975.

In 1978 upon his return from his post in Geneva, my husband served as foreign secretary. In his writings here he describes how during the last few months of his tenure he could not fulfill his duties with peace of mind. He also describes his pivotal role in the formation of SAARC in the late 1970's.

From 1981 to 1992, he served as Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP for the United Nations, and he has written about the new type of work and responsibilities he faced. During these 11 years at Bangkok, he did collaborative work with several different countries and islands in the Asia Pacific region, of which he also provides descriptions.

A few months after my husband left the United Nations, he joined the Awami League with the objective of helping his country through political means. He has written about his role in the Awami League's victory in the 1996 elections, and his ensuing time as Finance Minister under the newly formed government. During the terrible floods of 1998, he was responsible for several initiatives to help save the lives of millions of flood-affected people. My husband was always looking to sustain a solid economy alongside achieving high economic growth and a higher standard of living for the people, taking initiatives to distribute allowances to widowers and senior citizens. He has also written about his campaigning and ultimate victory in securing the constituency of Habiganj in the 2001 elections.

Successful in every aspect of his life, I lost my husband as the consequence of a terrible conspiracy. Had he received prompt treatment after the grenade attack, he may well have survived. It is ironic that a man who had access to free medical services anywhere in the world due to his United Nations job, died in his own country due to lack of treatment. I am deeply disturbed and disillusioned to see this

vicious side of politics. How can we accept this political environment, one that does not allow members from the opposition party to work for the good of the country and the people?

As “Looking Back” is published, my husband is somewhere distant, far away from us. I believe he will remain in our hearts eternally, through his achievements, and through his writing.

On behalf of my family, I take this opportunity to thank UPL, and in particular Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed. This book has been edited by my daughter-in-law Rina Sultana Kibria. I would also like to express my gratitude towards everyone who has contributed towards the publication of this book, be it through their work or invaluable advice.

It is my belief that readers of this book will recognize Shah AMS Kibria’s deep patriotism, and his unquestionable integrity and intellect. These characteristics manifest themselves repeatedly in his writings.

It is the hope of his bereaved family that you, the readers, will enjoy the story of Shah AMS Kibria’s life, and that through his writing, you can rediscover his departed soul.

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(Translated to English by Shovon Kibria, January 2006)

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