

Riaz, Ali and C. Christine Fair (Eds). *Political Islam and Governance in Bangladesh* (London: Routledge, 2011). Pp.183.

DOI: 10.1177/097492841106800109

The book under review presents a good account of political violence in Bangladesh. The chapters in the book underline the fast blurring line between political parties, and religious parties or privately run groups advocating Islamisation of Bangladesh society.

First of all, there are certain common observations about the book. The most interesting aspect of the book is the detailed description about mushrooming of Islamic groups. Close reading of the organisations suggests that there is not much ideological difference among different groups; rather it is about personality clashes which are engendering new outfits.

Interestingly, it is observed that Bangladesh is a country of NGOs; at the same time Bangladesh has become a land of Islamic groups. Reading reveals another interesting aspect that these organisations have their own rules and regulations to govern. There is no transparency about funding, how it is received and spent. Another feature emerging is the nexus among different Islamic and insurgent groups of South Asia; this is becoming a big challenge among the governments about how they are going to deal with the emerging situation with concerted strategy. This is an important learning for India, especially when it is widely perceived that Bangladesh has emerged as a critical logistical hub for Pakistan-based militant groups intended to be operational throughout India. Though Bangladesh has taken strong measures against militant groups recently, it is still to be seen how sustainable the effort is going to be in the future.

The introduction of the book introduces the topics to be discussed further in the book. In the beginning, the authors provide the definition of Political Islam as defined by Graham Fuller, which reads as ‘Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and implemented in some fashion’ (p. 2). This definition has been taken as a basis for description of Political Islam in the book.

The book contains eight chapters. All of them deal with convergence of governance, Islamism and Bangladesh. All three aspects have been used by the authors in varying degrees, depending upon the requirement of the subject. Most importantly, all these variables are not confined to Bangladesh only, but have been studied in the context of Bangladesh’s potential for internal security challenge as well as its wider impact upon South Asian security.

The chapters, ‘Political Culture in Contemporary Bangladesh: Histories, Ruptures and Contradictions’ by Dina Mahnaz Siddiqui and ‘Political Violence: The Trends and Tendencies’ by Shamsul Islam, describe the contexts within which political and even militant Islam have flourished in Bangladesh, and how they have transformed politics over the years. The authors assert that how the founding principles of the constitution—nationalism, democracy, secularism and socialism—began being sabotaged by the first prime minister of the country himself by bringing fourth amendment to the constitution which instituted one-party rule. This authoritarianism got further sharpened with successive military regimes. With the dawn of democracy in Bangladesh, the author suggests that instead of any visible ideological differences, conflicts between Bangladesh Nationalist Party/Awami League have been about patronage politics—distribution of resources as largesse, so that they can stick with power. The author argues that instead of seeing rise of Islamic fundamentalism purely in terms of Jamaat’s electoral alignment with BNP, this has been getting consolidated since 1975 when BNP introduced alternative identity.

Another chapter 'Political Islam in Bangladesh' by Md. Shamsul Islam contends that unlike general perception that violence has been a recent phenomena, violence as a tool to achieve political objectives has been continuing since Independence; only issue is that the form and intensity of violence have increased, like clashes between political rivals, between the police and activists during *hartals* (general strikes), violence against women and minorities, and extrajudicial killings. Another important distinction of this chapter is that the author has showed changing nature of violence through different regimes, how democracy has introduced confrontational violence between two major political parties along with its alliance partners.

The chapter, 'Who Are the Islamists?' by Ali Riaz and Kh. Ali Ar Raji stands out in the book because the authors have given description of various hues of Islamic groups existing in Bangladesh. Unlike general perception about monolithic nature of Islamic ideology being followed by Islamic parties, the authors have identifies five categories of Islamic parties on the basis of their origins and policies: pragmatists/opportunists like Jamaat-e-Islami often referred as Jamaat; idealist and orthodox like Bangladesh Khilafat Andolan (BKA) and others; *Pir* (Preacher of Islam) centric and *Mazar* (Shrines) based like Zaker Party; Urban-elite centric like Hizb Ut Tahrir, Bangladesh; and Jihadists like Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, Bangladesh. Another important aspect being discussed by the author is how number of Islamic parties has increased from two in 1979, when Islamists were for the first time allowed to participate in the elections, to 18 in 1996. Not only this, another tendency which is visible is the growing alliance between mainstream political parties and Islamists.

The authors Zayadul Ahsan and Pavithra Banavar in 'Who Are the Militants?' give very good description of key groups of Islamist actors that have embraced violence to achieve their objectives and who describe themselves as 'jihadists'. Generally, it is not known much about their activities. The authors have done great work by describing their composition, recruitment mechanisms, training methods and structures. They have also gone into details of groups' sources of financing and logistical support. This chapter brings out how these groups have been exporting militancy to India and are posing serious threats to Bangladesh as well as to the South Asian regional security fabric.

Elora Shehabuddin in the chapter entitled 'Bangladeshi Civil Society and Islamist Politics' analyses how these militant groups have nurtured intolerance in the society. Unlike popular perceptions which suggest that the presence of development NGOs which are mostly funded by foreign aid represent vibrant civil society groups in Bangladesh, the authors suggests that Bangladesh has a rich tradition of civil society which predates the arrival of the NGOs. The author has done fieldwork to understand the messages and strategies of three civil society organisations' campaigns against Islamists before the 2001 parliamentary election in rural areas of Bangladesh. She has taken three organisations activities in three parts of the country.

'Islamists Politics and Education' by Ali Riaz focuses on the impact of the Islamists on the education scene of Bangladesh. The author has described how the influence of Islamists has gone beyond the realm of madrassas because of ambivalent policies being followed by all political parties regarding education. An illustration in this respect is Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's decision to recognise the degree given by the Daurah Hadith, the highest degree of *qwami madrassah*, an equivalent to the master's degree in Islamic studies in 2006 (p. 122). This was done without consulting the University Grants Commission, the national accreditation body for higher education. Now the Islamists are using new medium of popular culture to reach to wider public, such as popular Islamic literature, and the entertainment medium.

The Islamists novels are a new genre of fiction which preach how Islamic scriptures are to be followed, how women should conduct themselves, and the important role they have in society.

The concluding chapter, 'Bangladesh Regional and Extra-regional Dimensions' by Ali Riaz and Jessica Bastian, studies domestic developments in Bangladesh within regional and extra-regional contexts. Here the authors meticulously describe how internal problems of one country have really affected another country's insurgent movement. It is also suggested how this menace can be handled at the regional level more effectively.

Apart from one typographic mistake in (p. 94) 'Civil Society and Islamist Politics', there is no major flaw in the book. There are some repetitions that can be excused because of the nature of topics being discussed throughout the book. This book can be recommended to all academicians, scholars, students of South Asia, journalists and foreign policy experts, who keep interest in happenings of South Asia. It is a treasure for those who intend to know about different Islamic groups existing in Bangladesh.

Punam Pandey
Research Assistant, USI, New Delhi
punampandey@gmail.com

Pant, Harsh. *The China Syndrome: Grappling with an Uneasy Relationship* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2010). Pp. 280.

DOI: 10.1177/097492841106800110

The definitive rise of China as a major power is one of the realities which India needs to deal with. In the coming years, China is going to further climb the ladder of hierarchy of the international order. China has been making consistent progress towards building itself as the next important player in the world, after the United States. Additionally, there is no more debate about China's role in the global economy. The current financial crisis clearly highlighted the degree to which China is engaged in the international system, and it also shows the financial strength of China. It was not a surprise when surpassing Japan, China became the second-largest economy in the world after the US. China's military modernisation also is well known. Beijing is developing a blue water navy, and is also making rapid progress in space and cyber warfare capabilities. These developments show that Beijing is clearly visualising itself as a leader and is not comfortable with the idea of being a regional player any more. Its international agenda and actions have dual causes; primarily, it is for the domestic needs and second, it is to assert its global presence.

These developments and their implications for India, is the subject discussed in Harsh Pant's *The China Syndrome: Grappling with an Uneasy Relationship*. The author has argued that there is an urgent need for New Delhi to formulate and execute a coherent policy towards China. He argues that India needs to understand that it has to deal with China at every level and everywhere, and the half-hearted policies will only lead to further problems in this bilateral relationship. This book is only 150 pages long and is divided into five chapters. The author provides a good overview of the current situation of the India-China relations. In the chapters he talks about the Sino-Indian convergences as well as divergences at both bi-lateral and global level. In the third chapter the author provides the readers with his argument