I INTRODUCTION

Nation building is a complex and multi-dimensional process and at the same time, the most cherished goal of any nation state. Shared historical memories, shared interests, value consensus and a sense of belonging together within particular territorial boundaries are the essential ingredients of any nation. Language, culture, ethnicity, religion etc. are important elements of social communication that brings the people together. But more important is the shared experience of going through a particular process. Thus the nation building tasks are three-fold: defining the national goals, finding out the desired process/mechanism of attaining the goals and then going through the process. Each of these tasks is demanding and arduous taking the toll of many years, decades, even centuries, and then, much of the nation’s energies, resources and opportunities. In the process of nation building, there is hardly any alternative to conscious and articulate efforts with a sense of direction, commitment and sacrifice.

When we talk of nation building in the Third World countries, the situation is one of dire contrast between expectations and realities. The expectations are associated with the seeds of nationalism and they are aroused by the vast political mobilisation that is carried out by identifying political independence with economic, social and political development. And the realities are posed by internal socio-political situation and the global environment in which the developing
nations have to build their states. These realities are, however, vastly different from the ones faced by the currently developed states in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. In the first place, the developed countries in their nation building efforts had the advantage of a pre-existent nationalism, dominant social structure and state authority. Nation building for them meant basically integration of one or two minority groups into the mainstream of national life. For the Third World countries, however, the task is multiple and many times bigger in magnitude. Defining national identity, giving substance to the semblance of nationalism with which independence was achieved, bringing into the national fold diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups none of which often is dominant enough, establishing state authority and authoritative political institutions constitute the major agenda of nation building. Secondly, in the past, population-to-resources ratios compared favourably in relation to the present day adverse situation. The burden of poverty today is so overwhelming, that the state authority even with an almost monopoly over the available developmental resources can hardly cope up with the challenge of providing basic minimum to the citizens. Thirdly, because of a revolution in global communication system, intrusion of western values, perceived higher standard of life obtaining there tends to destabilise and disrupt the prevailing indigenous norms and values without an alternative available on the horizon. Consequently, values of egalitarianism, equity, human rights, democratic norms and behaviour etc., are projected and eventually cherished to be realized in a socio-political milieu which is basically primordial, unjust, unequal, hierarchical and unadaptive in nature. Coupled with this wide gap between expectations and realities, there is the time dimension as well. The problem of nation building is one of telescoping more than three centuries' development within few years or at best, few decades. Consequently, the state structure is under tremendous pressure. Unable to meet the fast rising popular demand, state authority resorts to coercive measure causing serious setbacks in the
very nation building process. A series of setbacks consequently throws the nation in perpetual crisis. Bangladesh experience over the last 15 years of her independent existence is a case in point. With a vast population of 100 million packed within a small territory, Bangladesh is one of the least developed countries. In the absence of adequate socio-political institutions, elite-mass gap in decision making process in the face of rising expectations and highly politicised population giving rise to political tensions and instability—all have led to a vicious circle of stagnation.

Despite enormous significance of the topic, however, nation building problems of Bangladesh have received very little scholarly attention in the past, specially from the academic and opinion making elites of the country. The present volume collates different perspectives on nation building, its various dimensions and approaches and solution to problems considered integral to the social, political and economic advancement of the country. Earlier versions of the papers contained in the book were presented during a two-day seminar on Nation Building in Bangladesh: Retrospect and Prospect organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka on 13-14 October 1985. The basic purpose of the seminar was to provide a forum for academic and objective deliberation on the nation building problems of Bangladesh. The seminar was also intended to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Bangladesh nationhood and to come out with possible direction as to where to go and how to build-up a broad national consensus on vital national issues. The basic approach of the seminar was to look at the problems of nation building in an analytically disaggregated manner, although this resulted in somewhat overlapping of issues and treatment. The overlappings, however, have not been edited out in order that they provide differing angles and perspectives of looking at the same problem as well as some flavour of debate of the seminar. The problems of nation building have been looked at in terms of a few basic considerations.
The first group of considerations looked at the problem of nation building from a macro-perspective, that is the sum-total of basic socio-politico-economic goals and cross-currents of factors and forces that mutually interact. What really nation building is and what are the differing perspectives on it? What are the goals of nation building in Bangladesh? What is the nature of nationalism in Bangladesh? Where do the objectives of nation building fit in the overall national priority structure? How expectations were raised by the flowering of nationalism culminating in independence and why could not they come to fruition over these years? These questions have been addressed in the three articles in Chapter II on National Identity and Nation Building. Iftekharuzzaman and Mahbubur Rahman in the first article of the volume deal with the concept of nation building in the context of Bangladesh and highlight the need for value-consensus, allegiance and participation for nation building. M. G. Kabir brings forth the changing perceptions of national identity in the post-independence era of Bangladesh and argues that a multi-symbol identity in terms of culture, religion and territory defines a distinguishable identity of Bangladesh. Abdur Rob Khan and Khaleda Nazneen advocate for a strategic approach to nation building problems in view of the core and very commanding position that these issues occupy.

Secondly, there is no denying the fact that problems of economic development are organically linked to nation building process. The historically critical role that the development strategies of 1950s and 1960s played in the nation building process in the then Pakistan to which Bangladesh belonged till 1971 is a moot point of this consideration. In the overall context of massive poverty, critical shortage of domestic resources and persistent dependence on external aid, how does economic decision making affect the nation building process, specially long term development process and participation of the people in development activities? These are the subject matter of the three papers on Economic Development
and Nation Building in Chapter III. Jstekeharuzzaman and Abdur Rob Khan raise the key issues of development strategies in Bangladesh. The vital issue of participation of the poor in development process has been addressed by Atiur Rahman while Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad deals with the cost of continued dependence on foreign aid.

The third and most critical group of considerations is the political development which is intertwined with nation building process. It is obvious that lack of political institutions, lack of consensus on distribution of public authority and on systemic-value of politics and constitutional process account for the present state of political underdevelopment and political instability. The critical questions that perturb the nation at the moment are: What basically has hindered the growth of political institutions? Why has the system failed to mediate and articulate the conflicting perceptions of elites and interest groups, and to accommodate the demand for broader participation in political process by the increasing number of elites, rising middle class and somewhat politically sensitised population? Has it anything to do with the political system that the nation dreamt of? Is it because of leadership? What could be the optimum modicum of attaining national consensus on some of the fundamental national issues? How can one visualise the future political development of the country? These considerations provide the backdrop of the papers in Chapter IV on Political Development and Nation Building. The basic thrust of A. N. Shamsul Hoque's paper is on leadership crisis, lack of respect for continuity of certain fundamental institutions, politics of patronage and asymmetry in the development of institutions as the major problems with political development in the country. The central argument in Mizanur Rahman Shelley's paper is that political development in the country has failed to keep pace with the fast moving process of development of nationhood which had existed even before the stage for this nation was set. Emajuddin Ahamed in his paper argues for participatory and authoritative political institutions like
political parties, local government institutions for bringing the various social forces within the fabric of national community.

Fourthly, the input as well as impact of the nation building process are not confined to the territorial boundaries only. There is a great deal of mutuality between external interaction and internal developments. External interaction in the first place depends, to a large extent, on internal cohesion, sense of vulnerability, elite perception of external forces favouring or inhibiting the process of evolution toward a progressive and cohesive nationhood. The internal developments, in turn, are also shaped by inflow of external inputs and ideas. How and to what extent can the external forces be manipulated to enhance internal cohesion, and procure valuable resources for the nation building process of developing countries like Bangladesh? How can the foreign policy postures neutralise the external destabilising forces in the current tension and conflict-ridden international system? Conversely, what are the domestic and institutional inputs to Bangladesh foreign policy? More importantly, to what extent the mass perception of external environment is reflected in the foreign policy making mechanism? These basically constitute the subject matter of the three papers on Foreign Policy and Nation Building in Chapter V. Tabarak Husain's paper brings forth the geopolitical predicaments of Bangladesh foreign policy and the extent and manner in which public opinion is reflected in foreign policy postures. Ataur Rahman in his paper deals with the institutional inputs including those from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government and non-government agencies having direct and indirect bearings on Bangladesh's external relations at different levels. The co-authored paper by Mizanur Rahman Khan, Golam Mostafa and Rezaul Haque brings out the security considerations and economic predicaments of Bangladesh foreign policy.

Finally, M. Shamsul Huq's Concluding Statement sums up the deliberations highlighting the major arguments and recommendations
of the papers. The Conclusion is reproduced as it was presented at
the seminar in order that the readers get the flavour of the very
lively debate raised by the authors and participants in the seminar.

The book is intended to provide greater understanding and clear
perception of the socio-economic and political problems of Bangla-
desh, and contribute to building up premises for broad consensus
on crucial national issues. It is hoped that the book will be
of immense help not only to the students, academicians and resear-
chers in politics and development but also to policy makers and
opinion building sections of the society.

M. Abdul Hafiz
Abdur Rob Khan