

THE OVER-SUNG AND THE UNSUNG

CHINTITO
SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

ACCORDING to one Bengali folklore, albeit in reference to a woman, it is said that she who can cook can also tie up her hair. Perhaps 'hairstyle' *per se* was not in vogue in the days of Thakur Ma and so the rudimentary tying up, or perhaps it was assumed, by the biased male chauvinist even back then that the woman of the house was born to be shackled to the kitchen.

Most of us *aam admi* would have been happy if we could stick to our pretentious tradition and our dexterity were spread over (or limited to) maybe two to three skills per person. But, going by TV programmes, printed supplements and humongous billboards, some of our mainly distinguished performers of the arts appear to be into everything and anything under the sun, as they take full, and to some extent, undue advantage of the 'celebrity' tag.

Yes, they can sing only when their permanent hands are in accompaniment, or dance when their recorded music sounds the cue, act or naught you know better, or recite by imitation, or anchor a show stereotyped to a tee, and yet they are invited to don the judge's robe in a cooking competition and then soon after in a fashion show, or in a debate on a subject as complex as climate change, or in a talent hunt for budding performers.

They will also dare to start crooning if their known virtue is drama or assume the role of an author if they have excelled in the footsteps of Uday Shankar or Mallika



Sarabhai. We are not surprised to see a painter giving tips on make-up, although there is some close affiliation.

During the early 70s, the fabled Khan Ata (aka Khan Ataur Rahman) was lovingly known as WAPDA because (if my memory is loyal) he was a writer (of screenplay), artiste, producer, director and an actor, and he was tops in all. But, did we see him bare his teeth to vend toothpaste, however fresh the breath became? Or vouch confidently about the quality of imported cotton as a parrot mimicking his master? Or be a judge in a relay race at a sports meet or in a dress-as-

you-like competition, the latter being his forte? Nahhh! He was too dignified to stoop to commercialising his gifted talents.

Our TV channels primarily are responsible for expending these over-sung celebrities who seem to be willing to respond to the beck and call of any producer. The relationship works both ways; the household name gets more domestic and the producer gets an impromptu readymade unrehearsed guaranteed 'product', however depthless the deliberations may be. A survey would reveal that remote-happy viewers are bored with the repetitive faces, but working with a debutant

has always been considered a risk taken only by a producer worth his salt.

And yet, this country is thriving with diligent, honourable and conscientious workers, educators, professionals, businesspeople, government officers, service personnel, retailers, vehicle operators, backstage support team in sports and performance arts, mass media personnel, parents, siblings... (not mentioned in any order) who remain the society's unsung heroes. They each are a manifest giant in their own spectrum, without whose contributions our nation would have fallen further behind in the global race.

We are a wretched nation, unwilling to be grateful to or be unaware of the people who keep our life ticking. In their shortcut crack at delivering typecast package endlessly, a good chunk of our media has been running after the glitter of the tinsel world; and in the process, a very significant part of real providers has been ignored. But, do our champions mind? They are too human and humble to be caged in the confines of monitors, broadsheets and tabloids.

Without their sustained contribution, we would not have had a full bowl of rice on our table, nor a table carved by their nimble hands, nor hands that carry out complex lifesaving operations, nor risky operations that seek out criminals from a sea of people, nor people who sacrifice daily to better the life of their loved ones, nor ones that build houses and bridges, nor bridges that connect conflicting factions in the community, nor communities that complete Jasimuddin's patterned quilt, nor quilts that keep us warm, nor warmth that we exude every Ekushey, every 26th and 16th...

They are the unknown heroes. Their achievements in the face of adversity must be glorified. Depiction of their struggles can be inspirational for the younger generation. Their stories of giving can reverse the trend of brain drain. They are winning our peace-time war.

Collectively, they are like the 'unknown soldier', whose tomb (found in several countries) is dedicated to the service of an unidentified martyr and in commemorating the supreme sacrifice of all soldiers who lost their life in a war. Only our unheralded soldiers are living.

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INDIA'S RIVER LINKING PROJECT

Not a practical option Reframing water challenges

M INAMUL HAQUE

RECENTLY, *The Daily Star* (July 22, 2015) reported that India will be proceeding ahead with its Rivers Interlinking Project, particularly on its northeastern part, to link the rivers Brahmaputra, Manos, Sankosh, Raidak, Torsa, Dharla, Teesta, Mahananda and Mechi. These activities refer to the planned canals No. 14 and 1 of the Rivers Interlinking Project, which are to crisscross through western Assam, North Bengal part of Paschim Banga and eastern Bihar (see the map). The Indian Water Resources Minister Sanwar Lal Jat has said, "This link project will not only provide large irrigation and water supply benefits to Assam, West Bengal and Bihar but will also make available large quantum of water for transfer subsequently to southern states." The governments in West Bengal, Assam and Bihar will soon be approached for their consent, Jat said.

The interlink project has 30 canal systems stretching from Brahmaputra River basin in the northeast of India to the Luni River basin to the west and Caverry River basin to the south. The main issue with the interlinking of rivers is the increasing water demand in the states of India due to unhindered growth of population everywhere. According to the report published in *The Daily Star*, the concerned officials of India-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission in Dhaka expressed their unawareness of any move from the Indian side, as they were not officially reported by their counterpart. They claimed that they are "not supposed to divert water from any of the Himalayan River without the consent of Bangladesh." But the fact is, India is diverting Teesta River's lean period flows without informing or even caring about the adverse effects on Bangladesh, as evidenced during the lean periods in 2014 and 2015.



The increasing water and food demand has led to Indian states to fight with each other over sharing water from common sources. The recent creation of Telengana has not only increased administrative division, but also increased rivalry over the sharing of water. The project for interlinking of rivers offers impractical hopes to the water starved western and southern states of India.

From an engineering point of view, the interlinking project can be executed and delivered on the ground. Though possible from an engineering point of view, completing the interlinking project of such magnitude is not possible for various practical reasons. Any hydraulic mass has a natural tendency to flow downwards; the river basins are created out of that natural tendency. Any civilisation that grew on created water resources has been able to live for some decades only. The reservoirs, structures and canals that will be created under this interlinking project shall devour cultivable lands and uproot people from their homes. The diversion projects shall have high evaporation loss on exposure, high conveyance loss by seepage, etc. The structures that will be built shall fail to deliver lateral flow against gravity, leading to clogging by sand and silt, and incur high maintenance cost. The environmental impact on ecology and on animal life shall be visible both at upstream and

downstream of the project components. Moreover, these projects shall have to bear huge power costs to lift the water to be conveyed against gravity. With this and other unlimited maintenance costs, there is no sound cost-benefit dynamics.

The cost of the Rivers Interlinking Project in 2005 was Rs 560,000 crore; by now it has increased threefold. However big the investment figure might be, investors like the World Bank and the ADB are reportedly ready to invest in this project. State governments of India, particularly, Assam, Paschim Banga and Bihar are opposing this project. But the central government of India has the power to start this project anytime and anywhere they please. In that case, the states may voice their opposition through their people, politicians and activists.

There are reports that the Bangladesh government is likely to send a *note verbale* to India. It will be a matter of joy if the authorities concerned take up the matter of unilateral withdrawal of Teesta waters from the past, as they oppose any future withdrawal unless an agreement is settled upon.

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SHAFIQUIL ISLAM

THE logic of averaging "surplus" and "deficit" to optimise and equalise resource allocation is neither new nor actionable. For example, if we were to take the "food surplus" from all regions of the globe and deliver it to households with a "food deficit", no one would go hungry. Yet, over 800 million people remain food insecure and hungry every day. Why does this happen?

Short answer: Politics. This framing of politics, the one promoted by Chanakya (300BC) and Machiavelli (1500AD) and summarised by Lasswell (1936): Politics is - *Who gets what, when, and how.*

Water is one of the most vital resources for our survival. We need to understand and address how "surplus" and "deficit" plays out within the context of water politics.

The ideas of linking rivers to equalise surplus and deficit of water are not new.

Visveswarya - the legendary engineer of early 1900s - envisioned the idea of connecting rivers in the Indian subcontinent and some of his ideas evolved at a grand scale in the interlinking project framed in the



1980 report from India's Ministry of Water Resources, Indian National Perspective for Water Development. It envisioned linking 14 rivers from the Himalayas and 16 across the India peninsula to bring water from areas of surplus to areas that would benefit from more water.

35 years later: none of the links have been implemented.

Critics argue that interlinking project is neither economically feasible nor environmentally sustainable. Equally important is the lack of technical information about the viability of the project given the cost - US\$125 to 200 billion. Beyond a few lines drawn on the map to indicate the rough location of the dams and canals, nothing is available to the professional community to verify the justifiability and efficacy of claimed benefits from the project. Downstream, Bangladesh - which shares 54 transboundary rivers - is worried about the impact these linking projects will have on its people, economy and the environment.

It appears that this Interlinking project - envisioned as a "surplus-deficit" problem with a techno-centric solution - is not only an inaccurate diagnosis of the problem, but also a short-sighted prescriptive solution that is not actionable.

Over the last three decades, the science-policy-politics of water has moved away from techno-centric approaches to more integrated and adaptive management. Globally, there is growing consensus that the complexity of issues as well as the competing and often conflicting values and priorities make the process of charting a path for water security difficult.

A reframing of this interlinking project is urgently needed. The politics of water demand answers: Who decides water for whom; who bears the burden and at what scale?

These difficulties are amplified by practical questions like: *How do we resolve water sharing issues when Gujarat demanded that Maharashtra must agree to share more water from Tapi if it wanted more water from the proposed Damanganga-Pinjal link, which will supply water to Mumbai? How can future management meet the previous agreements on the Ganges that allocate water between India and Bangladesh? How does any water agreement among the Himalayan basin countries relate to larger regional concerns beyond water?*

These are a small subset of many questions that need to be raised and discussed. More importantly, these questions are contingent upon the context, framing, and choice of the problem's scale. Consequently, there are no pre-specified solutions to these complex problems. As the Water Diplomacy Framework argues, complex problems cannot be solved but can be resolved through a negotiated mutual gains approach, which is essential to chart a sustainable new future for the Himalayan rivers.

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QUOTABLE
Quote

SIMONE WEIL
French philosopher, Christian mystic, and political activist

ATTACHMENT IS THE GREAT FABRICATOR OF ILLUSIONS;
REALITY CAN BE ATTAINED ONLY BY SOMEONE
WHO IS DETACHED.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Angel's instrument
- 5 Grinch creator Dr. -
- 10 Region
- 11 Monkey (with)
- 13 Bring up
- 14 Have hopes
- 15 Blow up
- 17 Longoria of TV
- 18 Did a Cuban dance
- 19 Attack command
- 20 Antique
- 21 Parent's warning
- 22 Photographer's request
- 25 Saturn feature
- 26 Turner of movies
- 27 Confederate general
- 28 Anger
- 29 Middle
- 33 Compass pt.
- 34 Guacamole base
- 35 Whole
- 37 Stench
- 38 "Stand by Me" director Rob
- 39 Cooking fat

DOWN

- 40 Crazy talks
- 41 Son of Zeus
- 1 Part of a sheik's household
- 2 Sports spot
- 3 Kingdom
- 4 Geometric curve
- 5 Put on, as a play
- 6 Moved slowly
- 7 Strike caller
- 8 Watches slyly
- 9 Dinner unit
- 12 Changes chemically
- 16 Part to play
- 21 Light drink
- 22 Mini burger
- 23 Seattle player
- 24 Resistance to change
- 25 Nevada city
- 27 Pries
- 29 Insertion mark
- 30 Speed checker
- 31 Cherish
- 32 Serfs' bosses
- 36 Road-house

Yesterday's answer

S	H	A	P	E	D		M	U	S	T
T	O	M	A	T	O		O	N	T	O
A	V	A	T	A	R		L	I	E	S
R	E	S	T	S		L	A	C	E	S
E	L	S	E		P	A	R	O	L	E
F	U	N	N		R	E	A	M		R
F	U	N	N		B	O	N	E		
H	O	P			T	E	S	T		
E	R	A	S	E	R		T	O	P	S
A	S	T	E	R		M	O	R	A	L
P	A	R	E		D	A	M	A	G	E
E	K	E	D		E	L	A	T	E	D
D	E	E	S		M	I	N	E	R	S

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