

It's not only about Teesta, it's more than that

Torture of a 12-year-old

Punish the perpetrators exemplarily

YET another minor -- a 12-year-old boy working as a bus helper -- has been subjected to torture at the hands of some transport workers, allegedly, for damaging CD wires of a bus at Puthia upazila of Rajshahi. Over the past few years, we have seen such beastly torture of minors, particularly at their workplaces, repeating a number of times. In some cases, the torture was so severe, that they had even led to the unfortunate and untimely deaths of these young children.

At an age when these children should be going to school and exploring the wonders of life, because of the financial struggles their families face, they have to work hazardous jobs just to help put food on the table. Amidst the already existing deplorable working conditions that exist, the threat of being tortured now has also become very real.

But what is it that is driving people to seek such animalistic pleasures? How are these people not ashamed at all to not only commit such perverted acts of violence against children, but to then take pictures of them doing so? Given that we are seeing the same story unfold time and again, perhaps, it is time for society to take a moment to seriously reflect upon these questions.

The authorities in the meantime must take action against the perpetrators. Even if the victim's family is reluctant to file a case fearing the associated expenses, the authorities must take suo moto cognizance of the matter and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Buet teacher wins international accolade

Reminder of need to foster local talents

IN a story we published last week which contested the notion that women and girls in Bangladesh are inherently not good at science subjects, the Professor of Physics and Dean of Faculty of Sciences at DU said, "In the PhD and MPhil programmes we prefer women students as they are more serious about their studies. In Physics, Chemistry and Math women secure top positions in the merit list on a regular basis. They also do very well as faculty members."

Proving our conviction right about women's role and achievements in science right, Tanzima Hashem, a computer science researcher from Buet, won the 2017 Elsevier Foundation Awards for Early-Career Women Scientists in the Developing World for her work in developed computational approaches to protect the privacy of people accessing location-based services. It is not only a laudable achievement which highlights the hidden talents that our country has to offer, but a reminder of the need to foster opportunities so that women are inspired to enroll in science subjects.

Tanzina, an associate professor of Buet, is among five women honoured with the award this year. Her work stands among innovations which the Organisation for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) has said are bound to be beneficial for developing countries and the world at large.

We heartily congratulate Tanzina for her brilliant achievement. But we should also see this as an opportunity to remind ourselves of the need to break the existing cultural and social barriers that bar too many women from pursuing science subjects. Only through fostering their talent and encouraging equal participation of women in higher education can we truly enable the brilliant minds of the country to make their mark.



REAZ AHMAD

IT has been seven long years since water resources ministers of Bangladesh and India last met to talk about Teesta at the platform of Joint Rivers Commission (JRC). Since then Bangladesh has been more than ready about holding a meeting of the JRC, an official instrument devised jointly by Bangladesh and India back in 1972, to resolve water disputes

and harness common water resources for mutual and regional benefits. A long overdue JRC meeting in Dhaka in June 2013 was postponed due to India's last moment pullout. Nearly four more years passed by and Dhaka wrote to Delhi dozens of times seeking a date to hold the JRC meeting but to no avail.

As far as water sharing issue of river Teesta is concerned things actually had moved fast after the 37th JRC meeting (the last one) held in Delhi back in early 2010. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January that year helped put JRC back into motion so much so that a water treaty on the sharing of Teesta was about to be struck the very following year as then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came to Dhaka on a return visit. The Teesta deal had faced obstacles since September 2011 when West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, scheduled to visit Dhaka with Singh, opted out of the trip, opposing the agreement.

Originating in India's Sikkim, Teesta enters into Bangladesh through West Bengal. Mamata has been opposing the water deal based on the argument that if India commits to certain cuses of guaranteed water share from Teesta to Bangladesh, her state might be deprived of water during the dry season.

In a subsequent development, Mamata commissioned an expert, Kalyan Rudra, to give a report on Teesta water sharing prospects. The Rudra report, submitted in 2012, has never been made public but Indian media reported on several instances that the report had stated that there was a shortage of water in Teesta since the Indian government had been building hydro-power projects upstream.

In fact it's not only in Sikkim, rather the Teesta water diversion was made also in West Bengal through building of a dam and hydro-power project in Gajaldoba near Shiliguri. India completed the Gajaldoba project at a time when Bangladesh had to abandon its planned 2nd phase of Teesta Barrage irrigation project as the very command area of the 1st phase dried up due to very poor flow of water through the Teesta.

Since the 2011 momentum evaporated there has been a long lull over the prospect of a Teesta water sharing agreement between the lower-riparian Bangladesh and its upper-riparian neighbour, India. Bangladesh and India, which share between them waters of 54 common rivers, inherit and cherish a long tradition of using and harnessing of this natural



Near the Teesta bridge in the northern district of Lalmonirhat, a boat is tied up to a pole where the river is dried up.

PHOTO: STAR

resource amicably and judiciously. The signing of the Ganges water sharing agreement by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her then Indian counterpart Deve Gowda in December, 1996 is one example of a mutually agreed solution to water sharing between neighbours. The 30-year water-sharing arrangement recognised Bangladesh's rights on Ganges water as a lower riparian country.

According to the JRC website, there are as many as 405 big and small rivers in Bangladesh, of which 57 are transboundary. Of these 57, Bangladesh and Myanmar are co-riparian for only three rivers. Given the fact that Bangladesh and India are co-riparian countries having a common stake on as many as 54 transboundary rivers, it was prudent and visionary on the part of the leadership of a new nation (Bangladesh) back in March 1972 to embark upon a crucial instrument called Joint Rivers Commission (JRC). The Indo-Bangla JRC was established on a permanent basis through a joint declaration on March 19, 1972 inter alia to carry out a comprehensive survey of the river systems shared by the two countries; formulate and implement projects concerning flood control in both countries; formulate detailed proposals on advance flood warnings, flood forecasting, study on flood control and irrigation projects on the major river systems; and examine the feasibility of linking the power grids of Bangladesh with the adjoining areas of India, so that the water resources of the regions can be utilised on an equitable basis for mutual benefit of the people of the two countries.

Since its inception the JRC had 37 meetings till 2010, which discussed, among other things, sharing waters of common rivers, transmission of flood related data from India to Bangladesh, construction and repair of

embankment and bank protection works along common/border rivers, Indian River Inter Linking project, Tipaimukh Dam project of India and Mahananda Barrage constructed by India.

Though there has been no meeting of JRC (at the Water Ministerial level) in the last seven years, there were several other meetings that took place either in India or in Bangladesh on and off at technical levels. But ever since the talks were stalled in 2011, there has been no significant call for materialising the Teesta river treaty by New Delhi.

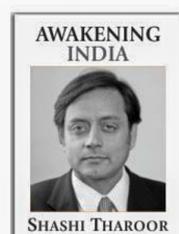
Expectations run high every time there is a summit and during high official-level visits between Bangladesh and India. But experts in the water discourse always emphasise on activating JRC as a forum where both political and technical discussions can take place simultaneously. It's not crucial just because Bangladesh wants its due share of water from the river Teesta. Rather, it's necessary for the best interests of both Bangladesh and India. It's not only about Teesta, it's more than that.

Teesta apart, progress on discussions on sharing of the waters of Feni, Monu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharala and Dudhkumar rivers has also been stalled for long. Bangladesh's concern over India's river interlinking project is far from over as the project works continue to gain momentum. India is also curious to know, in further details, whether or not the Ganges Barrage that Bangladesh contemplates to build in Rajbari would have any negative bearings in its ecology. So there is a whole range of issues here that demand attention.

The writer is Assignment Editor at *The Daily Star*.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The price of empire



AWAKENING INDIA
SHASHI THAROOR

INDIANS tend not to dwell on the country's colonial past. Whether through national strength or civilisational weakness, India has long refused to hold any grudge against

Britain for 200 years of imperial enslavement, plunder, and exploitation. But Indians' equanimity about the past does not annul what was done.

Britain's shambolic withdrawal from India in 1947, after two centuries of imperial rule, entailed a savage partitioning that gave rise to Pakistan.

have not fully faded. I learned that firsthand in the summer of 2015, when I delivered a speech at the Oxford Union decrying the iniquities of British colonialism -- a speech that, to my surprise, inspired a powerful response across India.

The speech quickly went viral on social media, with one post racking up more than three million hits in just 48 hours, and with websites across the globe reposting it. My right-wing opponents stopped trolling me on social media just long enough to hail my speech. The speaker of the Lok Sabha, Sumitra Mahajan, went out of her way to compliment me at a function attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who then congratulated me publicly for having said "the right things at the right

its publication three months ago. The British edition, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India*, hits bookshelves next month.

Given India's longstanding attitudes about colonialism, I did not expect such a reception. But perhaps I should have. After all, the British seized one of the richest countries in the world -- accounting for 27 percent of global GDP in 1700 -- and, over 200 years of colonial rule, reduced it to one of the world's poorest.

Britain destroyed India through looting, expropriation, and outright theft -- all conducted in a spirit of deep racism and amoral cynicism. The British justified their actions, carried out by brute force, with staggering hypocrisy and cant. The American historian Will Durant

single lesson on colonial history.

Londoners marvel at their magnificent city, knowing little of the rapacity and plunder that paid for it. Many British are genuinely unaware of the atrocities their ancestors committed, and some live in the blissful illusion that the British Empire was some sort of civilising mission to uplift the ignorant natives.

This opens the way for the manipulation of historical narratives. Television soap operas, with their gauzy romanticisation of the "Raj," provide a rose-tinted picture of the colonial era. Several British historians have written hugely successful books extolling the supposed virtues of empire.

In the last decade or two, in particular, popular histories of the British Empire, written by the likes of Niall Ferguson and Lawrence James, have described it in glowing terms. Such accounts fail to acknowledge the atrocities, exploitation, plunder, and racism that underpinned the imperial enterprise.

All of this explains -- but does not excuse -- Britons' ignorance. The present cannot be understood in terms of simple historical analogies, but the lessons of history must not be ignored. If you don't know where you've come from, how will you appreciate where you're going?

This goes not just for the British, but also for my fellow Indians, who have shown an extraordinary capacity to forgive and forget. But, while we should forgive, we should not forget. In that sense, the powerful response to my 2015 speech at the Oxford Union is encouraging.

The modern relationship between Britain and India -- two sovereign and equal countries -- is clearly very different from the colonial relationship of the past. When my book hit bookstores in Delhi, British Prime Minister Theresa May was just days away from a visit to seek Indian investment. As I've often argued, you don't need to seek revenge upon history. History is its own revenge.

The writer, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is currently Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and an MP for the Indian National Congress.

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The Jallianwala Bagh massacre carried out by the British in 1919.

ILLUSTRATION: ABDUR RAHMAN

place." Schools and colleges played the speech to their students. One university, the Central University of Jammu, organised a daylong seminar, at which eminent scholars addressed specific points I had raised. Hundreds of articles were written in response, both in support of and in opposition to my statements.

Two years later, strangers still approach me in public places to praise my "Oxford speech." My book on the same theme, *An Era of Darkness*, has remained on Indian bestseller lists since

But it occurred curiously without rancor toward Britain. India chose to remain in the Commonwealth as a republic, and maintained cordial relations with its former overlords. Some years later, Winston Churchill asked Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who had spent nearly a decade of his life in British jails, about his apparent lack of bitterness. Nehru replied that "a great man," Mahatma Gandhi, had taught Indians "never to fear and never to hate."

But, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, the scars of colonialism

called Britain's colonial subjugation of India "the greatest crime in all history." Whether or not one agrees, one thing is clear: imperialism was not, as some disingenuous British apologists have claimed, an altruistic enterprise.

Britain has been suffering from a kind of historical amnesia about colonialism. As Moni Mohsin, a Pakistani writer, recently pointed out, British colonialism is conspicuously absent from the United Kingdom's school curricula. Mohsin's own two children, despite attending the best schools in London, never had a

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Using foot over-bridge must be mandated

A picture in *The Daily Star* shows a woman crossing the main road with her child, with a foot over-bridge just a few yards away. It was an act of negligence that put both her and her child's life at risk.

Everything from fences and iron grills to barbed wire have been put in place to stop this trend; but to no avail. Substandard security management, vendors occupying sidewalks, and plain ignorance are some of the causes behind this.

It is high time to stop these illicit practices permanently. The relentless outcry and awareness initiated by print and electronic media needs government and public appreciation. There cannot be a better solution than self-awareness.

Public places in any developed city are completely pedestrian-friendly. We hope that the concerned authorities, with the help of vigilant volunteers and officials from respective wards, will ensure such an environment for us as well. Zubair Khaled Huq

By email

Inconvenience of construction sites

Construction sites across the city are causing a lot of inconvenience to residents. There is severe air and noise pollution. Dust permeating the environment is causing health hazards for everyone. Patients living in the areas suffer from deafening noises even after working hours.

We are helpless in our protest against this situation. We barely get any assistance from the authorities. We urge the city corporation officials and RAJUK to take strict actions against this problem.

Md. Amzad, By email