

## Convicted fugitive working as a policeman

### How could this happen?

HOW did Habibur Rahman Habib, a former Rabman, who was among the 35 accused in the sensational seven-murder case in Narayanganj, continue his job at a police outpost in Barisal's Hizla upazila as an assistant sub-inspector, before being arrested by police only on Friday? We find this whole episode not only baffling, but extremely worrying.

A Narayanganj court had, in January, found all of the accused in the murder case, including Habib, guilty and had sentenced him to 17 years of imprisonment on charges of abduction and destroying evidence. How then, could a man charged with such serious and grievous crimes, be allowed to continue serving as a law enforcer for two whole months after being convicted, especially given that Habib was supposed to be suspended immediately after his indictment, as per law? How could he roam around freely for so long, that too, right under the nose of law enforcers?

It is difficult to accept that this happened simply because of sheer negligence on part of the law enforcers given how sensationalised the case he was involved in had become. However, even if that was indeed the case, what does that say about our law enforcing agencies? Moreover, what does it say about the state of law and order in our country?

This whole incident is totally unacceptable and must be taken seriously by the authorities. The concerned authorities must also conduct a credible investigation into the matter and find out what had really happened.

## Thousands bereft of safe drinking water

### Tube wells in disrepair

IN 2014, eight remote shoals located twenty kilometres east of Bauphal upazila town in Patuakhali were formalised into Chandranip union that now has a population of 20,000 people. Of the 27 tube wells, eight are in a state of disrepair and basically non-operational, which means the population living on the shoals is forced to depend on Tentulia River for drinking water. Besides being extremely inconvenient, the water collected is purified with potassium alum, which does not necessarily make the water safe for human consumption. An investigative report by this paper on March 31 produced a grim picture for the people living in this frontier area.

Without access to safe drinking water, thousands of people suffer the ills that come with diarrhoea and dysentery. And those people who are situated even further away from the Tentulia River must resort to collecting water from the lone pond at a local's house, which loses its clarity and becomes murky during the dry season. The moment authorities decided to turn these shoals into an administrative unit, basic services like provisioning for access to safe drinking water should have been planned and made available, but that has not happened.

There is no point in talking about access to other basic rights like education and health where a fundamental requirement for existence is in question. Just because these people are physically located in a remote part of the country does not mean we can choose to ignore their plight. Indeed shoal-dwellers of other unions in the vicinity are facing similar drinking-water problems and we can only hope that the local administration will take steps to bring all the dysfunction tube wells on line as soon as possible.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Creating autism awareness

A recent survey has revealed that there are currently 17 thousand autistic children in Bangladesh. The rate is increasing day by day, but we are still far behind in addressing the issue. Gross negligence and ignorance leads us to treating them as a burden on our society. In order to prevent this, it is important to understand autism.

Autism is a neurological problem caused by unusual organic chemical activity in the brain, abnormal brain development, genetic abnormalities, etc. Sometimes, if a mother suffers from viral fever and takes excessive antibiotics during pregnancy, the child is impacted negatively and is born with autism. Symptoms of autism can be noticed in a child's lack of response to his/her name or to playing games, their avoidance of eye contact, recurrence of speech errors, or unusual reactions to sound, smell, taste, or touch. If detected early enough, the child can be helped and given appropriate attention. Bangladesh has made some commendable strides in addressing autism, such as the establishment of Centre for Neurodevelopment and Autism in Children (CNAC), among others. The government must create stronger and more far-reaching awareness regarding autism in Bangladesh, and ensure that adequate help and education is provided in all strata of the society.

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# The cost of a delayed Teesta treaty



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basins due to upstream intervention by India, which impedes the livelihood options of the river dependent

which itself took two decades of negotiation. Water sharing of the rest of the major rivers, especially Teesta, is uncertain. The news of the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India raised our hopes for the awaited Teesta agreement. But recent statements from different government officials highlight the uncertainty over the Teesta deal, making people disheartened. If the Teesta deal is delayed, Bangladesh must suffer from the prolonged cost of water scarcity due to unilateral withdrawal in

their livelihood and economic activities. The estimated catchment area of Teesta is 12,159 Sq. Km, out of which 10,155 lies in India. When India constructed the Gazaldoba barrage in the upper Teesta region and started large scale irrigation projects in 1989, the water flow in Bangladesh was severely reduced. The water stress turns acute in Bangladesh when India starts storing and utilising Teesta's water in Sikkim for hydroelectricity generation. It also threatens the ecological sustainability of the river which causes irreversible dam-

In 1997 water flow of Teesta was nearly 6,500 cusec in the Bangladesh part. This was reduced to 1,348 cusec in 2006, and further deteriorated to 300 cusec in 2016 during the dry period. Since, Teesta is a transboundary river, Bangladesh is supposed to get an equitable share of water.

The 1,11,406 hectares of irrigable land in the Teesta basin area inside Bangladesh can be irrigated in the Aus and Aman season but during the Boro season, a large amount of land is kept uncultivated due to water scarcity. In the 2006-07 and 2013-14 cropping years, only 11,323 and 27,486 hectares of land could be cultivated respectively, which is only 14 percent and 35 percent of the total irrigable area.

From 2006 to 2014, we lost a total of 42,54,218 metric tonnes of Boro production from that area. At the current market price, the cost of this forgone production is BDT 81,326 million. During the last ten years, Teesta was entirely dried up five times, which has had enormous ecological costs.

The government of Bangladesh must assess the overall socio-economic and environmental loss and damages due to water scarcity in the Teesta basin and bring it to the negotiation table. Despite repeated assurances from India that they will not take any action that is harmful for its neighbour, effective initiatives to solve the Teesta water sharing issues are yet to be seen.

Water is a very crucial issue for Bangladesh. Increasing the waiting time for the Teesta deal not only harms Bangladesh, but also adds up the cost of water scarcity everyday, which may affect the bilateral relationship. Dhaka has already proved to be a friend by providing transit and helping India crack down on militant groups. It is now their turn. Although delayed, if New Delhi comes up with optimum solutions and restores the confidence of Dhaka regarding transboundary water issues during the upcoming visit of our Prime Minister, it will definitely strengthen the bilateral relationship between these close neighbours.

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PHOTO: STAR

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

communities of the country. Over the last four decades, the political, economic, trade and cultural relations of the two close neighbours have endured. But the deadlock in transboundary water sharing is considered as an impediment to the bilateral relation between these two nations. Among the shared rivers of India and Bangladesh, a water sharing treaty exists only for the Ganges,

upstream India.

In Bangladesh, Teesta is a major supplier of water resources in Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Rajshahi, Nilphamari, Dinajpur, and Kurigram districts of the North-western region. It is also considered as a prominent tributary and water supplier of the Bhrmaputra-Jamuna river system. Twenty-one million people of 5,427 villages and 12 upazilas are completely dependent on the Teesta for

age in both the upper and lower basin.

India has already brought about 58 percent of its total irrigable areas in the Teesta basin under irrigation. Whereas, due to enormous water scarcity, on Bangladesh's side this figure stands at 20 percent of its total irrigable area, which turns worse during the dry season as a large share of water is diverted and utilised by India through the Gazaldoba barrage.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

# Treating the invisible and the stigmatised



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consequences are often invisible and left untreated. Similarly, the reproductive and sexual health needs of survivors of rape and sexual violence – to reduce the risk of HIV and STIs, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe terminations, and long-term reproductive complications – are often unmet, stigmatised and under-reported.

But it is not only health needs which must be met. Gender-based violence is a consequence and reflection of structural inequalities that threaten sustainable development, undermine democratic governance, deepen social fragmentation and threaten peace and security. This week, UNDP and the Republic of Korea hosted an event at the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women on "Gender-based violence, health and well-being: Addressing the needs of women and girls living in crisis affected context" bringing together government officials, practitioners, and academics.

A common message emerged: survivors need dignity for themselves and their families, they need immediate health services and legal services, livelihood support and economic empowerment. Multi-sectoral approaches which can meet these distinct, but inter-connected, needs are often the most effective. Research has demonstrated co-benefits of combining economic and health interventions, including the reduction of intimate partner violence. However, even where services are available, serious barriers to accessing them exist. As Ambassador Oh Youngju of Korea stressed: "Survivors of violence are often deterred from seeking help or reporting the incidents due to stigma and a lack of accessible services or ways to report safely, receive help and be treated with dignity".

And the data can be daunting. Deputy Minister Wardak of Afghanistan shared some sobering statistics from her

country: almost one in two women aged 15-49 reported physical violence in the last 12 months, with the majority who have experienced physical or sexual violence (61 percent) not seeking help or telling anyone about the violence.

So is there any room for optimism? Jocelyn Kelly, Director of the Women and War programme of Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, stressed that while conflict is a time of trauma, it is

support programmes. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNDP supported the establishment of multipurpose community centres, where survivors of gender-based violence are provided with legal assistance and offered livelihood training, after medical and psychosocial treatment is given by other partners. And in Afghanistan, efforts to increase the number of female healthcare workers, while not directly focused on survivors of violence, can offer culturally

change. And Upala Devi, the UNFPA Technical Advisor on Gender-Based Violence and Coordinator of the UN Task Force on Violence against Women, stressed how a "continuum approach" is necessary across prevention and response efforts, as well as across the humanitarian-development nexus.

Ending gender-based violence, and particularly violence against women and girls, is an important end itself. It is also critical for the achievement of all the



SOURCE: GISTTRACE

also a time of potential transformation. Changing social norms which perpetuate violence can be linked to peace and recovery processes. And successful initiatives can be scaled up. UNDP's Mandeep Dhaliwal shared some good practices. In South Sudan, UNDP is working in partnership with the government, the Global Fund and the International Organization for Migration to address gender-based violence as part of mental health and psychosocial

appropriate services and safe spaces. Gayle Tatsi, Executive Director in the Office for the Development of Women in Papua New Guinea, shared both successes – strong alignment across civil society and government in bringing about a coherent strategy to end gender-based violence – and challenges – the need for additional financial and technical support and called on donors to work with government for long-term, sustainable, and transformational

Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 - ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages, and the commitment to "leave no one behind." While more evidence on preventing violence and supporting survivors is needed, the time for action is now.

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