

TRANSBOUNDARY RIVER FLOW

The future of Bangladesh depends on it



BANGLADESH being the most downstream country in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basins is faced with the double whammy of too much water flowing in transboundary rivers in the rainy season (causing deluge) and too little flow during the lean season (negatively impacting the economy, livelihood, and the ecosystems). Currently, out of the 54 transboundary rivers, there exists only one treaty with upstream India to share the flow in the Ganges during the lean period. The lack of control over the flow of water in transboundary rivers puts Bangladesh in a very precarious situation. Being somewhat frustrated by the stalemate in negotiations over water flow in transboundary rivers, the policymakers in Bangladesh are considering the possibility to manage internal water resources to meet the demands, and not to look towards her upstream neighbours for availability of water.



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

A decision to meet all water-related issues internally can set a very bad precedent for future negotiations on water-sharing agreements. Apparently, Bangladesh will manage its own water resources internally through dredging rivers and containing water in rivers to be used during lean season. As per international laws and the existing Ganges Treaty with India, Bangladesh, as a lower riparian nation, has a legitimate right on all transboundary rivers, as does India on all transboundary rivers with Pakistan, China, Bhutan, and Nepal. The very existence of Bangladesh depends on water and sediments carried by transboundary rivers. Only eight percent of water and sediments that flow through Bangladesh are generated within its own territory. Transboundary rivers are common wealth and resources that belong to all

co-riparian nations and the ecosystems that those rivers support. It is expected that all civilised nations will settle their differences and agree on equitable and fair share of water and sediment resources in all transboundary rivers. Recently, Bangladesh adopted a long-term plan called the Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP 2100) to manage water and land resources in the country in the face of climate change. Under the BDP 2100, the entire territory of the country is divided into six "hotspots": coastal zones, Barind and drought-prone areas, haor and flash flood areas, Chittagong Hill Tracts, river systems and estuaries, and urban areas. The BDP 2100 is a water-centric plan. Freshwater availability was identified as the only cross-cutting and common challenge for each of the hotspots.

It is hoped that once the BDP 2100 is implemented, all water-related problems will be solved one after another. But what the policymakers do not realise is the fact that the success of the BDP 2100 heavily depends on the availability of flow in all transboundary rivers. In the BDP 2100 documents, four future economic growth scenarios are projected based on the availability of water resources. As per the projection scenarios outlined in the BDP 2100, extreme water condition in the country will lead to stagnation in economic growth. As per the BDP 2100, a total of 19 projects have been selected for immediate implementation, one of which is the construction of the Ganges Barrage and Ancillary Works that includes revival of the Gorai River flow. The success of the proposed

Ganges Barrage will completely depend on the availability of water flow downstream of the Farakka Barrage. Although there exists the Ganges water-sharing treaty, a recent study carried out by scientists from Canada, Bangladesh (BUET), and the Netherlands reported that during the period of 1997-2016, Bangladesh did not receive its guaranteed share during critical dry periods with high water demand 65 percent of the time. The Abridged Version of the BDP 2100 document highlighted the importance of upstream development activities as follows: "Being highly dependent upon developments at upstream, the diversion, use or storage of flows from the transboundary rivers is of major importance to Bangladesh." All six specific goals outlined in the BDP 2100 revolve around various aspects of water resource development. One such goal is to develop effective institutions and equitable governance for in-country and transboundary water resource management. The Ganges Treaty will expire in 2026. What will be the fate of Bangladesh if India does not allow any flow during the lean season, as is the case for the Teesta River? What about unilateral control of flow by China and/or India over the Brahmaputra or the Barak River? Would that too be okay for Bangladesh? So, how can the policymakers assume that Bangladesh will not depend on others for water flow in transboundary rivers? In a recent statement, Mamata Banerjee reiterated her position to not allow additional flow in the Teesta during the lean period. The policymakers in Bangladesh should continue to pursue the central government of India and convince them to resolve all transboundary river issues immediately for the sake of regional peace and friendship. Amidst the new political atmosphere in New Delhi, Dhaka needs to revive all negotiations on Teesta water-sharing. It is also high time for the Joint River Commission to work on the technical details for renewal of the Ganges Treaty. It is hoped that the new treaty on the Ganges water-sharing and

all other future water-sharing treaties will have a guarantee clause similar to that of the 1977 agreement which ensured Bangladesh would receive a minimum of 80 percent of the scheduled flow during extremely low flow events at Farakka Barrage. In fact, it would be wise to sign a long-term treaty for all transboundary rivers involving all co-riparian nations in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basins. The central government in India has been maintaining the position that they are ready to sign the Teesta water-sharing treaty but it is due to Mamata Banerjee's opposition that they are reluctant to do so. Now that Mamata Banerjee's grip on power does not stand on firm ground, the central government in India should press her to come on board and do the right thing. In addition to negotiating for her fair share on all transboundary rivers, Bangladesh needs to better manage her water resources within the country. All rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands, and estuaries need to be properly demarcated and reclaimed from encroachers. The pollution in these water bodies has to be tackled. The High Court's recent ruling to recognise all rivers as legal entities can serve as a guiding principle in providing necessary protection to the rivers. PM Sheikh Hasina recently directed all district commissioners in the country to take necessary actions to remove all physical structures from rivers and canals that create an obstacle to the natural flow of water. The High Court's decision backed by the PM can usher a new dawn for stewardship of the rivers in the country. Bangladesh should also rectify the UN Convention on Non-Navigational Water Course (1997) and encourage other co-riparian nations to do the same. If all parties rectify the convention, then it can serve as a basis for fair and equitable negotiation for all rivers in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basins. Md Khalequzzaman is Professor of Geology, Lock Haven University, USA. Email: mkhalequ@lockhaven.edu

Breaking harmful taboos in society

Sex education is a must to prevent gender-based violence

MALHA AHMED
BANGLADESH has been witnessing an alarming rise in rape cases, particularly child rape cases. Between April and June this year, child rape cases increased by 102 percent from the previous quarter; the number of child rape cases filed so far in 2019 is around 500. This makes me wonder whether men are becoming more violent or just switching over to children as they are more vulnerable and easier to target. It is difficult to register that the number of rape incidents has increased from the past. For the longest time, the attitudes of men towards women in the country have been disrespectful. Women cannot walk on the streets without being ogled at or groped. With the rise of the global #MeToo movement that led to an increased awareness on victim-blaming, an increased number of women are now speaking up against sexual abuse. Therefore, the rise in figures of rape incidents might just be reflecting that more women are reporting rape compared to before. The alarming increase in child rape incidents might also be related to that: as more women are now willing to speak out against sexual violence, perpetrators see them as less vulnerable, and as such, they target innocent children and disabled girls who are easier to silence. With rape news frequently hogging the headlines, there is an increased fear among parents who have daughters. Regular instances of rape crimes are being interpreted to mean that women/girls need to be on high alert all the time. Haven't parents of daughters always been careful regarding their daughters' safety in Bangladesh? Women are warned to dress conservatively, stay indoors,

not to venture out at night or travel alone. Women in Bangladesh have been practising these safety measures for ages, and still continue to do so in 2019. So when someone says "be safe", women don't know what else they can do to protect themselves. Why should women have to do all this just to be safe? In the 21st century, why do women have to constantly worry about keeping themselves and their baby daughters safe? Why isn't anything being done to ensure that women can live their lives freely and not always have to worry about their safety? Instead of telling women to be more careful, why don't we tell parents and teachers to initiate appropriate sex education in order to nurture good attitudes among boys and men? Why don't we make sex education compulsory in school curricula? The real problem in Bangladesh is that "sex" and "sexuality" are treated as taboos. We can't talk about it—we pretend that these subjects don't exist. Lack of sex education

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SOURCE: CPMAGAZINE.NET

coupled with a patriarchal culture leads to sexual frustration, often turning men into monsters. Instead of solving the real problem, we try to "tackle" rape culture by saying: "Be careful girls," or "Parents with girls should be more careful." It's rape culture when women walk on the streets and are constantly ogled and face unsolicited touching (even when they're totally covered). Young men in Bangladesh grow up in a patriarchal environment with little or no sex education. In rural areas and single-sex schools, boys have very little contact with female peers after reaching puberty. Differences in gender roles intensify during

adolescence when boys enjoy new social privileges reserved only for men such as autonomy, mobility, opportunity, and power, whereas girls have to start enduring restrictions. Their parents curtail their mobility, monitor their interactions with males and, in some cases, even withdraw them from school. This leads to misdirected masculinity, characterised by male sexual dominance and unequal gender attitudes and behaviour. This is why Bangladesh is in dire need of comprehensive sex education with modules focusing on sexual violence awareness. Such lessons can help empower young people by uplifting women's roles in

society. Importantly, they can also provide a safe space to address distorted views of masculinity and create awareness about violence against women. A comprehensive curriculum-based "sexuality education", such as the one launched by Unesco in 2018, can help young boys and girls understand their bodies and the age-related changes better. And it can also teach young people about consent and respecting each other's personal space. According to the Unesco website, "CSE (comprehensive sexuality education) is not just about sex. It is about relationships, gender, puberty, consent, and sexual and reproductive health, for all young people." Sexuality education should also be a space to learn about menstruation, sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted diseases and risks of pregnancy. In 2015, New Zealand released a new curriculum policy document for sexuality education in all schools. This policy is a rare example of a curriculum document that explicitly values diversity and promotes inclusive school environments. Students also need to be taught to critically think and learn about sexuality and all that it encompasses. In other words, sexuality education is more than just talking about sexual intimacy. It includes reproductive health, sexually-transmitted diseases, contraceptives, consent, gender identity, gender equality and self-worth—all of which are important themes when addressing sexual violence. Parents should also be involved in this process; research findings emphasise the importance of children witnessing positive and equitable gender roles at home. Malha Ahmed is a PhD candidate in Economics at University of Illinois at Chicago, USA.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

General Francisco Franco
JULY 18, 1936
The Spanish Civil War begins as a revolt by right-wing Spanish military officers in Spanish Morocco and spreads to mainland Spain. General Francisco Franco led an uprising of army troops based in Spanish North Africa. From the Canary Islands, he broadcasted a message calling for all army officers to join the uprising and overthrow Spain's leftist Republican government.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Look for
5 Irritates
10 Volcanic flow
11 Makes blank
13 Kitchen appliance
14 1960s cartoon feline
15 Bird with flippers
17 In the style of
18 Fancy homes
19 Golf goal
20 Warning color
21 Flexed
22 Small singing groups
25 Police raids
26 Nevada city
27 Buddy

DOWN
1 Skiing spot
2 Roof overhangs
3 Bit of history
4 Aussie animal
5 Made new knots
6 Golf bag group

28 Nile serpent
29 Pillow fabric
33 Coolidge nickname
34 Biofuel option
35 Pal of George and Jerry
37 Pro -- (proportionate)
38 Region
39 Bullfight cries
40 Prophets
41 Early carmaker

7 Pool unit
8 Gets away
9 Waterproofing stuff
12 Sets off
16 Salt Lake City team
21 Cowboy
22 Vestiges
23 Used car deals
24 Properly positioned
25 "Art of the Fugue" composer
27 Bishop's caps
29 Choir member
30 Counting everything
31 Famous
32 Pane material
36 Mineral suffix

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

P	E	A	N	U	T	L	O	S	S
A	R	O	U	S	E	A	R	C	H
W	A	R	M	E	D	V	E	R	A
A	S	T	E	R	C	I	G	A	R
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J	A	L	A	P	E	N	O	S	
R	A	D	R	O	S	E			
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E	A	S	T	A	T	E	A	S	E
R	I	S	E	D	A	N	C	E	D

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

THANKS, CHAPLAIN!
LIFE IS VERY FULFILLING WHEN YOU DO SOMETHING THAT WARMS YOUR HEART
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, SIR...
LIKE THAT PIZZA I HAD LAST NIGHT!

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

BANG! PONG!
HAMMIE!
PRETTY COOL DRUM, HULLA MOM!
YES, BUT WILL YOU PLEASE PLAY IT SOMEWHERE ELSE?
PAT-A-TAT! BAM! BAM!
AND MOM SPECIFICALLY SAID TO DO THAT IN HERE?
BINGITTY BONG BAP!
THAT'S WHAT I HEARD!