

# Hasina-Modi agreements on shared rivers: What did Bangladesh get?



**D**URING her recent visit to India, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At this meeting, a number of agreements were signed, several of which concern shared rivers.

According to press reports, the meeting reached the agreement to "operationalise the Dhulian-Gadagari-Rajshahi-Daulatdia-Aricha Route (to and fro) and include Daudkandi-Sonamura Route (to and fro) under Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade." It agreed to "exchange updated data and information and prepare the draft framework on Interim Sharing Agreements for the six rivers, namely Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla, and Dudkumar, and to firm up the draft framework of the interim sharing agreement of Feni River." At the meeting, the Indian prime minister assured his Bangladeshi counterpart that "his government is working with all stakeholders in India for conclusion of the Agreement (on sharing of Teesta River) soonest possible." Finally, Bangladesh agreed at the meeting to allow India to withdraw 1.82 cusec water from the Feni River.

Clearly, some of these agreements cater to the interests of India. There was hardly any concrete progress toward meeting Bangladesh's concerns regarding shared rivers. This is disappointing when many parts of the country's west adjoining the Padma River are experiencing unprecedented flood, the root cause of which is the Farakka Barrage. India regulates the gates of this barrage in winter in a way that diverts water, causing siltation, encroachment, shallowing, and other harmful morphological changes, which reduce the carrying capacity of the Padma River. As a result, when India opens the floodgates in summer and autumn, severe bank erosion and floods occur. The same is the situation with Teesta and many other shared rivers on which India has built water impounding and diversions structures.



Farakka Barrage

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Both India and Bangladesh should realise that unless this basic problem of diversion of flow and destabilisation of Bangladesh's rivers is addressed, it will be difficult to meet India's need for water routes through Bangladesh to its seven northeastern states. Maintaining the proposed river routes will require enormous and perpetual dredging, which at some point will become simply untenable. India's plan to divert Brahmaputra water, under its River Linking Project, will aggravate the situation further. Without this basic realisation, efforts to reach agreements regarding sharing of rivers will not be fruitful. The unpleasant fact is that the 1996 Ganges Treaty has not increased the winter flow of the Padma River and has not stopped the process of destabilisation of this river. Similarly, assurances of a Teesta sharing

agreement are not of much value, because Bangladesh has been getting such assurances for many years now, and more importantly because, by the time any such agreement may be reached, there will be hardly any flow left of the Teesta River beyond the Gajoldoba Barrage in winter. Against this backdrop, it is ironic that the only concrete river-related outcome of the Hasina-Modi meeting was Bangladesh's agreement to allow India to withdraw part of the Feni River flow. The quantity is small, but the symbolism is large. It shows that, as far as shared rivers are concerned, India gets what it wants while Bangladesh keeps on pleading. It is indeed unfortunate that Bangladesh fails to raise the demand for the removal of diversions structures built by India, when there is an increasing recognition that

the Farakka Barrage has failed to achieve its stated goal of desilting the Kolkata port and has instead become a problem even for India now, causing upstream flooding in the Indian state of Bihar. As a result, there is a growing demand inside India for demolition of the Farakka Barrage. Important figures of the Indian polity—such as Nitish Kumar, the ex-chief minister of Bihar, Rajendra Singh, the "waterman of India", and many others—have been urging for demolition of Farakka Barrage for quite some time now. On July 17, 2016, Mr Kumar raised his demand formally at the 11th Interstate Council Meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended by Union (Central) ministers and the chief ministers of the states. There is a saying that "one has to cry one's own cry!" It is not surprising that Bangladesh is not getting the necessary

hearing from India when it hesitates even to cry its own cry.

It is, therefore, high time for Bangladesh to insist on its rights on the shared rivers. It should sign the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, and use its Articles 7, 20, 21, and 23 to urge India not to cause "significant harm" to Bangladesh through its impounding and diversions structures and to "protect and preserve (Bangladesh's) ecosystem" and its "marine environment," including the Sundarbans, by restoring full natural flow of the shared rivers.

Given the experience of Farakka, the idea of constructing a Ganges-Padma Barrage of the usual type inside Bangladesh with India's help does not make much sense. Such a barrage will provide justification for the Farakka Barrage and cause similar downstream and upstream harms as Farakka has already caused.

The governments of both Bangladesh and India should, therefore, seriously consider the "transit in exchange for rivers" formula that Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) put forward in 2011. Under this formula, India will restore natural flows of Bangladesh's rivers by removing impounding and diversions structures, while Bangladesh will provide India transit and transshipment facilities to its northeastern states, subject to common international practices.

Unfortunately, governments of Bangladesh have so far been meeting India's demands regarding transit and transshipment without getting much in the way of rivers in return. Such an unequal exchange cannot be sustainable in the long run.

It may be hoped that the leaders of both Bangladesh and India will see the merit of the "transit in exchange for rivers" formula as a win-win solution for their respective needs. The goodwill that such a solution will create can then spill over into other areas of cooperation between the two countries.

Dr Nazrul Islam is an economist, founder of Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), and vice-president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA).

## 38TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY

# Qazi Motahar Hossain: A pundit of versatile knowledge

HASAN AL-MAHMUD

**W**HILE learning how to subtract and multiply, a boy surprised his uncle, Kazi Abul Hossain, by discovering the rules of division in advance. Later, this young boy gained fame as the first statistician, scientist, educator, chess player and prominent literary figure of Bangladesh. He is none other than Professor Qazi Motahar Hussain.

He was called by different names by different prominent figures. Our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam used to call him "Motihar". And in the words of Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, he was "an upright, humble person and a man of wisdom and virtue". Everyone close to him used to call this brilliant mind "Qazi Shaheb". He was a rational, religious and outspoken man with a dynamic talent in the fields of science, research, literature, culture, music, sports, etc.

The writings of Bangkim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore and Pramoth Chowdhury created a novel dimension in Bengal that we consider as thoughtful or literary essays. Although the style of Kazi Motahar Hossain was not completely similar to theirs, we still can easily put him in this category because he didn't write exactly philosophical essays, nor systematic works, but research projects. He and his contemporary friend-writers were trying to turn "essays" into "literature". In this case, the collective success of that generation has never come back again in Bangladesh.

Qazi Motahar Hossain was born on July 30, 1897, at Lakshimpur village of Bhaluka (now Kumarkhali in Kushtia district) of Nadia district, in Matulala. His ancestral residence was in Bagmara village of Pangsha Upazila in the Rajbari district. During the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, the ancestors of Motahar Hossain were appointed as religious advisers and judges in the Delhi court—thus he was designated "Qazi".

His father Kazi Gowharuddin was a government service holder and Motahar Hossain was the eldest of eight siblings. That is why it was not possible for his family to fully pay for their children's education. But Motahar Hossain received scholarships from the beginning of his education life. He used to teach in various educational institutes—sometimes on tuition or on long-term basis—to support himself. He struggled with poverty but did not give up on studying.

This struggling life taught him to be stronger. He was influenced by his teachers, Jyotindranath Roy and Jatindra Mohan Biswas, in the field of science. Jatinbabu was a secular, liberal teacher. But his ideology had inspired Kazi Motahar Hossain throughout his life. Even his literary journey had been influenced by Jatinbabu. There was a competition held on the occasion of "the chariot journey of Kushtia". That was the first time he wrote an



Qazi Motahar Hossain (July 30, 1897 – October 9, 1981)

essay with the support of Jatinbabu. His literary journey was glorified with his wonderful work. Some of them are *Shancharan* (1937), *Nazrul Kabya Porichiti* (Introduction to Nazrul's Poetry, 1955), *Gonit Shastrer Itihas* (History of Mathematics, 1970), *Alok Bigyan* (Optics, 1974), *Nirbachito Probondho* (Collected Essays, 1976) and many others. When his first essay book was published, it caught the attention of many readers. Rabindranath Tagore, among many others, praised the book for its "conspicuous language, the boldness of speaking and for its mastery of thought".

Kazi Nazrul Islam was a close friend of his. The friendship between the two of them was intense. Their relationship was so deep that Nazrul wrote a long poem called "Dari-Bilap" about Motahar Hossain's beard. Motahar Hossain also had a special relationship with Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay. And Sharat Chandra's story "Mahesh" was based on a conversation he had with Motahar Hossain. His professional career was filled with great achievements. He had a doctorate (Ph.D) degree from the University of Dhaka in "Design of Experiments". One of the examiners of his thesis was Sir Ronald Fisher, a renowned statistician. He was highly praised for this paper. Later, one of the statistical methods invented by Motahar Hossain was known as "Hossain's Chain Rule". And, one of his biographers, Abdullah Al-Mutti, called him a "truly Renaissance man".

On January 3, 1920, a progressive literary organisation, "Muslim Sahitya Samaj", was established in Dhaka and he was deeply involved in it. The annual pageantry of

the "Muslim Sahitya Samaj" was "Shikha". Qazi Motahar Hossain was the editor in the second and third years of "Shikha", where he dreamed of creating a progressive social structure that would provide them the opportunity to practice independent thinking. Qazi Motahar Hossain was a devout man, not a fanatic. He wanted to experience life with his own eyes. In his writing, he had no place for religious fanaticism or superstition. When Kazi Abdul Oud or Abul Hossain made a comment about the followers of Kazi Motahar Hossain, he said, "We do not want to fight against Islam—we want to eliminate the superstition and the accumulated rubbish of the current Muslim society."

Qazi Motahar Hossain became the voice against language reforms, change of letters (writing the Bengali language in Urdu), and the irrational Rabindra antagonism of capitalism. He also showed dissatisfaction with the attempt to impose Urdu as a state language, which was likely to end the East-West affiliation. Later, his prophecy came true.

He came forward to celebrate the birth anniversary of Rabindranath. For the first time in Dhaka, he presided over the death anniversary of the renowned author Maxim Gorky. He protested whenever the language, literary works, culture, or science studies were criticised. This is why Annadashankar Roy said this about him: "a liberal Muslim as well as a patriotic Bengali and an honest man overall."

Motahar Hossain was also famous for playing "chess". His interest in sports was immense, and when it came to chess, he was profoundly involved. His chess companions were well-known people like Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Kisanlal, Satish Chandra Addi (All-India Champion), and others. He became the first to compete in the "All India Chess Brilliance" in 1925. Grandmaster Kazi Motahar Hossain was the founder and lifetime president of the "Bangladesh Chess Federation". He was also talented in football, tennis, high jump, swimming and badminton. He became Dhaka's lawn tennis champion in 1951.

Many from this generation don't know very much about him. People know the popular detective series "Masud Rana" by Kazi Anwar Hossain, who is a worthy son of this great man—and was encouraged by his father to write it.

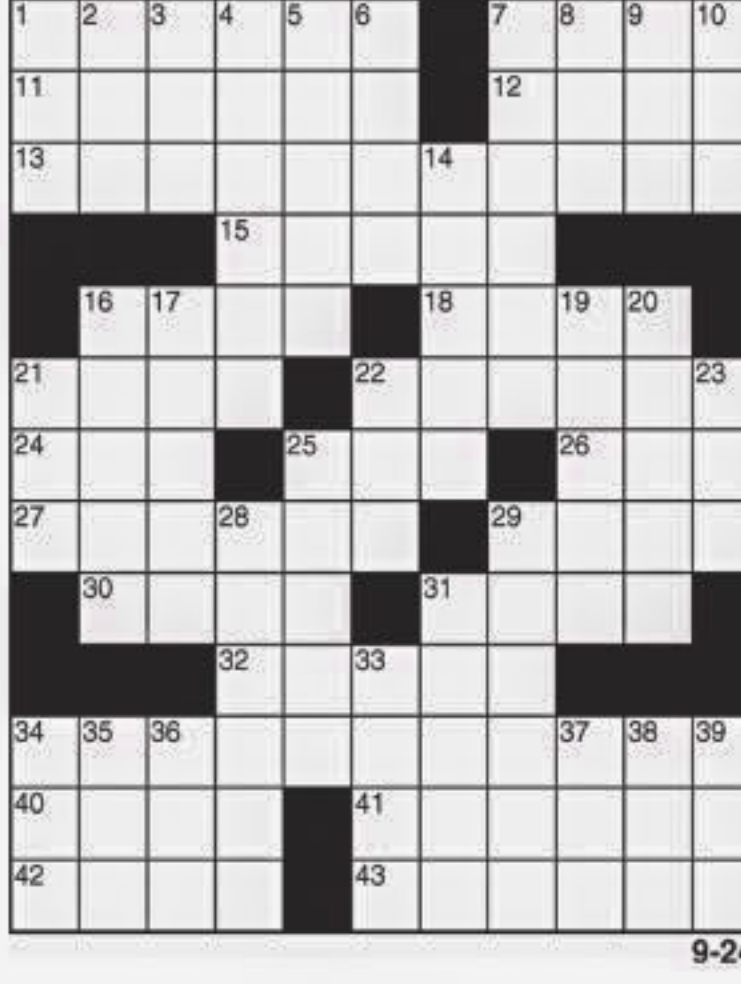
Being a progressive and pioneer educator, literary person, mathematician, scientist, musician, etc., Motahar Hossain became one of the guardians of the intellectual, progressive, and open-minded people of Bangladesh. Today, Bangladesh stands on the foundation that people like Kazi Motahar Hossain created. So, on this day, let us remember him as the legendary, versatile figure that he was.

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## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Loving touch
  - 7 Work on jerky
  - 11 Denali setting
  - 12 Casual greeting
  - 13 Schoolbag items
  - 15 Victorious
  - 16 History class topics
  - 18 Suit piece
  - 21 Gasp for air
  - 22 Roar
  - 24 Nest item
  - 25 Butter square
  - 26 Start of a count
  - 27 Gazed
  - 29 Fencing sword
  - 30 Glided
  - 31 Takes advantage of
  - 32 Weather map line
  - 34 Shams opposite
  - 40 Pennsylvania port
  - 41 Typical Telemundo viewer
  - 42 Spigots
  - 43 Isn't thrifty
  - 16 Salary
  - 17 Brat's
  - 19 Skiing spot
  - 20 Phone sounds
  - 21 Vigor
  - 22 Misbehaving
  - 23 Petite
  - 25 Director
  - 28 Hunting weapons
  - 29 Ritzy home
  - 31 Open, in a way
  - 33 Hogwarts messengers
  - 34 Sulky state
  - 35 Lyricist
  - Gershwin
  - 36 Pert talk
  - 37 Sermon topic
  - 38 Finish
  - 39 Sinking signal

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