

**Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2017 commences
India bled under the British rule – a conversation
Shashi Tharoor’s opening address and a ‘conversation’ with UK’s
Michael Dwyer**

Kolkata 15th January 2017: Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF) was inaugurated today with a potent conversation about the legacy of the Raj on India, in continuation of author **Dr. Shashi Tharoor** popular speech at the Oxford University debate that demanded that UK pay India for the damage its 200 years of rule caused the country. **Michael Dwyer**, from the UK, the country being ‘attacked’ by Shashi Tharoor, who is publishing Dr. Tharoor’s new book in the UK later this year, dialogued with the author on what has become a controversial subject between the two countries and their people.

Anjum Katyal and Maina Bhagat, the Directors, Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival said, *“That such a conversation is possible, that too in the shadow of the first cathedral built in the overseas territory of the British Empire, illustrates what AKLF stands for. With this we kick off AKLF’s 2017 agenda of starting conversations to make the world a more inclusive place. Over the next four days, AKLF will host conversations across a spectrum of ‘controversial’ issues in the hope that our literary festival will contribute to inspiring a new generation of artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers who will value the idea of inclusion and spotlight the racism, bigotry, patriarchy, warmongering, social inequality, and corruption which is hurting people, especially children, across the world.”*

Dr. Tharoor who is attending Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival for the second time said, *“It’s a pleasure to be in Kolkata again, the beloved city of my adolescence, with my new book, An Era of Darkness. AKLF takes place in Kolkata, where love of ideas and appreciation of words is embedded in the culture. I have been looking forward to sharing my ideas and words with the knowledgeable audience AKLF attracts.”*

Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival is India’s first major literary initiative of the year, India’s only literary festival created by a bookstore and Kolkata’s first literary festival. AKLF’s eighth edition from Jan 15–18 is woven around conversations to make the world a more inclusive place. Spotting Kolkata’s unique cultural heritage of inclusiveness, the programme of AKLF 2017 was announced aboard a cruise on the banks of the Ganges. Created by the nearly 100 year old Oxford Bookstore, the Festival programming, said the Directors, *“spans the entire spectrum of inclusion, from women and children to the underprivileged, including our tribute to Mahasweta Devi, who brought the most marginalized of our people into the fold of literature. The era of Post Truth, where facts are fast losing out to rhetoric, is discussed by experts; as is the impact of different media on our reality today.”*

Every evening for three days, AKLF will pay tribute to Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan through poetry and contemporary music at Poetry Café and Plug in, hosted at the festival’s main venue – St. Paul’s Cathedral grounds – chosen for its welcoming, accessible and inclusive nature.

For the first time, Oxford Bookstores will host Oxford Junior Literary Festival (OJLF), a two-day festival to be held on 15th and 16th Jan for young readers. Renowned children's authors, publishers of children's books, storytelling and creativity will form part of OJLF. This year, AKLF has tied up with UNICEF@70 to conduct its global short stories campaign titled "Tiny Stories" at OJLF. AKLF 2017 will be held at St Paul's Cathedral, established in 1847, and Oxford Bookstore, established in 1919. The festival's closing event will be hosted at St John's Church, built in 1787. The Festival conversations will also be hosted at Royal Calcutta Turf Club, Tollygunge Club, the campus of iLead & Presidency University, Daga Nikunj and the Harrington Street Arts Centre.

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Notes to Editors

AKLF 2017 Partners and Associations: The AKLF 2017 edition has forged several new, prestigious associations, to add to its impressive repertoire of collaborations since the first edition in 2010. We are proud to have as our partners major national and international institutions and corporates such as the Australian Council for the Arts, Alliance Française, Australian High Commission, Instituto Cervantes, Consulate General of Italy, MAKAIAS, Presidency University, Future Hope, UNICEF, The Teacher's Centre, Jaipur Literary Festival, Sahitya Akademi, Prabha Khaitan Foundation, Development Corporation Limited (DCL), Vivada Cruises, FACES, Open Doors, The Creative Arts, Zoomcar, Art Rickshaw, Times Fibrefill, Aishee, Sienna and several others. A wide cross section of publishers like Niyogi Books, Future, Oxford University Press, Tulika, Duckbill, NBDS The Book Council are also partnering with us. Venue partners include Tollygunge Club, iLead, Harrington Street Art Centre, Alka Jalan Foundation and Royal Calcutta Turf Club. We welcome 93.5 Red FM as our radio partner, Vistara as aviation partner, Typhoo as beverage partner, Kenilworth as hospitality partner, Apollo Gleneagles Hospitals as wellness partner. AKLF is very proud of these associations and hopes to keep growing year on year.

About An Era of Darkness: In 1930, the American historian and philosopher Will Durant wrote that Britain's 'conscious and deliberate bleeding of India... [was the] greatest crime in all history'. He was not the only one to denounce the rapacity and cruelty of British rule, and his assessment was not exaggerated. Almost thirty-five million Indians died because of acts of commission and omission by the British—in famines, epidemics, communal riots and wholesale slaughter like the reprisal killings after the 1857 War of Independence and the Amritsar massacre of 1919. Besides the deaths of Indians, British rule impoverished India in a manner that beggars belief. When the East India Company took control of the country, in the chaos that ensued after the collapse of the Mughal empire, India's share of world GDP was 23 per cent. When the British left it was just above 3 per cent. The British empire in India began with the East India Company, incorporated in 1600, by royal charter of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I, to trade in silk, spices and other profitable Indian commodities. Within a century and a half, the Company had become a power to reckon with in India. In 1757, under the command of Robert Clive, Company forces defeated the ruling Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula of Bengal at Plassey, through a combination of superior artillery and even more superior chicanery. A few years later, the

young and weakened Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, was browbeaten into issuing an edict that replaced his own revenue officials with the Company's representatives. Over the next several decades, the East India Company, backed by the British government, extended its control over most of India, ruling with a combination of extortion, double-dealing, and outright corruption backed by violence and superior force. This state of affairs continued until 1857, when large numbers of the Company's Indian soldiers spearheaded the first major rebellion against colonial rule. After the rebels were defeated, the British Crown took over power and ruled the country ostensibly more benignly until 1947, when India won independence. In this explosive book, bestselling author Shashi Tharoor reveals with acuity, impeccable research, and trademark wit, just how disastrous British rule was for India. Besides examining the many ways in which the colonizers exploited India, ranging from the drain of national resources to Britain, the destruction of the Indian textile, steel-making and shipping industries, and the negative transformation of agriculture, he demolishes the arguments of Western and Indian apologists for Empire on the supposed benefits of British rule, including democracy and political freedom, the rule of law, and the railways. The few unarguable benefits—the English language, tea, and cricket—were never actually intended for the benefit of the colonized but introduced to serve the interests of the colonizers. Brilliantly narrated and passionately argued, *An Era of Darkness* will serve to correct many misconceptions about one of the most contested periods of Indian history.

Bios

Shashi Tharoor: Indian politician and a former diplomat who is currently serving as Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha (from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala since 2009). He also currently serves as Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs. Tharoor is also an acclaimed writer, having authored 15 bestselling works of fiction and non-fiction since 1981, all of which are centred on India and its history, culture, film, politics, society, foreign policy, and more. His most distinguished works are *The Great Indian Novel*, *Riot*, *Nehru: The Invention of India* and *An Era Of Darkness* that has recently been published in November, 2016.

Michael Dwyer: Publisher at Hurst Publishers. He joined Hurst Publishers, a London-based independent non-fiction publishing house in 1986 and became the head in 2007 after the death of Christopher Hurst. He mostly works with African Studies, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, South Asian Studies and War and International Relations.