



Indo-Bangladesh Water Diplomacy

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Abstract:

The paper aims to analyze the challenges faced in water negotiations between Bangladesh and India, focusing on historical events and ongoing discussions. It examines the significance of the Kushiya River Pact, which has played a crucial role in shaping hydro relations between the two countries. While the Ganges Water Treaty of 1996 provides a management framework for the Ganga River, it emphasizes the need for a similar agreement for other shared rivers. However, limited efforts from both sides have hindered progress in this regard. The paper argues that significant negotiation challenges have hindered the progress of water negotiations between Bangladesh and India, turning it into a zero-sum game. The objective of the paper is to investigate the difficulties encountered in water negotiations between Bangladesh and India. In order to comprehend these challenges, the paper assesses historical information as well as previous and current water negotiations between the two countries. Additionally, the paper proposes potential solutions to address these challenges.

The study will be Qualitative research. It will begin with study and analysis of copies of Agreements, orders, reports of negotiations available on websites of ministry of external affairs, Government of India and Foreign ministry of Bangladesh. Along with this, the study also involves academic research papers as well as books available.

Key words: Kushiya River Pact, Ganges Water Treaty, Water Negotiations, Qualitative Research

Introduction

The Indo-Bangladesh relationship has a rich history of nearly five decades, with India being one of the first countries to formally acknowledge Bangladesh. These two nations have a strong

bond based on shared history, language, and sentiment. Their close proximity, both geographically and culturally, has significant implications for their economic interactions, strategic interests, and the overall stability of the Indian Subcontinent. However, the current situation indicates problems in their relationship. There are several factors that have hindered positive bilateral relations between the two neighbours, including issues related to migration, insurgent activities, border and trade disputes, and the crucial matter of water scarcity. This study specifically focuses on water disputes and diplomacy between India and Bangladesh, which are often considered the main cause of the bilateral water crisis. The aim is to examine how this factor shapes their relationship and highlight the detrimental effect of neglecting the importance of water. To support this claim, it is important to provide context and understand the nature of tension between the two countries. The geopolitical characteristics of the conflict play a significant role, creating a push-and-pull effect. Despite the need for cooperation due to their physical proximity, changes in political regimes and ruling parties have often worsened the issue or limited the level of cooperation. This trend is evident in various areas of conflict. India and Bangladesh share a border of over 4000 kilometers, making it the largest land border for India. The permeability of this border and the lack of clear demarcation used to be a major source of dispute, leading to various negative consequences. The presence of enclaves, where parts of one country existed within the territory of the other, created opportunities for illegal migration and had significant demographic implications for the bordering Indian states of West Bengal and Assam.

Fifty years of Indo Bangladesh relations: Issues, Challenges and Possibilities

The two countries share 54 transnational rivers, and as an upper riparian country, India diverts water, depriving Bangladesh of its rightful share. Currently, there is only one water-sharing agreement, the Ganga Water sharing Treaty, which was established in 1996 and is valid for 30 years. The future beyond this treaty is uncertain. The Teesta Water Sharing Treaty, which was expected to be signed in 2011 during Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh, was ultimately halted due to strong opposition by Mamata Banerjee. This is significant because the Teesta River is the fourth largest trans boundary river for irrigation and fishing in Bangladesh. Negotiations on Teesta water sharing have been ongoing since 1983, but India has not displayed the expected behaviour in sharing water with Bangladesh. As a result, tens of thousands of Bangladeshi farmers and fishermen are suffering from severe water scarcity.

Bangladesh-India Water Negotiations:

With the highest number of common rivers with India, Bangladesh faces numerous waters sharing disputes. Since its independence, Bangladesh has engaged in negotiations with India to resolve these disputes. However, the country has encountered challenges in reaching a consensus on a formula and mechanism for sharing water.

The Kushiya River Pact:

The Kushiya River Pact is a Stimulus for Indo- Bangladesh Hydro relations which has played a crucial role in shaping hydro relations between the two countries. While the Ganges Water Treaty of 1996 provides a

management framework for the Ganga River, it emphasizes the need for a similar agreement for other shared rivers. However, limited efforts from both sides have hindered progress in this regard. Water expert Ramaswamy Iyer has highlighted the necessity of establishing a management regime for six to seven rivers. Disputes have already emerged concerning the utilization of these rivers, such as the concerns raised by Bangladesh over the proposed dam on the Barak River at Tipaimukh. In this context, a significant breakthrough occurred with the signing of the Kushiya Pact in September 2022. This pact, signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India, focuses on the distribution of water from the Kushiya River, which is a tributary of the Barak River flowing through Bangladesh before entering Assam. Notably, this agreement marks the first watersharing deal between the two countries since the historic Ganga Waters Treaty in 1996, bridging a gap of over 25 years.

Conclusion

The study of Bangladesh-India water sharing disputes. Water remains a contested issue between Bangladesh and India for a long time that needs to be resolved for the benefits of all. The existing discourse of water, 'water conflict' needs to be problematised. New thinking needs to be developed. Promoting cooperation over water and proper water information and governance also becomes essential. Since Bangladesh and India share international rivers, India should not treat water as its national resource/issue. The longstanding Bangladesh-India maritime and land boundary disputes have been resolved peacefully through international regimes. It is also possible to resolve the water dispute amicably. If necessary, Bangladesh should go to international organisations to resolve the water dispute. This chapter concludes by arguing that there is less cooperation over water than challenges. And for this, India cannot avoid its responsibility.

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