



River water Interests/disputes with India's Neighbours as Potential Flash Points

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The potential implications of an increased water-insecure world are: population explosion in the past two decades, consistently growing economies with ever-increasing energy needs/requirements, strained regional environment, demographically agrarian society and global warming/climate change in the Asian sub-continent. The situation is worse for countries that are already experiencing water shortages, such as Pakistan, which is seen as one of the most water-stressed countries around the world. According to a study by Asian Development Bank, Pakistan is on the brink of a serious water crisis. The report states, Pakistan along with some other countries of Asia, are not very far from being classified as 'water scarce' nations, with less than 1,000 cubic metres per persons per year being available¹. The situation is more or less similar for other emerging economies of Bangladesh, China and India, who are also in a precarious situation, and are highly susceptible to water stress in the near future. As a result, it is often argued by many that there is a serious possibility that present water interests/disputes and scarcity, if not resolved, could one day transform or lead into a potential flashpoint/security risk within the Asian sub-continent.

1 Weblink: http://www.salon.com/2013/08/04/global_water_shortage_is_getting_worse_partner/

2 Weblink: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111601,00.html>

India and Pakistan Water Conflicts/Flashpoints

Both India and Pakistan since partition have experienced friction between their relations due to various water conflicts. The countries' early leaders anticipated this fierce rivalry over the waters that connect their volatile border. As a result, after numerous dialogues and through careful negotiations, both countries signed an accord called the *Indus Waters Treaty* in 1960, which clearly determined how the region's rivers are to be divided. In this treaty, control over three eastern rivers of the Beas, Ravi and Sutlej was given to India, while Pakistan got the control over western rivers of the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum². The Indus Waters Treaty has been widely hailed as success, having survived three post-independence wars between the two hostile neighbours. However, its resilience is increasingly being tested by the continuous challenges that are posed due to shrinking water resources within the 21st Century in the Asian sub-continent. The situation for Pakistan has changed significantly from 1960s till the present moment, as it is now on the brink of water scarcity. The once lush green agricultural fields which employed roughly half of the total population in Pakistan, and further contributed for a quarter of the GDP growth, is going barren over time due to inadequate water supply.

Climate change also has begun to have a serious impact on the outflow of water resources in Pakistan, which has more or less crippled the economy and the society of the nation as a whole. The source or flow of all of the Pakistan's rivers passes through India first, so this naturally provides India with an upper hand in controlling the outflow of these rivers. This in turn makes Pakistan more suspicious of any dam project or any activity that is carried out by India upstream of the western rivers. The Indian Government has a total of forty-five projects that are either already completed or in the proposal stages on the western rivers, some of which that have the capacity to generate as much as up to 1000 megawatts (MW) of power³. The carrying of such activities within the western rivers has irked Pakistan, who accuses India of worsening Pakistan's dire water shortages, which would ultimately choke the agricultural production and ruin the livelihoods of many in the country. On the other hand, India keeps dismissing these accusations of Pakistan as baseless and without any scientific backing. In 2005, Pakistan challenged India's 450 MW Baglihar dam project before the World Bank, but lost the case in the end. In 2011, both countries went head to head again at the International Court of Arbitration (ICA) over India's 330 MW project in Kishanganga project in Jammu and Kashmir⁴. As of now, ICA has asked India to stop its construction in relation to this project till the assessments are being carried out. Moreover, Pakistan is further considering arbitration to clear out the differences with India over dam projects which are underway on the Indus and Jhelum River. Although, it is difficult to predict if India and Pakistan will actually go to a war to settle their water disputes, however one thing is for certain, the differences between the two nations related to water resources, are ultimately making it harder for long-time rivals to put their enmity behind them.

3Weblink: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111601,00.html>

4Weblink: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111601,00.html>

5Weblink:

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1303506/chinese-dam-concerns-raise-fears-future-water-conflict>

India and China Water Conflicts/Flashpoints

China is the world's most prolific builders of hydropower dams, and is further the source of ten major rivers flowing to eleven countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that its neighbours downstream live in the constant fear that Beijing has a tight grip on "Asia's tight water tap"⁵. As far as India is concerned, China currently has three major dam projects that are mapped out on the river of Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet, which is not far upstream, and from where it crosses into India and eventually into Bangladesh as the Brahmaputra. Despite continuous assurances from China that construction of their dam projects will not harm or obstruct the flow of the rivers downstream, the perceived lack of transparency related to such projects has always intensified Indian fears.

Both India and China combined have more than a third of the world's population, but only a tenth of the water reserves⁶. Moreover, both the countries are rapidly growing economies, and are competing for the access to the same yet limited water resources within the Asian sub-continent. China's lack of usable water resources is already causing a significant shortfall in the annual GDP, and the situation could further worsen with the persistent economic growth, and through the negative effects that are related to climate change within China. India on the other hand, with a projected population of 1.4 billion by 2050, is also predicted to be "water-scarce" roughly during the same time. With both China and India having their own reasons to fear the increasing water shortages, conflicts in the near future can/may take place, if such issues are not resolved at the earliest.

6Weblink:

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1303506/chinese-dam-concerns-raise-fears-future-water-conflict>

7Weblink: http://www.nih.ernet.in/rbis/Ganga_treat.htm

8Weblink:

<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/06/08/india-bangladesh-water-disputes-and-teesta-river-diplomacy/>

India and Bangladesh Water Conflicts/Flashpoints

India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers between them. Despite the setting up of a *Joint River Commission* for water management as early as 1972, tensions between both the countries on how to share resources has always been a matter of concern. The construction of the Farakka barrage in 1975 in West Bengal (close to Indo- Bangladesh border) led to serious frictions between both the nations. The objective behind the construction over the barrage was to increase the water flow during the lean period flow of Bhagirathi- Hooghly branch of Ganga, and further to increase the water depth at Kolkata port which was threatened by siltation⁷. Once irrigation withdrawals increased in Bangladesh, dispute arose between India and Bangladesh over how to share the water resources during the lean season flow at Farakka. While the Bangladesh Government shared the view that the reduction in flow due to the barrage has led to extensive damage to its agriculture fields, industry and ecology over the years, the Indian Government ignores these claims of Bangladesh, and labels them as baseless. Although an agreement was reached in 1996 between both the nations on how to share the water from the Ganga River during the lean season, however many still argue that this agreement is more of a political agreement rather than a technical one, which would resolve the long standing issue completely.

Tensions between India and Bangladesh have resurfaced once again on how to share the water resources over the Teesta River in 2012. The Teesta River which has its source in Sikkim, flows through the northern part of West Bengal in India, before it enters into Bangladesh, from where it merges with the Brahmaputra River. In 1983, an ad-hoc water sharing agreement was reached between India and Bangladesh, whereby both countries were allocated 39 percent and 36 percent of the water flow respectively⁸. The new bilateral treaty proposes to expand this agreement on the equal allocation of the Teesta River water resources. However, the deal has fallen through when Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee refused to comply with this new agreement, fearing the loss of higher volume of water especially during drier months would hamper the growth and prosperity of her ruling state. Therefore, both countries now need to develop a well thought out and balanced treaty/agreement that will enable equitable sharing of the waters along the Teesta River, which in turn would reduce the possibility of water conflicts in future.

Recommendations: Water Scarcity Situation

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Water Convention that came up in 1992 that intends to strengthen national measures for the protection and ecologically sound management of the trans boundary surface waters and ground waters, till 2007, has only been ratified by fifteen countries around the world. The rest of the countries have either not taken a stand, or have rejected this proposal completely. During the time of water scarcity, countries around the world should instead cooperate and share, rather than compete with each other which will benefit no one in particular. Therefore, more and more countries ratifying this convention and becoming part of the global community in the near future, would ultimately help everyone in their task of preserving the limited water resources around the world. Joint programmes of water linking projects should be launched with the cooperation of countries, which will require minimum input of resources to be incorporated with the project, while

the final output and gains will be substantial for everyone to enjoy. Moreover, the use of technology needs to be enhanced in order to increase the existing water use efficiency in the industrial and agricultural sectors of the economy. Recycling and reusing, reverse osmosis, and drip method of irrigation, are some of the many ways through which technology can help mankind to preserve substantial water resources. And last but not the least, fulfilling of simple and basic tasks by individuals such as promptly fixing or repairing leaks in sprinklers, facets, taps and showers at homes or at work place, or simply by changing one's diet or by turning into a vegetarian, precious amount of water resources can be preserved around the world.

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