

## Water-Disputes between India and Bangladesh on Ganga Water Agreement

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### **Abstract:-**

*The Ganga/Ganges River Water Agreement was signed in December 1996 between India and Bangladesh. In South Asia, the Ganga Water Arrangement is seen as one of the best ways for neighbouring upstream and downstream to talk with each other. This article looks at the Indo-Bangladesh Ganga Water Laws and the political reasons why the two countries signed an agreement. From the beginning of the discussion interaction to the present day, it has been studied and found that, while the specialised idea of the issue stays the same, changes in domestic government issues either help or hurt the discussion cycle. India and Bangladesh share 53 more streams, so it is important to come up with a good solution from the 1996 discussion that can be used for other waterway problems.*

**Keywords:** water-dispute, India, Bangladesh, Ganga-water agreement, etc.,

Since the 1970s, India and Bangladesh have had a lot of trouble getting along because of how they share stream water. In reality, Pakistan gave this to Bangladesh. The Farakka river had been a source of conflict for a long time before Bangladesh got its independence in 1971. Due to their long-running and well-known debate about the Farakka flood, its relationship with India has often been centred on a single person from that time until 1996. Also, how Dhaka dealt with this issue decided the fortune of its most important political-leaders and was the utmost vital way to measure how well its progressive systems for making decisions worked.

There have been interviews with people who were directly involved in making the deal. The article says that the technical issues at stake haven't had much of an effect on India and Bangladesh's approach to the issue of stream water sharing over the Farakka river, as well as their potential agreements or conflicts. In reality, they tend to agree on this issue

because of two main things: first, the political connection between their separate decision-making systems in Delhi and Dhaka at some random, verifiable crossroads; and second, the politicising of the Farakka issue, particularly in Bangladesh, by several ideological groups and pioneers for their own political goals.

The discussion after 1971 is split into five stages, and each one looks at how the changing association between Delhi and Dhaka has affected the talks about sharing stream water. Before talking about the political side of it, though, it is important to give a quick overview of the Ganga's 2,510-kilometer geological voyage through India and Bangladesh. It starts in Gangotri, India, on the southern side of the Himalayas. From there, it flows south-east toward Bangladesh. The Ganga splits into two rivers in India and Bangladesh. These rivers are called Bhagirathi-Hooghly and Padma, respectively. After travelling about one hundred and twelve kilometres, the river turns south-east and meets the Brahmaputra in the middle of Bangladesh. Together, the two rivers flow south and empty into the Bay of Bengal. The natural aspect separates India and Bangladesh (formerly Eastern Pakistan) into states that are upstream and states that are downstream. The freedom of Bangladesh was a key starting point for the debate about the goal of the Farakka blast. This is discussed in detail in the next section, which is split into five parts.

### **Phase 1**

Sheik Mujib ur Rahman, Bangladesh's most famous president, recognised India's role in freeing Bangladesh and tried to get along with India. In March of 1972, a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace was signed. It called for flood control, waterway bowl development, and the improvement of hydropower and water systems to be looked at together and for an action plan to be made.

On July 8, 1973, India's Minister of External Affairs, Sardar Swaran Singh, and his Bangladeshi counterpart, Knodakar Moshtaque Ahmed, met in Delhi for the first round of political talks. They repeated that a final decision on how to share the Ganga would be made at a summit meeting between the two Prime Ministers in 1974. Before 1951, B.M. Abbas was part of Pakistan's group and took part in water trades. He talked about a conversation he had with Sardar Swaran Singh, an unknown minister in India.

During Bangladesh Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman's 1974 visit to India, he and Mrs. Indira Gandhi agreed to allow the Farakka flood before the end of the year because the dry season stream wasn't enough for both countries. In order to find a solution that everyone could agree on, the Joint River Commission looked into all possible ways to increase the best use of their shared water resources. Even though serious talks about expanding the Ganga's dry season stream began in June 1974, the Commission was not able to come to a decision.

Bangladesh insisted on expanding in the Ganga bowl, even though New Delhi wanted to build on the lower Ganga from the Brahmaputra. This was because the Ganga could only hold so much water and the demand for goods in rural India was growing quickly. In February and April 1975, there were two meetings at the pastor level, but they did not break the expansion deadlock.

The Indian side said that while talks about expansion would continue, it was important to try out the Feeder trench of the Farakka Barrage because the dry season's lean time was starting that year. The parties also agreed that India would let out different amounts of water every 10 days from April 21 to May 31, ranging from 11,000 cusecs to 16,000 cusecs, and that Bangladesh would get 39,000 to 44,000 cusecs of outstanding flows (Karim 1998, 222). Pakistan asked for more money in 1968 than what was agreed upon for Bangladesh. But Bangladesh felt tricked by the way the break agreement to remove the water at Farakka was carried out. The torrent was charged before any progress was made on a mostly satisfactory arrangement.

The generosity between the two countries was hurt by the opposition in Bangladesh and those who didn't like Mujib. People were put into different groups based on what they did during the independence war: those who fought, those who were stuck in Dhaka, and those who helped the Pakistani army. Because people in Bangladesh had different ideas, the role of India in Bangladesh's freedom and the two countries' relationship were looked at and talked about more.

The founder of Bangladesh's National Awami Party, Maulana Bhasani, has said that Mujibur Rahman broke the Friendship Treaty by selling Bangladesh's political and financial power to India. The annoying issue of Farakka made these feelings even stronger. Harun ur Rashid, the ambassador before him, says that Sheik Mujib was having a hard time at home.

People were scared by the idea of one-party rule, and Mujib was looked at closely because he did not promise a government based on popular vote or the option to get water from India. A military coup d'état was led by a few unhappy military officials in a short amount of time. Sheik Mujib and his family were killed by the military coup, which also overthrew the government and set up a tactical system led by General Ziaur Rehman.

## **Phase 2**

When Mujibur Rahman died, the situation changed right away. It brought long-simmering tensions to the surface, which led to open conflict. Because of coups and countercoups in Bangladesh in the years 1975 and 1976, the issue of the Farakka torrent was quickly forgotten. After the June 1975 Agreement ended, India kept taking water from the Ganges. Before the middle of 1976, Bangladesh didn't say out loud that these withdrawals were wrong. According to the 1975 Agreement, India said that Bangladesh did not help collect the information and data needed to finish the joint assessment. Bangladesh said that India broke the agreement by leaving at the finish of the forty day period.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman got along well and had a good relationship. But she was against military systems in the area around India, and she didn't do much to build even a functional relationship with General Ziaur Rahman. Diplomat Harun uses a personal story to explain this point. When the new president of Bangladesh, General Ziaur Rahman, went to India in late 1977 and met Mrs. Gandhi, he said that she was "a very difficult and extreme lady." Harun says that these things caused their relationship to get worse while Mrs. Gandhi was in charge. But Ziaur Rehman used strategies that were very different from what Mujib did.

Ziaur Rehman's position at home was strengthened when Jamaat-I-Islami and the Muslim League helped him win the Presidential and parliamentary elections in 1978 and 1979. Both of these groups were banned after independence because they worked with the Pakistani military. Ziaur Rahman changed the Constitution by replacing the word "secularism" with "absolute faith and confidence in all-powerful Allah," which should be "the premise, all else being equal." After Mujib was killed, members of the Jatiyo Rakhi Bahini ran away to India, where they fought guerrilla war against his government.

Zia tried to make an international plan that was mostly good for Pakistan and the US. Zia's government took two approaches to water. First, it blamed India for its domestic issues. Second, it sought international support for its goal. When there was no water-sharing deal in 1976 and 1977, the tension worsened. The media branded India's water withdrawal a "plot against the freedom and authority of Bangladesh" in a 1976 Bangladesh White Paper (Khosla 2005, 73). Bangladesh blamed Farakka for destroying a bird sanctuary, flooding, and a lack of jobs in the north.

Bangladesh brought the issue of Farakka to a number of international meetings at the same time. Bangladesh's first attempt to get the world's attention on the issue was at the Colombo Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. Then, at the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Istanbul, and then at the United Nations, Bangladesh tried to get the world's attention on the issue again. Reaz Rahman, Bangladesh's former foreign secretary, discussed bringing the Farakka problem to the UN. Bringing the Ganges water issue to the General Assembly's notice was a great win, given all of its main powers were upper riparian states. Bangladesh wanted the subject to be discussed in the General Assembly, but it was forwarded to the Political Committee. There, only the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and the President of the General Assembly were able to mediate because India had worked hard with the affected countries. The President of the General Assembly also suggested that the two countries handle the problem on their own. This didn't stop Dhaka from talking about it somewhere else. Bangladesh's plan to bring the issue to the attention of the rest of the world stalled in the mind, and the halt lasted. The only thing that changed was that India got a new government.

### **Phase 3**

In India, the general elections in 1977 led to the election of a government that wasn't from the Congress party. When Morarji Desai became India's Prime Minister, he moved quickly to make a different foreign policy than the one the Congress had been following. He also made a good impression on the public authorities in Dhaka, which had a big impact on how they worked together. Bangladesh, for its part, cut back on how much water it used. Eight months later, on September 30, 1977, the two countries reached a five-year agreement on Farakka, which was signed in Dhaka on November 5, 1977.

The Agreement was split into two parts: sharing water at Farakka and slowly widening streams. The main amount was for the five dry months from January 1 to May 31. This was based on the 10-day plans that were agreed upon, which said that if water streams dropped to 80% of the agreed-upon value in any 10-day period, India would guarantee Bangladesh 80% of what it had offered. A joint board was put together to put these plans into action. The Agreement called for two audits, one after three years and another one and a half years before the end of the settlement. The JRC was asked to do research and come up with plans for long-term strategies that are safe and likely to help increase dry season streams within three years.

India and Bangladesh in 1978 shared growth objectives. India planned reservoirs on the Dihang, Subansiri, and Barak in the Brahmaputra-Meghna structure and a dam at Jogighopa with a Brahmaputra-Ganga gravity connection waterway that would traverse through India and Bangladesh and link with the Ganga right above Farakka. The Indian proposal saw the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna Basin as a coordinated system in which the densely populated Ganges sub-bowl had less availability of water, less capacity potential, and more access to water system, while the underpopulated Brahmaputra and Meghna sub-bowls had ample water accessibility, great capacity possibilities, and much less demand for water system.

Bangladesh had doubts about India's plan and said that the Ganga framework in India and Nepal already had enough room for more water to flow at Farakka. It built a number of reservoirs in the upper catchments of the Ganga system to store extra rainwater and make sure water flows in the right direction. This made the water flow faster under Farakka. Bangladesh stopped any kind of stockpiling from happening within its borders. People said that India and Bangladesh should both try to get Nepal to join, as was decided in the side letters they sent each other when they signed the 1977 Understanding.

When Mujib and Mrs. Gandhi met at Farakka to talk about a plan for sharing water, neither side's position was very different from what it had been in the past. If elected, India's Congress party said it would withdraw from the Agreement. Former Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman told that the Congress party opposed the 1977 Agreement's assurance requirement.

#### **Phase 4**

When the Congress took power in New Delhi in 1980, the atmosphere, which had been friendly at first, turned more and more hostile. Overall, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's real plan to get rid of the Farakka arrangement was never carried out. At the end of the five-year period, the two sides agreed that the plan for sharing water during the dry season had worked as planned, but they couldn't agree on how to expand. The last time the 1977 Agreement was looked at, it was assumed that the issue of increase would be dealt with at a higher level of politics. In any case, Bangladesh had another coup not long before General Ershad came to Dhaka to take over as leader.

General Ershad's foreign policy toward India and Farakka in particular stayed the same. In October 1982, President Ershad went to India, and the two countries agreed to a long-term truce that would last through the dry seasons of 1983 and 1984. The terms of reference depended on a revised offering recipe to account for small differences in distribution, but the assurance statement from the 1977 Agreement was missing, which was a big deal. The most important parts of the Memorandum of Understanding were how water would be shared and how it would grow. In fact, people kept talking about expansion from the same, well-known points of view.

General Ershad was in a tough spot at home because his political system didn't have a lot of legitimacy. Ershad adopted Islam and made it the state religion, just like General Zia-ul-Haq did in Pakistan. When he said that Islam was the state religion, a strict ideological group called ISA (Islamic Shansonotantrannadolan) started looking into him to make sure he was telling the truth so that Islam could become the state religion.

#### **Farakka and Bangladesh Politics**

A Catch-22 stands between the talks between India and Bangladesh about Farakka. Ershad's plan could have led to an agreement on water on its own, and he moved quickly to do so to prove that his plan was sound. His falling popularity made it impossible for him to stay in New Delhi. In any case, the creation of a majority-rule government in Bangladesh signalled a time of tough legislative issues. Farakka was a good way for the country's two main ideological groups to agree on something. Any concession that one party made was called a "sell-out" by the other party, which was sitting in the resistance seats. The Awami

Association and, later, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party didn't miss a chance to say that the ruling party was making Bangladesh too submissive to India, which made it almost impossible for the two parties to agree on how to negotiate with New Delhi in a way that would be acceptable to everyone.

Strangely, the tables would turn each time, and the winner would have to face the harsh reality that talks with India wouldn't lead to certain results unless both sides were willing to "compromise" and try to work together. In any case, by then, it wouldn't be able to do anything because those in the resistance seats would be demanding a firm stance. This cycle is still going on. This section explains how this strange thing started in the time before the 1991 races.

In 1991, races were held in Bangladesh. This was made possible by the end of military rule in 1990. The issue of Farakka and the larger relationship between India and Bangladesh was a major point of disagreement between different ideologies. Begum Khaleda Zia, who was in charge of the BNP, attacked the Awami League for being kind to India and said that the country would fall apart if the BNP didn't take power.

Khaleda Zia claimed the next elections would decide Bangladesh's freedom and sway at the end of her term. "The nation could be subjugated by foreign powers" if the BNP loses, she claimed (POT 1995, 593). Sheik Hasina, head of the Awami League, questioned Khaleda Zia about the Indo-Bangla Friendship Treaty's commemoration. (1995 Morning Sun) Sheik Hasina stated the BNP didn't honour any of its election promises and "completely handed Bangladesh to India during the last four years" (New Nation, 21 March 1995). She said Farakka had transformed the country's north into a desert, but the PM didn't mention it during the campaign.

## **Phase 5**

In 1996, both New Delhi and Dhaka got new government systems that were run by the state. In Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina's Awami Association won the election. In India, Deve Gowda's non-Congress alliance government took power. A big part of the party was the Left Front, which was in charge of West Bengal at the time. India chose Mr. I.K. Gujral to be its new foreign minister.

Around the middle of 1996, it seemed like a good time to take a new approach to the water sharing issue. This was mainly because both New Delhi and Dhaka, in a rare show of political resolve, agreed to take the previous negotiations to their logical conclusion and come to an agreement about water sharing.

As was already known, a government without Congress in New Delhi and the Awami League in Dhaka offered an interesting chance to come to an agreement that was good for both sides. After losing power for 20 days, the Awami League took it back, and New Delhi moved quickly to support this system in Dhaka. Both sides agreed that the Ganga water dispute needed to be solved and that they needed to come to an agreement quickly before the next dry season. Farooq Sobhan, who was the Secretary of Bangladesh at the time but was not well known, agreed with this assessment and said that the Awami League was more committed to finding a solution. India also responded in the same way. In general, the BNP has been less open to India's worries.

Bangladesh's Foreign Minister visited India from August 6-10, 1996 to establish the basis (Karim 1998, 227). During this tour, the Foreign Secretary met with the West Bengal Chief Minister at the suggestion of Indian External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral to appeal for his help in finding a long-term solution to sharing the Ganga waters. Mr. Jyoti Basu promised to try his best for the neighbourhood revitalization initiative.

In September 1996, the External Affairs Minister of India went to Bangladesh. The two countries agreed to meet a Joint Committee made up of people from their respective foreign services. The committee's job was to transport water experts from both countries to try to come to an agreement about sharing water. In the past, these kinds of councils were always run by the Water Resources Ministry, so putting together this panel was a big change from what had come before. Karim (1998) expressed that by putting experts in charge of the political initiative, the conversations were "geared toward making it more flexible and giving the political plan more weight than the complexity of designing details" (228)

## **Conclusion**

The Farakka conflict has been going on for a long time, and the long, complicated talks to solve it show how important it is to understand water conflicts in the social and political contexts of both internal and external spaces. The technical understanding of the

problem hasn't changed much over the years, both in terms of finding the right tools and incorporating the right innovations and in terms of figuring out how much of the normal waters each party is entitled to and finding ways to make the water streams bigger. When the Ganga agreement was signed in 1996, the issue of expansion was kept separate from the issue of sharing water. This is because the issue of expansion is very specific. Almost all of the technical experts from the two countries came to the same conclusion about the expansion plan, so the stop was kept. So, in 1996, the two issues were split up. In any case, when the Joint Committee was set up to deal with the water problem in 1996, water experts had to answer to politicians. So, the 1996 settlement was a political decision. The amount of water agreed upon by the two countries was 35,000 cusecs, which was not much more than the 1977 Agreement. In any case, the real story isn't about finding special arrangements. It is about understanding the neighbourhood, the social aspects of water use, and the political motivations of the decision-making systems on both sides of the line.

The importance of Jyoti Basu's job as Chief Minister of West Bengal is another thing that can be learned from the conversation. As was mentioned in the last section, Jyoti Basu's last-minute trip to Bangladesh before the signing of the settlement agreement helped it go through. Also, a priest from Bangladesh who lived abroad went to both New Delhi and Calcutta. This is important for the state's chief executive because he or she was made a major partner in the matter. The 1996 setup isn't ideal. It is been criticised on technical and political reasons, but the fact that a long-term agreement worked perfectly for more than a decade is a significant success. The political will of New Delhi and Dhaka made this feasible.

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