Making sense of water

It is time for all of us to move beyond narrow environmental nationalism and look at our common water crisis from a regional perspective, argues **Iftekhar Iqbal**



IT is high time to explore the possibility of an ecologically-driven, as opposed to state-centric, vision of economic development and human well-being in the ecologically contiguous regions of south-western China (SWC) and north-eastern South Asia (NESA) that includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and the seven eastern states of India. NESA-SWC is one of the most naturally endowed regions in Asia. It is home to the largest mountain blocks, three of the world's mighty rivers that created the largest delta, a great mangrove forest system, along with a vast Bay of Bengal coastline in the south.

These ecological settings provide the space for huge tracts of fertile agricultural lands in the delta, plenty of tea gardens and natural gas in the hillocks and offshore, and tremendous horticultural and fisheries opportunities. The region, however, remains one of the most underdeveloped in the world, and with remarkably low human well-being indicators. At the same time, this region lies dormant in the centre of a triangle constituted by three emerging economic giants, China, India, and Southeast Asia, which are converging for a great Asian economic stride in the 21st century.

In the above context, it is crucial that we focus on the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna (GMB)