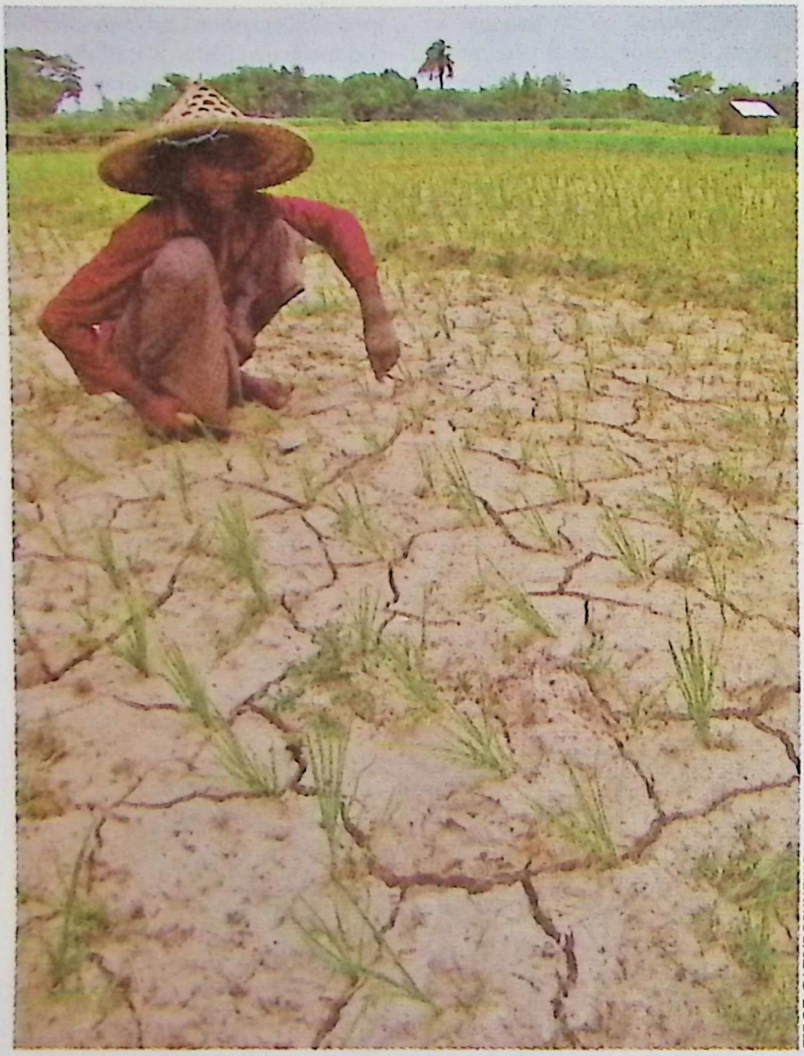


FIROZ GAZI/DRIKNEWS

them were built in agreement with riparian countries, and about 200 treaties are now in force for the management of common water resources.

According to a Unesco study, fresh water is getting scarce. The study reveals that the average supply of water is expected to fall by one-third within 20 years. Nearly 7 billion people could face water shortages by 2020, and global warming may cause severe water shortages in 50 countries. South Asia is one of the regions to be adversely affected, partly because of melting of the Himalayan glaciers due to global warming.

In 1896, US Attorney General Judson Harmon propounded the "Harmon Doctrine" which stated that Mexico was not entitled to the water from an international river, the Rio Grande. The doctrine emphasised territorial sovereignty over an international river. It means that, within its territory, a state can do whatever it wishes with the water of an international river, and does not need to bother about the consequences of its withdrawal on a lower riparian nation. But the US discarded and discredited this theory in 1906 when it concluded a treaty with Mexico relating to sharing of water of the Rio Grande.

India also argued in favour of this doctrine in the mid 1970s with Bangladesh. India also made a treaty with Pakistan in 1960 called the Indus Water Treaty, which gives India exclusive use of all of the waters of the Eastern Rivers and their tributaries before the point where the rivers enter Pakistan.

A river flows as an indivisible unit, without knowing any political boundaries. If it is interfered with at the upper stream, the lower riparian country will be affected. That is why international law recognises the right of each riparian country to benefit from all the advantages deriving from river waters for the welfare and economic prosperity of its people.

According to international law, it is illegal to construct any dam on an international river without consent from the other side. But India has violated it by starting the construction of the Tipaimukh Dam on the Barak River.

News of this construction has been formally confirmed in a recent statement by the high commissioner of India to Bangladesh. He admitted that the Indian government has resumed the process of construction once again from the end of 2008. According to the high commissioner, the dam would produce hydro-electricity and would not "harm" Bangladesh in any way. It would only regulate the river's flow. As it is a project aimed at producing hydro-electricity, no water would be withheld from Bangladesh.

But to produce electricity, the water flow would have to be obstructed, which means that there will be less flow of water to the riparian neighbouring country. Furthermore, he is stating that the water will not be used for irrigation purposes. But once the water is obstructed, the water flow will automatically decrease.

Sadly, such assurances were given at the time of the construction of the Farakka Dam also, but till date, Bangladesh is suffering the consequences. Surprisingly, even the Bangladesh water resources minister said that Dhaka would not object to a project to produce electricity but would protest if a dam was constructed.