

Impact of Tipai Dam on the *haor* regions

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THE debate over potential impacts of Tipaimukh Dam has intensified following Adviser Gawher Rizvi's article in *The Daily Star* on December 13, 2011 in which he called for a science-based analysis of the proposed project. The following arguments about potential negative impacts of the proposed Tipaimukh Dam on downstream region in Bangladesh have been formulated based on the conventional knowledge of hydrology, environmental science and published information in the electronic and press media.

The Tipaimukh Dam will retain about 15 billion cubic metres (BCM) of water at peak level, which is about 31% of the total flow of water that enters Bangladesh through Barak River into Surma-Kushiyara-Meghna rivers. Therefore, it is unacceptable to Bangladesh that India will have unilateral control over 31% of the water in a shared river. Proponents of the dam (Advisor Gawher Rizvi, Water Minister Ramesh Shil, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, etc.) in the government claim that they have necessary information on Tipaimukh Dam, and that the Indian government (including Manmohan Singh) reassured them on numerous occasions that they will not do anything to harm Bangladesh. This logic is unacceptable for many reasons: (a) India should not decide what is good for Bangladesh and her people without first taking them in confidence. If India's intension was to help Bangladesh then they would have studied all environmental and economic impacts jointly with Bangladesh before initiating this project; (b) India did not even inform Bangladesh about this project before they signed an agreement on October 24, 2011. They are in clear violation of all laws, policies, and agreement that are practiced on shared international rivers.

The Article IX in the Ganges Treaty clearly demands such co-operation and prior consent from all stakeholders. If Bangladeshi news media did not raise this

issue, then India would not have even bothered to mention it to anyone (including the government) about the project; (c) Indian government has issued the environmental clearance certificate on October 24, 2008 and they are going ahead with the project despite serious objections from Bangladesh and Indian environmental groups. In their environmental analysis, they did not carryout any study in Bangladesh to understand the natural ecosystems that exist and depend on natural flow of water in Surma-Kushiyara-Meghna and their numerous tributaries.

The assumption that Tipaimukh Dam will not cause any harm to Bangladesh is not based on science.

India claims that the Tipaimukh Dam is a run-of-the-river project and no water will be diverted for irrigation, and therefore, no harm will be done to Bangladesh. This is a flawed logic because:

(a) They will have to fill up the reservoir that holds 15 BCM of water, out of which about 8 BCM will be dead storage (i.e. will remain behind the dam permanently to maintain needed pressure to run turbines). If this 8 BCM water is released over 365 days in a year then it amounts to about 17,000 cusec, which is a huge amount for the Surma-Kushiyara-Meghna rivers in dry season. As result of the dam, the flow characteristics and water release schedule will be different as compared to the flow that existed before the dam was built. No one in Bangladesh really knows how much water will have to be released on a daily basis for proper operation of the hydroelectric project; (b) The life, livelihood, and ecosystems in Haor region have established an equilibrium with the natural

flow of the rivers, and the farmers prepare their field in harmony with this natural flow regime. Now, if this natural flow regime is altered then farmers will not be able to prepare their land for *boro* cultivation on time, and the whole agricultural production may be jeopardised. On the other hand, if India releases way too much water in the dry season then farmers will not have access to their land since these lands will be under unusual amount of water.

India has offered Bangladesh to invest in the project and to buy electricity from the project, which is not acceptable on the following counts: (a) If India was serious about a joint venture project then they would not sign an agreement with three Indian entity and set a deadline of 87 months for completion of the project. They would not issue the environmental clearance without involving environmental study in Bangladesh first; (b) There is no treaty between India and Bangladesh about joint management of water resources in Barak-Surma-Kushiyara. If even Bangladesh invests money in the project, India will decide unilaterally how much water they will release and when they will release it; (c) Since the Barak-Surma-Kushiyara is an international river system, Bangladesh should not pay for electricity, India should provide a fair share to Bangladesh for free as they agreed to provide some electricity to Manipur for free as a stakeholder. More importantly, Bangladesh should find other means to produce electricity -- not by destroying the agriculture and ecosystem in the *haor* region

Adviser Gawher Rizvi wrote that since the Tipaimukh

In their environmental analysis, they did not carryout any study in Bangladesh to understand the natural ecosystems that depend on natural flow of water in Surma-Kushiyara-Meghna. The assumption that Tiapi Dam will not cause any harm there is not based on science.

Dam is 140 miles away from Bangladesh border its impact will be minimal on Bangladesh. The truth couldn't be far from this. Barak-Surma-Kushiyara is a continuous river and it empties in the Bay of Bengal through the Meghna River. Therefore, unilateral control of upstream water flow will be felt all the way to the Bay of Bengal as is the case for the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges. Any water diversion barrage will further deteriorate the situation in greater Mymensingh and Sylhet districts.

As a part of FAP-6 study, it was concluded that if the Tipaimukh Dam is completed then the flow in Bangladesh will increase in summer months and will decrease in rainy season. This finding is questionable on the following accounts: (a) Since India has not completed the dam they don't have any water release schedule yet, and if even they did have a tentative schedule then it is not clear as to when and how they shared this information with Bangladeshi authority. Therefore, the FAP-6 is carried out based on many assumptions and sketchy data, which may or may not be true; (b) As mentioned before, any departure from natural flow regime will mean adjustments for farmers and fishermen in the *haor* region in terms of timing for preparation of their agricultural fields, planting of seeds, and harvesting the crops. There is no guarantee that this disturbance in natural flow will bring positive feedback for the *haor* region. Most importantly, the people of Bangladesh will have to rely on the mercy and decision of Indian authority for the fair share or necessary amount of water needed for their life and livelihood. The natural flow of the Surma-Kushiyara-Meghna should be warranted for the well being of the people and existence of Bengal delta which has been fed by water and sediments of Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system during its entire existence throughout the geologic time.

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Is Egypt drifting towards Islamism rule?

MAHMOOD HASAN

EGYPT'S revolution that began in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011 has yet to come to a democratic conclusion.

The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), led by Field Marshal Mohammed Hussain Tantawi, which took over power after President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, has been repeatedly facing violent demonstrations from Tahrir Square.

In the backdrop of violent anti-SCAF protests the country went to polls on November 28, 2011 to elect the Majlis al-Sha'ab (498-member Lower House). The Majlis al-Shura (264-member Upper House) will be elected in January 2012. The election has so far been termed as free and fair, with a turnout of over 60%. The new parliament will select the 100-member constitutional council to draft the new constitution.

The election process is rather complex. Two-third members of both houses are to be elected through proportional representation. The remaining one-third is to be elected through "first-past-the-post" system. The election is being held in phases in the 27 governorates of Egypt. The new president will be elected by June 2012.

More than 47 political parties belonging to different hues have fielded more than 6,700 candidates for both the houses.

Some of the major parties contesting the elections are: Freedom and Justice Party (Islamist, set up by the Muslim Brotherhood); Al-Nour Party (Salafi); Egyptian Bloc (Liberal Democrat); Al-Wafd (National Liberals); Al-Wasat (moderate Islamist); Revolution Continues (Leftist); Reform and Development (Liberals).

However, it would be naive to categorise the parties from their ideological leanings, because none of them have been tested so far. Many of these parties have been set up after Mubarak's departure. They are in a constant process of making and breaking coalitions.

What surprised many are the results of the first phase. The Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) obtained 49% votes followed by Al-Nour with 20% -- both Islamist. The second phase (held on Dec 14) was also dominated by the two parties -- FJP with 48% and Al-Nour having 28% votes.

If this trend continues in the subsequent phases then the new parliament will be dominated by the Islamist parties. The FJP is, however, opposed to the Salafi ideology and is unlikely to form any coalition with Al-Nour.

Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. It spread to other Arab countries in the Middle East. In Egypt it remained banned under Hosni Mubarak for its alleged plot to kill President Anwar Sadaat. But after the January 2011 revolution it set up the FJP to contest the elections. Although it was

banned, Muslim Brotherhood remained active as a social outfit. It helped poorer sections of Egyptians by setting up schools, extending basic medical assistance and distributing food. It is committed to creating a state based on "Sharia." It is quite solvent as party members make regular contributions. Although FJP is less radical in its views than the Al-Nour Party -- there is an uneasiness that once it attains a majority in Parliament its real colours will come out.

No wonder Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak commented that the election results were "very, very disturbing." Barak hoped that the new Egyptian Parliament would respect international treaties -- meaning the shaky 1979 Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty. Israel's main fear is that the Muslim Brotherhood has

at Tahrir Square demanding end to discrimination. Police and Muslims activists descended on the protesters and killed 26 of them. Persecution of Christians was, until now, unheard of in Egypt. Western media strongly suspects the Muslim Brotherhood and have already started demonising it, predicting that Egypt will be another Iran.

Cosmopolitan Cairo being the epicenter of politics, culture and education of the Arab world since the days of the First World War -- has a large western educated class, proud of Egypt's history, who are truly secular in belief in spite of being Muslims. The Armed Forces Officers Corps, which is largely US trained, also forms part of that secular society.

The middle class and poorer sections, which constitute the majority, are deeply religious.

Women wearing hejab is a common sight in Cairo now.

Islamist tendencies has always been there in Egypt, but were kept under tight wraps by successive dictators -- Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadaat, Hosni Mubarak -- who many say ruled like Pharaohs.

Under these regimes free political discourse was severely stifled -- denying Egyptians the culture of political parties. Because of fraudulent elections in the past many grew apathetic towards politics. Now that the last Pharaoh is gone there is great enthusiasm for true democracy. The Islamists also are quickly getting organised.

There are a number of candidates for the presidential election. Among them secular Amr Moussa, former Secretary General of the Arab League, is currently leading the opinion polls with 38.9%. What is interesting is that Moussa is not backed by any political party, as of now. The FJP has not yet announced their candidate. But other Islamist candidates are lagging way behind Amr Moussa.

If the FJP controls the Majlis al-Sha'ab it will need to be pragmatic by drafting a constitution that is balanced -- with Sharia laws and secular tenets. Any attempt to dilute Egypt's liberal credentials will inevitably put it on a collision course with the SCAF and the secular forces.

Egypt today stands at a crossroad. Egypt's role in modernising the Arab world, its civilisational history, its influence over Arab nationalism, its large population and its strategic location has made it the most important country in the Middle East. A democratic Egypt will no doubt wield immense influence over the events in that region.

Which direction Egypt will take is a matter of conjecture. We shall have to wait till the final composition of the parliament is announced.

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always been cool towards the Peace Treaty and is closely linked to the militant group Hamas in Gaza. Once FJP controls the new Egyptian parliament, Hamas may become aggressive.

The other worry for Israel is that both the opposing Palestinian groups -- Fatah and Hamas -- have closed ranks under mediation of Cairo. Besides, Islamist parties have already gained power in Morocco, Libya and Tunisia. A sense of being surrounded by hostile neighbours pervades Israel.

The US State Department and White House in their reactions to the first round of elections have expressed concern over the reported irregularities in the election process. There was no mention about the Muslim Brotherhood gaining a lead. Clearly, the events in Egypt are no longer under the control of the Americans.

On October 10 a grave incident shook Cairo. Several thousand Coptic Christians gathered

IN MEMORIAM

Goodbye Chacha

KAISER KABIR

IT was nearly midnight. The Catholic Church in Kakrail was bursting at the seams with people assembling to pay their last respects to a wonderful soul. In the backdrop of poignant hymns and solemn prayers, eulogies and emotions flowed straight from the heart. It was an ambience characterised by remarkable genuineness --- the principal trait in the life of Samson H Chowdhury.

The late Chairman of Square Group was known in the pharmaceutical industry as "Chacha," a befitting sobriquet for an unmistakably avuncular figure. With his height, large frame, and sartorial elegance he could easily stand out in any crowd. However, it was the gravitas of his demeanour coupled with a remarkable sense of candidness that placed him several leagues ahead of ordinary men.

"The truth must out," was his modus operandi. To Chacha, the opaque language of diplomacy always took a backseat to an assertive and straight-from-the-hip presentation of one's point-of-view. This straightforwardness stemmed largely from the fact that, unlike some businessmen in this country, Chacha had no skeletons in his cupboard and thus, was under no compunction to compromise his principles, nor resort to hidden agendas in furtherance of his business.

The key reason that Square is among the most respected of business institutions in Bangladesh is attributable not just to its size, but principally due to the transparency of its business model. Square is successful because of its adherence to good-old business principles such as producing quality products, cost effectiveness, sound marketing, and efficient management.

To its credit, Square Group has eschewed use of the all-too-well-known shenanigans as growth strategies. To those who knew him closely, Chacha lamented the rise of "thugs" in the business world. He, therefore, made a conscious decision to remain clean and transparent. He was convinced that "thuggery" only brings in short-term benefits at the expense of long-run prospects.

In fact, from the business model of Square, it appears that long-run sustainability had always been paramount to Chacha. The model relies on increasing the size of the market through strategies that enhance consumer demand in the long-run. For example, in the context of the pharmaceutical industry it means focusing on generating doctors' prescriptions rather than offering deals and discounts that invariably have deleterious consequences in the long-run.

Chacha's focus on the long-run has not only been good for Square, but also for the industries in which its companies operate. For example, there is a consensus among the pharmaceutical companies that Square has been good for the medicines industry.

That the Square Group is highly profitable is well known. This profitability has come from revenue growth as well as cost-efficiency. However, penny-pinching was not Chacha's style. He was fond of quoting the well-known proverb, "Penny-wise, pound foolish," especially when it came to making investment decisions.

Invariably, he would choose to pay premium prices for high-quality equipment rather than opt for the run-of-the-mill. This approach, in hindsight, has served Square well. The investments made a decade ago have helped the Group deliver tremendous volume growth.

Of course, the growth of the Group lies in sheer hard-work with Chacha leading the way. He was the sort of manager who thrived on being down-to-earth and getting the proverbial finger nails dirty.

Even as an octogenarian, he travelled extensively throughout the world in furtherance of the globalisation efforts of the Group. On one such trip, about three years ago, I happened to be sitting next to him. When asked about how he handles the rigours of air travel, he pushed his seat back, pulled out an iPod, put on the earphones, closed his eyes, and with a satisfied smile said: "I love jazz."

Goodbye Chacha. Here's wishing that your ascent to Heaven be pleasant and accompanied by jazz.

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