

TEESTA, FARAKKA, AND GANGES BARRAGE

What Bangladesh should demand from India

Mega health projects

Use the money judiciously

WE welcome the government move to more than double the investment for the health sector programme over the next five years with infusion of Tk 1,15,486 crore being earmarked for diseases like cancer, heart ailments, diabetes and to improve overall health governance. This comes in the background of having spent very paltry sums in the past so many years. For instance, the government spent Tk 37,384 crore only from 2003 to 2011 in this sector. However, success of a programme does not depend merely on the volume of money injected into it. It is very much a matter of how well the money is spent.

We understand that 84 percent of this mammoth expenditure is to be sourced domestically. What concerns us is that with such a huge rise in expenditure, there come a slew of unnecessary projects. It is hence imperative that projects are chosen carefully without extraneous considerations. Another point that we would like to make is that when projects are financed, even partially, by multilateral agencies, there are stringent conditions attached to funding. Those terms and conditions are there for multifarious reasons including transparency and also to act as a guard against graft and misuse. Now that we will be financing the bulk of this expenditure from our own sources, putting into place such safeguards must be prioritised before disbursement of funds for any project.

Last but not the least, let health projects be chosen judiciously so as to be of use to the public. The implementation and utilisation of the funds need to show better performance than our infrastructure projects because delays mean cost overruns, something a poor country like ours does not need.

World Water Day

Ensure safe drinking water for all

WE observed World Water Day yesterday with a stark reminder that safe potable drinking water is becoming scarcer by the day. According to a new report by WHO and Unicef Joint Monitoring Programme, however, as recently as 2015, 663 million people—one in 10—drank from unprotected sources. That includes Bangladesh where large numbers of people, especially in rural areas, extract drinking water from contaminated sources.

We have overcome numerous socioeconomic challenges in the short span of time since independence. Since the early 1990s, the installation of tubewells across rural areas of the country has provided drinking water for over 90 percent of the population leading to the decline of diarrheal diseases such as cholera.

However, widespread arsenic contamination of groundwater and decreasing levels of groundwater due to excessive extraction are some of the most pressing concerns today. Not only that, wastewater from industrial pollution is killing our rivers and water bodies, increasing amount of faecal sludge is filling up latrine pits and septic tanks, and rising sea level has led to saline water seeping into the surface water and groundwater along the coastal belt.

Needless to say, the ramifications of these issues are untold. There are immense risks to public health, food security, and the very livelihood of millions. Until and unless the government prioritises water management and governance in its agenda, not only will we remain far from achieving our national goals but also SDG 6, which demands to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.



MD. KHALEQUZZAMAN

THE upcoming visit by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India has generated a lot of excitement and expectations among the people in both

Bangladesh and India. Although it is not clear if any issue pertinent to water resources management will be discussed or if any treaty on the Teesta River will be signed during this visit, it is certain that various issues related to river and water sharing agreements will be on the mind of Sheikh Hasina. As per news reports, the people of Bangladesh want an immediate resolution to the issue of Teesta water sharing. The Farakka Barrage issue has resurfaced both in India and Bangladesh following the demand by Bihar's Chief Minister (CM) Nitish Kumar to demolish it. The Ganges Barrage issue has been in the news following the objection raised by West Bengal's CM Mamata Banerjee. The question that begs an answer is how should PM Sheikh Hasina and her team deal with these water and river resources management issues during her visit.

Teesta water-sharing agreement
 Given the strong opposition from Mamata Banerjee to reach a water-sharing agreement, it is highly unlikely that a treaty will be signed during this visit. The central government of India has been using the argument that water resources belong to states and without reaching an agreement with the government of West Bengal, it will be impossible to reach and implement such a treaty. This is unjustified as Article 253 of the Constitution of India gives the central government and the parliament "the power to make any law for whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement or convention with any other country." Therefore, if the central government wants to sign a treaty on Teesta water-sharing, it will be next to impossible for the state government not to comply.

The Indian River Linking Project, of which Teesta water diversion to other watersheds is an integral part, is dictated by the Indian Supreme Court and is being implemented by the central government. The proposed Tipaimukh dam project is another example of central government managing water resources of a trans-boundary river that flows through several states and downstream Bangladesh.

However, the question remains, what is a fair treaty for Teesta water-sharing? As per the international norm, Bangladesh has established "prior uses" of the Teesta water to support ecosystems

and the economy of a large region. Besides, the number of people living within the territory of Teesta watershed in India and Bangladesh is about 50:50. The Teesta treaty should be based on the interests of three stakeholders, namely the ecosystems, people living in West Bengal/Sikkim, and people living within Bangladesh's portion of the watershed. Any treaty should be based on historic flow of the Teesta that existed prior to both Gozaldoba and Dalia Barrages. Several studies showed that at least 3,200 cusec of water flow will be necessary to support the ecosystems in the river, which should be allowed to flow at any time throughout the year. The remaining water should be divided proportionally to the need of the people living in Bangladesh and India. In addition, no treaty will bring any fruit if a guarantee clause is not included.

The Farakka Barrage. Since the Ganges Treaty exists between Bangladesh and India, it is unlikely that the Farakka Barrage will be on the agenda. However, in light of the recent demands within India to demolish the barrage, Bangladesh should raise the issue and demand its complete demolition too.

Ganges Barrage
 If the Farakka Barrage is demolished then there will be no need for construction of the Ganges Barrage inside Bangladesh. However, even if the Farakka Barrage remains intact, Bangladesh should not build the Ganges Barrage for the same reason the Farakka Barrage is criticised. The viability of the Ganges Barrage will depend on the availability of water from the Farakka Barrage, which has not been the case in recent years. One study shows that during 2008-12, Bangladesh did not receive its fair share of water about 25 percent of the time as per the Ganges

the water scarcity issues but will have twice the impact on coastal areas in the face of climate change and sea level rise.

Other trans-boundary rivers
 During the last few decades, most of the 54 trans-boundary rivers that originate in India have either been diverted or dammed upstream by India. All of these hydro-developmental projects have left a profound impact on Bangladesh as it is located at the receiving end of the fluvial regime. The agriculture, fisheries, and human health sectors and wellbeing of ecosystems and the environment are reported to have been significantly affected by the disruption of natural river flow. Section IX of the Ganges Treaty calls for resolution of disputes over water sharing in all trans-boundary rivers between the two countries. In fact, creation of a greater compact for all trans-boundary rivers is needed to tackle water, sediment, land use, and climate



An almost dried up Teesta river in Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR

Farakka Barrage
 It is an established fact that the Farakka Barrage has not served the original purpose of de-silting the Kolkata Port. Rather, it has caused siltation on the riverbed and has resulted in riverbank erosion in upstream locations. CM Nitish Kumar has blamed the Farakka Barrage for increase in frequency and duration of flooding in upstream Bihar. Another study by South Asian Network of Dams, Rivers, and People has reported that about 328 million tonnes of silt are deposited upstream of the barrage each year, which is about 40 percent of the river-borne sediments that otherwise would have entered Bangladesh and could have contributed to the delta building process in coastal areas. Another study by the *New York Times* reported an annual loss of USD 4 billion to Bangladesh due to water diversion by

Treaty from the Farakka Barrage. This amount is much higher (85 percent) when the received amount of water is compared against the historic flow at Farakka point. Besides, the Ganges Barrage will cause waterlogging, riverbed siltation, and riverbank erosion at upstream locations of the barrage the same way Farakka Barrage has caused these problems. The Ganges Barrage will trap sediments at upstream locations, resulting in reduction of the delta-building process in the Meghna Estuary. While the diversion of flow towards the Sundarbans may provide some relief to salinity intrusion in southwestern regions of Bangladesh, the equal amount of salinity will ingress through the Meghna River in the western part of the active southern delta. In essence, the Ganges Barrage will become a double-edged sword for Bangladesh as it will not solve

change issues under the concept of integrated water resources management plan in the future. Most importantly, Bangladesh, being the lower riparian country, should adopt the UN Convention on the Uses of Non-Navigational Water Courses (1997) and encourage all co-riparian nations in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) Basin to sign and ratify this important law. If all countries agree – in the spirit of settlement of the maritime boundary between India and Bangladesh – all water, sediment, land use, and climate change related issues can also be settled following the UN Convention. Future peace, security, and prosperity will depend on the peaceful settlement of river and water issues in the sub-continent.

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A long way to go on climate change adaptation



SALEEMUL HUQ

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
IN the historic Paris Agreement reached in December 2015 at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), all countries agreed to collectively achieve two global goals. The first was to keep the long-term global temperature increase well below 2 degrees centigrade, or if possible, below 1.5 degrees. The second was to try to achieve a Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).

Countries also agreed to track the progress towards achieving both these goals through a periodic process of global stocktaking. Such periodic stocktaking would be done by adding up the mitigation and adaptation actions by each country as provided in their respective National Determined Contribution (NDC) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) reports.

This will require being able to measure global progress towards achieving the two goals. It is relatively easy to measure the total amount of emissions of the different greenhouse gases (GHGs) that cause global warming and to calculate the total Global Warming Potential (GWP) of each of the different GHGs (for example, each molecule of methane causes as much warming as twenty molecules of carbon dioxide) and

aggregate all of the emission globally to see where we are headed in achieving the long-term temperature goal. At the moment, the globally aggregated emissions from all NDCs submitted so far is taking the world to nearly 3 degrees of temperature rise so we are not on track to achieve the goal, but we have

and a long-term temperature goal for adaptation, there is no agreed long term goal for achieving adaptation at the global level, nor are there agreed metrics or indicators which can be measured in each country and then aggregated to the global level.

The Organisation for Economic Co-

I was invited to facilitate the discussion on the adaption goal. The interesting debate offered varied outlooks of individuals and groups who had differing views on what should be measured and aggregated.

The result was that there is no agreement on what the global goal on adaptation should look like. This is because adaptation is very location-specific and almost unique in each place on the globe. Hence, even aggregating from the local to the national level, let alone from the national to the global level, is a challenge.

The net result of the expert dialogue was to agree that a lot more work needs to be done at the scientific and technical level amongst adaptation scientists and practitioners in order to find some potential proxy indicators that could be used for the first global stocktaking while better ones are developed over time.

However, in the end there was one aspect of the global adaptation goal that was relatively easy to be agreed upon, namely how much of the global funds for tackling climate change should go to adaptation and mitigation.

Here the agreed goal is to achieve a balance of 50/50 out of the total amount of USD 100 billion a year, starting from 2020 onwards. On this measure, the current ratio is less than 20 percent of global funds going towards adaptation and more than 80 percent to mitigation. Hence, there is still a long way to go towards the global goal on adaptation.

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time to enhance the mitigation activities and reduce the emissions of GHGs even faster in future.

When it comes to agreeing on the adaptation goal, and also how to measure progress, it is not as easy as it is for mitigation.

Whereas measuring mitigation has a common GWP to aggregate all the GHGs

operation and Development (OECD) based in Paris, France, convened a Climate Change Experts Group Forum earlier this month to bring together experts and negotiators from the key negotiating groups to try to get some consensus at the technical level on measuring mitigation and adaptation for the first Global Stock take.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Noise pollution making residential areas unlivable

The blaring noise of horns in the Uttara residential area, particularly from the airport intersection to Abdullahpur, makes it impossible for us to sleep at night or for our children to study during daytime. Given that this area has a 24-hour stream of traffic on the move, there is no rational reason to honk in the residential lanes. But long route buses in particular continue to create a lot of unnecessary noise nonetheless.

The Traffic Department must make it mandatory for vehicles to follow specific lanes, and more importantly refrain from honking in residential areas. It is our earnest request to the Traffic Division and the DMP to look into the matter immediately.

Resident
 Uttara, Dhaka

Delay in BCS appointment

PSC had last published the results of the 35th BCS on August 17, 2016. Seven months have passed since then. The government is yet to publish the gazette and appoint the candidates. We wonder how much longer we will have to sit around idly and waste our precious time waiting for the gazette. PSC will soon publish the final results of both 36th and 37th BCS. If the government doesn't speed up the appointment process, the candidates of both these BCS batches will have to wait for almost a year for their appointment even after the final results are published. We earnestly request our government to publish the gazette as soon as possible and relieve us of this painful predicament.

Ashek Sarker
 Comilla