

# Indian parties

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Pranab and Hasina, who share close family ties since long, recalled their days in New Delhi when Hasina was in exile after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

The Indian president said he was moved by Hasina visiting New Delhi and sharing his grief following the death of his wife Suvera who hailed from Narail district of Bangladesh.

Pranab hosted a dinner for Hasina last night.

Hasina is to wrap up her India visit today by addressing an Indian think-tank at Hotel Imperial and honchos of Indian industries and businesses at Hotel Taj Palace this morning.

Her meeting with business and industry leaders assume significance as 12 MoUs are set to be signed between Bangladeshi and Indian companies to generate an investment of \$9 billion dollars in Bangladesh. Some of these companies are state-owned.

Hasina is expected to pitch for greater Indian investment in Bangladesh which Indian officials feel will go a long way in addressing Dhaka's concerns over huge deficit in bilateral trade.

The two-way trade is about \$6.5 billion, of which India's exports to Bangladesh stands around \$5 billion.

Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar said unlike the past, Indian investors are now showing more enthusiasm for and confidence in Bangladesh economy.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets Congress President Sonia Gandhi, Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi, right, and former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh, left, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

# It's no fault of Teesta

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Bangladesh have been going on for the past 20 years, with West Bengal weighing its own stake on the water's share.

In 2011, Mamata pulled herself out of the then Indian PM Manmohan Singh's Dhaka visit, putting a near-struck Teesta deal on backburner. Then four years later, she asked Bangladeshis to keep faith in her.

"Please keep faith in me," she told a programme on February 20, 2015, in Dhaka, "Don't worry about it [Teesta water sharing]."

Together with PM Sheikh Hasina, she would resolve the matter, the Trinamool Congress leader had said.

But what she told Hasina during her Saturday night meeting in New Delhi was anything but. Not only did she make it clear that Teesta has no water to share but also proposed exploring alternative water resources, for example small rivers like Torsa, Jhaldhaka and Dhansiri.

After the 2011 hiccup, Mamata commissioned West Bengal water expert Dr Kalyan Rudra to submit a report on the prospects of sharing water from Teesta with Bangladesh. Rudra did come up with the report, but it was never made public.

### TEESTA

**ORIGINATES:** From Tso Lhamo Lake, one of the highest lakes in the world, located at an altitude of 5,330 m in Sikkim, India.

**FLOWS THROUGH:** Darjeeling, New Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts of West Bengal before entering Bangladesh.

**LENGTH:** 309 KM

**MAJOR PROJECTS:** 26 hydropower projects mostly in Sikkim - either operating or at construction stage - on the river aiming at producing 50,000MW of electricity. Gajoldoba Barrage and Teesta Barrage for irrigation purposes in West Bengal and Bangladesh respectively.

When the concept of Gajoldoba barrage was being developed, it was Rudra who wrote that each hydro project in the upstream would take away at least five percent of the running water of Teesta.

Basking in the newfound height of Indo-Bangla relationship, Indian PM Narendra Modi is also in the bandwagon to try and persuade Mamata to agree to the deal. But the West Bengal

CM now says she has other plans.

On Saturday, she made a suggestion to Modi that Bangladesh and India could look at the possibility of sharing water from other river systems close to the border. She also "urged both governments to conduct studies to ascertain the viability of the option," a source told the Sunday Express.

**IS MAMATA'S CONSENT ESSENTIAL?** Legally, the Modi government can strike the Teesta deal ignoring Mamata's opposition.

"According to article 253 of the Indian constitution, the Union government has the decision-making power in the matters of sharing waters from the transboundary rivers," said Dr Amit Ranjan, visiting research fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

But, he said, the emergence of powerful regional political parties and regional leaders in India has created a situation where their consent, especially over resource sharing with the neighbouring country, has been important.

At present, Mamata's party Trinamool Congress is also an effective opposition in the central parliament.

"Hence, the Union government cannot ignore the State leadership while taking such decisions which have deep social, political and economic impacts in West Bengal," Ranjan wrote in a recent article on Hasina's visit to India.

However, the Modi government does not need to depend on allies to remain in office like the past Manmohan Singh government, he argued.

The point to remember is that the central government cannot be accused of unconstitutionality if it concludes the Teesta water-sharing agreement with Dhaka, writer Avijit Ghosal noted in an article published in Hindustan Times on Friday.

But then, Mamata is only too aware that the Indian foreign policy takes the relevant states on board while dealing with neighbours, which is why Tamil Nadu is important while dealing with Sri Lanka, Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan and Bengal (and the North East) when dealing with Bangladesh, he added.

**POLITICS OVER TEESTA**

"As the general elections are due in Bangladesh in 2018 [sic; it's due in 2019], Hasina wants a much needed breakthrough on the issue of Teesta

river water which is one of the major political-cum-economic issues in Bangladesh," wrote Amit Ranjan.

"The deal on river Teesta would help her to consolidate herself as a 'true' leader of Bangladesh and not a 'paw' in the hands of India which she is being always alleged to by her political opponents."

According to Avijit Ghosal, this is one issue where Mamata loses nothing by sitting tight.

Even if Delhi ignores her concerns and goes ahead, she can say that the BJP does not think twice before sacrificing the interests of Bengal. As the war between Trinamool Congress and the BJP intensifies before the 2018 rural polls and 2019 Lok Sabha polls, it can translate into a political windfall for the embattled Bengal chief minister, he wrote for the Hindustan Times.

Mamata is also aware that Delhi needs Dhaka by its side in its fight against terrorist elements entering India through the porous borders of Bengal, Avijit said. "It will be only to Delhi's interest that the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina return in power in the 2019 elections in Bangladesh, and the water-sharing

treaty can be a handy tool in her hands to refute charges at home that she is unnecessarily soft towards India."

There can also be compulsions that may silently be at play. With CBI launching investigation into the Narada footage, where about a dozen leaders of Trinamool Congress -- MPs, ministers, MLAs, Kolkata mayor -- were seen accepting cash, the Bengal CM is facing the biggest embarrassment of her four-decade long political career, he wrote.

With the BJP loading the guns against Trinamool before the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2018 rural polls, one cannot rule out extraneous factors flowing down the course of the Teesta river, said the the Hindustan Times articles.

Garga Chatterjee in his write up for Firstpost yesterday said, "For that [the deal], Delhi has to get Kolkata on board. To give Dhaka a deal, Delhi has to offer a deal first to Kolkata. This will entail compensation for West Bengal that stands to lose from a Teesta deal. Till now, Delhi has not promised any such compensation to West Bengal. So, for the time being, there is no deal."

# IS blasts in two Egypt

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killed 27 people, the health ministry said.

"I just felt fire grabbing my face. I pushed my brother who was sitting next to me and then I heard people saying: 'explosion'," one of the wounded told state television.

Emergency services had scrambled to the scene when another blast rocked Saint Mark's church in Alexandria where Coptic Pope Tawadros II had been leading a Palm Sunday service.

Seventeen people including at least four police officers were killed in that attack, which the interior ministry said was caused by a suicide bomber who blew himself up when prevented from entering the church.

The ministry said Tawadros was unharmd, and a church official said he left before the explosion.

The private CBC Extra channel aired footage of the Alexandria blast, with CCTV showing what appeared to be the church entrance engulfed in flame and flying concrete moments after a guard turned away a man.

Eyewitnesses said a police officer detected the bomber before he blew himself up.

At least 78 people were wounded in Tanta and 40 in Alexandria, the health ministry said.

A UN Security Council statement condemned the bombings as "heinous" and "cowardly".

Egyptian officials denounced the violence as an attempt to sow divisions, and Francis sent his "deep condolences" to Tawadros.

IS claimed two Egyptian suicide bombers carried out both attacks and threatened further attacks in a statement published on social media.

After the bombings, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ordered military deployments to guard "vital and important infrastructure", his office said.

State television reported that the interior minister sacked the provincial head of security and replaced him after the attack.

On March 29, the Mar Girgis church's Facebook page said a "suspicious" device had been found outside the building that security services removed.

"I heard the blast and came running. I found people torn up... some people, only half of their bodies remained," Nabil Nader, who lives in front of the Tanta church, said Sunday.

Worshippers had been celebrating Palm Sunday, one of the holiest days in the Christian calendar, marking Jesus's triumphant entrance to Jerusalem.

**POPE PRAYS FOR VICTIMS**

Pope Francis, who is due in Cairo on April 28-29, offered prayers for the victims.

"Let us pray for the victims of the attack unfortunately carried out today," he said.

"May the Lord convert the heart of those who sow terror, violence and death and also the heart of those who make weapons and trade in them."

Copts, who make up about one tenth of Egypt's population of more than 92 million and who celebrate Easter next weekend, have been targeted by several attacks in recent months.

Jihadists and Islamists accuse Copts of supporting the military overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, which ushered in a deadly crackdown on his supporters.

In December, a suicide bombing claimed by IS killed 29 worshippers in a Cairo church.

The group later released a video threatening Egypt's Christians with more attacks.

A spate of jihadist-linked attacks in the restive Sinai Peninsula, including the murder of a Copt in the city of El Arish, led some Coptic families to flee.

About 250 Christians took refuge in the Suez Canal city of Ismailiyya after IS in February called for attacks on the minority.

US President Donald Trump led international condemnation of Sunday's attacks.

"So sad to hear of the terrorist attack in Egypt. US strongly condemns. I have great confidence that President Al Sisi will handle situation properly," he tweeted.

**STRING OF ATTACKS**

Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail stressed the authorities' determination to "eliminate terrorism".

The Cairo-based Al-Azhar, an influ-

entia Sunni Muslim authority, said the attacks aimed to "destabilise security and... the unity of Egyptians".

Egypt's Copts have endured successive attacks since Morsi's ouster in July 2013.

More than 40 churches were targeted nationwide in the two weeks after the deadly dispersal by security forces of two pro-Morsi protest camps in Cairo on August 14 that year, Human Rights Watch said.

Sisi, who as then army chief helped remove Morsi, has defended his security forces and accused jihadists of attacking Copts in order to divide the country.

In October 2011, almost 30 people -- mostly Coptic Christians -- were killed outside the state television building in Cairo after the army charged at protesters denouncing the torching of a church in southern Egypt.

A few months earlier, the unclaimed New Year's Day bombing of a Coptic church killed more than 20 people in second city Alexandria.



A poultry farmer in Netrakona trapped this leopard cat with a duck as bait. The farmer planted the trap Saturday night after he noticed a significant decrease in the number of ducks he was rearing. On information, officials from the district forest department took the wild cat, which is two feet in height and two and a half feet in length.

# Show of force

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"US Pacific Command ordered the Carl Vinson Strike Group north as a prudent measure to maintain readiness and presence in the Western Pacific," said Commander Dave Benham, spokesman at US Pacific Command.

"The number one threat in the region continues to be North Korea, due to its reckless, irresponsible and destabilizing program of missile tests and pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability," he told AFP, in an unusually forceful statement.

Originally scheduled to make port calls in Australia, the strike group -- which includes the Nimitz-class aircraft super carrier USS Carl Vinson -- is now headed from Singapore to the Western Pacific Ocean.

Pyeongyang is on a quest to develop a long-range missile capable of hitting the US mainland with a nuclear warhead, and has so far staged five nuclear tests, two of them last year.

Expert satellite imagery analysis suggests it could well be preparing for a sixth, with US intelligence officials warning that Pyongyang's key ally to help curb the North's nuclear weapons program.

continental United States.

North Korea on Wednesday fired a medium-range ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan ahead of a US-China summit.

In February the North simultaneously fired four ballistic missiles off its east coast, three of which fell provocatively close to Japan, in what it said was a drill for an attack on US bases in the neighbouring Asian country.

Last August Pyongyang also successfully test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile 500 kilometres (300 miles) towards Japan, far exceeding any previous sub-launched tests, in what the North's leader Kim Jong-Un hailed as the "greatest success."

A nuclear-capable SLBM system would take the North's threat to a new level, allowing deployment far beyond the Korean peninsula and a "second-strike" capability in the event of an attack on its army bases.

**US UNILATERAL ACTION?**

On Thursday and Friday, US President Donald Trump hosted his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for talks during which he pressed Pyongyang's key ally to help curb the North's nuclear weapons program.

Trump has threatened unilateral action against the hermit state, a threat that appears more palpable after Thursday's strike on a Syrian airfield following an apparent chemical attack.

The head of North American Aerospace Defense Command, which provides missile detection for the region, said Thursday she was "extremely confident" of US capability to intercept a potential intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) bound for America from the North.

But General Lori Robinson expressed concerns for the type of ballistic missile powered by a solid-fuel engine that Pyongyang said it successfully tested in February.

"Amidst an unprecedented pace of North Korean strategic weapons testing, our ability to provide actionable warning continues to diminish," Robinson said in written testimony to senators.

And while a US unilateral strike on North Korea from a shorter range might be more militarily effective, it likely would endanger many civilians in South Korea, experts warn.

The isolated North is barred under UN resolutions from any use of ballistic missile technology.