

A short history of a big deal

The Teesta treaty continues to dominate relations between India and Bangladesh



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

BANGLADESH Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India and the signing of 36 agreements of cooperation ranging from the economic, defence and power sectors to the peaceful use of nuclear energy shows that significant progress has been made in Indo-Bangla

relations in the last eight years. However, the stalled Teesta treaty continues to eclipse bilateral relations as water affects the lives of ordinary people across vast spaces of land. It seems that in spite of the goodwill prevailing in Delhi, West Bengal has become a thorn in Indo-Bangla relations.

Bangladesh shares 54 of its 57 transboundary rivers with India. After the Ganges, Brahmaputra and the Meghna (GBM) river system, Teesta is the fourth largest river shared between the two countries. In 1983, an ad hoc water-sharing agreement allocated 39 percent of the water flow to India and 36 percent to Bangladesh and the remaining 25 percent was left unallocated for a later decision. The Teesta river's floodplain covers an area of 2,750 sq km in Bangladesh, supporting roughly 10 million people. An estimated one lakh hectares of land across five districts of Bangladesh are severely impacted and face acute shortages during dry seasons. Apart from livelihood directly obtained from the river, agriculture is also affected as 14 percent crop production is dependent on the flow of the river. At stake are the lives of millions of people of Bangladesh who depend on the river for their survival. Therefore, it is imperative that the treaty provide equal allocation of the Teesta, a fair demand from the side of the lower riparian Bangladesh.

So near, yet so far

In 2011, during the visit of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Dhaka, plans had been confirmed of an interim arrangement of 15 years, with India getting 42.5 percent and Bangladesh 37.5 percent of the river during dry seasons. The arrangement also included the setting of a joint hydrological observation station to gather accurate data for the future. The plans fell through when West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee opted out of the delegation led by Dr Singh to Dhaka, expressing strong reservations against giving Bangladesh a greater share of water.



Mamata Banerjee has been sitting on the Teesta issue for six years with Bangladesh hostage to India's domestic politics.

Hopes were renewed during Ms Banerjee's visit to Dhaka in February 2015 when upon arrival she said, "Have trust on me on the Teesta issue... I will have talks on the matter with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina." Despite her reassurances, she continues to flip-flop on her stance on the share Bangladesh should get. Again during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June 2015, Ms Banerjee accompanied the delegation and positive expectations were rife on both sides. The Modi government accepted the new arrangement between India and Bangladesh, but Ms Banerjee did not. Hence, the deal was not inked despite Mr Modi saying "rivers should nurture the India-Bangladesh relationship and not become a source of discord". The general perception was that the Teesta treaty could not be concluded before the West Bengal State elections in April-May 2016. Despite winning the elections for a second

consecutive term, during her recent face-to-face talks with Prime Minister Hasina in Delhi, the Chief Minister stated, "Your problem is water, not Teesta. I am willing to look at any alternate proposal to address your issues."
Mamata's flip-flops
When the Chief Minister herself had appointed an expert committee headed by Kalyan Rudra in 2011 to study the Teesta issue, the report, though unpublished, was in favour of Bangladesh. Aunur Nishat, a prominent hydrology expert from Bangladesh, says, "India has completely dried out the river on our end during the lean period by closing all the gates of the Gazaldoba barrage. That is unexpected from a friendly neighbour. This treaty is a formality, but India cannot ignore our rights to the river water."
Ms Banerjee has sat on the issue and been changing goalposts for six years, with Bangladesh

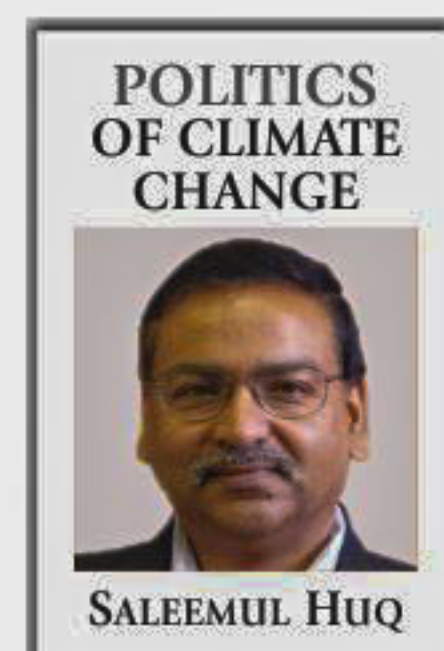
hostage to its neighbour's domestic politics as a State government refuses to play ball with the Centre. Speculation is now rife that Ms Banerjee is trying to secure a financial package from Delhi and the Teesta treaty has become the bargaining tool for it. It is ordinary Bangladeshis who are bearing the brunt of this impasse.
With elections slated for early 2019, it is Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina whose credibility is at stake at home after all that she has done for taking Indo-Bangla relations to newer heights. Unfortunately, the Bengal of India has become the sore throat in an otherwise evolving and matured Indo-Bangla relations.

Ms Banerjee has sat on the issue and been changing goalposts for six years, with Bangladesh hostage to its neighbour's domestic politics as a State government refuses to play ball with the Centre. It is ordinary Bangladeshis who are bearing the brunt of this impasse.

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CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Taking it to the next level in Bangladesh



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
SALEEMUL HUQ

Rather than trying to monopolise all actions related to climate change, the MOEF can provide technical assistance, advice, and research support to the other sectors as well as to the national plans under development.

TACKLING climate change, especially adapting to its adverse impacts, is a learning-by-doing process in which we should try a set of actions for around five years or so and then take stock of what worked and what didn't, and then plan the next set of actions. The second set of actions should then expand on what worked and leave out what didn't from the first round.

Thus, every five years or so we should evaluate the effectiveness of our actions and use that information to inform the next set of actions for the following five years or so. If the second set of actions simply repeats the first set, then it shows that we have failed to learn any lesson from our initial actions. Learning from doing means that we do things differently the second and third times around.
Bangladesh is at a good juncture to evaluate its previous actions and investments in terms of both planning and implementing adaptation projects in order to inform the upcoming national and sectoral plans over the coming years.
In particular, the Perspective Plan to 2040 and the Delta Plan to 2100 are about to be started by the Planning Commission. Then they will begin to prepare the 8th Five Year Plan for the period of 2021 to 2026 within a few years.
This gives the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) an opportunity to learn some lessons from the investments made through the

climate funds that were set up some years ago and develop their next set of plans. In particular, the MOEF will be working on revising the Bangladesh climate change strategy and action plan, which has been the guiding national document for nearly a decade. It will also develop a national adaptation plan as a document for implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change with its time horizon to 2030.
At the same time, the MOEF is also developing the country's investment programme for the climate change and environment sectors for the next five to ten years.
There is therefore a great opportunity for the MOEF to be much more strategic over the next

five years to ensure that it is able to play a significant and catalytic role to support all the other implementing ministries in integrating climate change activities into their respective plan and budgets.
Thus, rather than trying to monopolise all actions related to climate change, the MOEF can provide technical assistance, advice, and research support to the other sectors as well as to the national plans under development.
At the same time, the experience gained from managing climate funds over the last few years is an opportunity to develop a robust system of tracking, monitoring and evaluating climate investments, which will allow Bangladesh to

leverage significant amounts of global climate funds in future.
If Bangladesh is able to genuinely integrate climate change – both adaptations, as well as mitigation – in the preparation of the 8th five year plan by 2020, then the country will indeed have reached the next level of tackling climate change. This will mean that climate change responses will not be confined to just a single chapter of the plan and given to MOEF to implement, but rather that climate change actions will be included in every sector and ministry's own plans.

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A WORD A DAY

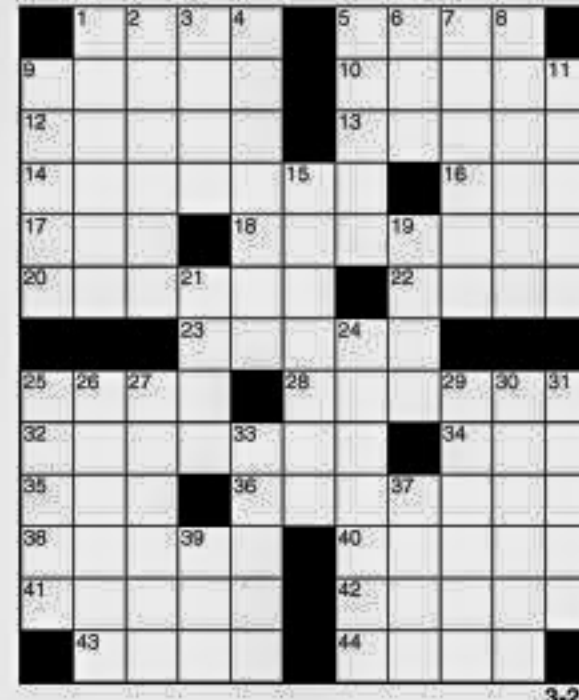


SERAGLIO
noun (historical)

The women's apartments (harem) in an Ottoman palace

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Jamie of "M*A*S*H"
 - 5 Dwindle
 - 9 Scoundrel
 - 10 Acts the nomad
 - 12 Improve, in a way
 - 13 Writer Brookner
 - 14 History division
 - 16 Diplomatic rep.
 - 17 Football player
 - 18 Middle
 - 20 Declares
 - 22 Jekyll's evil half
 - 23 Parting word
 - 25 Boot attachment
 - 28 Explorer Vasco-
 - 32 Chiron, for one
- DOWN**
- 1 Instigate
 - 2 To-do list
 - 3 Litter's littlest
 - 4 Marked down
 - 5 "Noises Off" playwright
 - 6 Horror's Chaney org.
 - 7 Bird sanctuary
 - 8 Steam
 - 9 Epsom events
 - 11 Black shade
 - 15 Leftover stuff
 - 19 Ruffian
 - 21 Bakery buy
 - 24 Heartfelt
 - 25 Cons
 - 26 Class length
 - 27 Disloyal
 - 29 Out of bed
 - 30 Brief time
 - 31 "This is only —"
 - 33 Was sore
 - 37 VCR insert
 - 39 Airport screening org.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

ACHE PASS
SHALE AMOUR
PARKA RIFLE
END THISTLE
NEWBIES WED
LAINE BANS
RAG CAR
AWES MANES
GAS MARKETS
ARTDECO REC
IMOUT LARVA
NURSE SPOIL
PETS BRED

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

