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## Bangladesh-India: Teesta Agreement- Revisited

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### **The Teesta River:**

The Teesta is the fourth major river after the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna in the eastern region.

It originates in Sikkim and after traversing 172 Km in the hilly region, runs for 97 Km in the plains of India and 124 Km in Bangladesh.

The river waters of Teesta are critical both for the agricultural lands in North Bengal and for North West Bangladesh. In the latter case, the northwestern region is said to be a “drought prone” area and thanks to a barrage built by Bangladesh downstream in 1990, the region is said to be having the luxury of three seasonal crops in a year.

India had already built a barrage upstream at Gozaldiba. The water for the barrage downstream built by Bangladesh depends on the regulated water sent downstream from this barrage. Besides irrigation, the water received downstream is also used for flood protection and drainage facilities for about 75000 hectares of cultivable land. This is the first phase of the project completed in 1998 and more are to follow. India was not associated in planning the downstream project as it should have been, when the whole barrage and associated works were dependent on the waters let off from the Gozaldiba project.

### **Sharing of Teesta Waters:**

Serious discussions on the sharing of Teesta River began only in March 2010. The 37th Ministerial level Joint River Commission meeting

came to an understanding that the agreement would be signed within one year. This was possible only when a friendly government in Bangladesh that was open to deal sympathetically with Indian concerns in other areas was installed.

The main problem in the sharing of the waters in Teesta is during the lean period. The “poverty” during the dry season will have to be shared and it looks that informally India had agreed to share fifty percent during the lean period.

While both countries have been intent on sharing the waters and the proportions, no serious discussions have taken place for both countries to look together for ways to augment the water in the lean season. Suitable storage of water upstream during the flood season, recharge of ground water down stream are some of the doable methods to increase the flow during the dry season.

Based on the dependency of the population on the Teesta waters as a whole, Bangladesh expects fifty percent of the waters down stream while the West Bengal Government would agree to not more than twenty five percent of waters to be allowed to go down stream.

It looks that fifty percent is too high and twenty five percent acceptable to West Bengal government is too low. The growing needs of Sikkim have also been ignored. It is not clear whether the State of Sikkim was ever consulted, when India informally agreed to a fifty percent sharing of waters.

If India had committed for a fifty percent, it should go ahead with this division for a short period of three to four years and the whole issue can then be re examined. It is almost certain that Bangladesh government would also cooperate in finding alternate means of additional water sources during the lean periods so that the farmers of all the three states are benefitted.

### **Bangladesh Needs Help:**

One cannot hope to get a more friendly government in Bangladesh than what India has now. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is facing tremendous challenges from extremist religious forces and she needs all the support from India for its stability.

In the interest of good relations between the two countries and more for the stability of Bangladesh, an agreement on sharing of Teesta waters could be signed as soon as possible.

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