

Waiting for the Begum

As past experience indicates, sharing the river waters is always politically fraught and needs consistent high-level consideration, for problems can keep arising in dealing with the numerous trans-border rivers between India and Bangladesh. As the lower riparian, Bangladesh may feel that its concerns tend to be overlooked: this was the case when the Ganga agreement was being negotiated, and echoes of the same sentiment are to be heard today when another water agreement is being put together

The long anticipated visit by Sheikh Hasina is an opportunity to freshen and re-animate ties between India and its important neighbour to the east. Not that there is any pressing need for new initiatives: relations are good, there is plenty of cooperation between India and Bangladesh, and few outstanding issues that demand attention. The closest there is to a dispute is the division of the waters of the Teesta, and that too need not be an insuperable problem, for the basic groundwork has been done, with extensive negotiations yielding an agreement in principle that former Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was all set to sign in Dhaka but was forced to delay owing to unexpected backing off by the West Bengal Chief Minister, whose support was - and is - crucial. Thus the technical basis of a balanced agreement has been established but the uncertainties of Centre-State relations in India have stood in the way of a final settlement.

Since the earlier near-miss on Teesta, much has changed, in that India is under a different leadership which is widely perceived as being more decisive, and certainly is much stronger in Parliament, hence expectations about river-sharing have revived, for New Delhi could well be in a better position today to come to terms on the water-sharing agreement that Bangladesh has been seeking. Another factor to be noted is that while India has undergone sweeping political change Bangladesh has remained under the same leadership - that of Sheikh Hasina - and this continuity could be helpful when it comes to reviving the earlier effort on the Teesta.

Sheikh Hasina's exceptional record as a discerning leader who has transcended differences and established meaningful cooperation with India should also be acknowledged. It was

under her leadership that the landmark agreement on sharing of the Ganga waters at Farakka was concluded; indeed, it can be argued that without her the Ganga would have remained the biggest obstacle to good relations, as it was for the previous half-century. At that time, too, there were strong differences on water-sharing between Kolkata and New Delhi, which were ruled by parties that had strong political differences, but yet they were able to come together in the shared cause of peace and development. If Sheikh Hasina gave the lead from Dhaka, she was able to count on the participation and support of the State Government in Kolkata under Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, and of PM I.K. Gujral's government in New Delhi. The agreement on the Ganga waters, as it turned out, was a prelude to other water-related issues, of which the Teesta is currently the most prominent, though there are others that may well move up when Teesta is sorted out. As past experience indicates, sharing the river waters is always politically fraught and needs consistent high-level consideration, for problems can keep arising in dealing with the numerous trans-border rivers between India and Bangladesh.

As the lower riparian, Bangladesh may feel that its concerns tend to be overlooked: this was the case when the Ganga agreement was being negotiated, and echoes of the same sentiment are to be heard today when another water agreement is being put together. As a means of giving itself some leverage in dealing with its larger and geographically better placed neighbour Bangladesh has spoken of the possibility of a broader regional water-sharing agreement that would include China

among the negotiating parties. The upper waters of the Teesta rise in Tibet so there is some apparent logic in the suggestion, even though India has never favoured third party association with bilateral issues of this nature and there can be little realistic expectation of bringing third parties into the Teesta discussion.

Apart from the rivers issue, there are several other matters that can be advanced during Sheikh Hasina's visit, some being projects to be financed out of a substantial loan that India is to provide. Infrastructure development and better connectivity have long been on the list of joint activities to which both countries are committed though the follow-up has remained insufficient. For India, revival of the route across Bangladesh is the most efficient way of getting across to the North-East, and it would make a big difference to the development of that region. Conceivably, should trans-border communications improve, Chittagong

could resume its role as the port for the eastern part of the sub-continent and Bangladesh become a central element in the evolution of India's 'Make East' policy. The possibilities are unending. Some of these themes figure in the large number of bilateral agreements that are to be signed during Sheikh Hasina's visit and they could give real substance to the relationship.

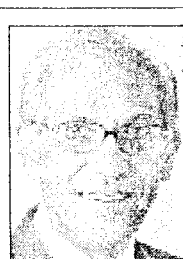
An MOU on cooperation in defence manufactures is also part of the expected outcome from the visit, and this has drawn some criticism in Bangladesh from elements that do not welcome closer ties with India. That the Prime Minister of Bangladesh has not permitted such groups to call the tune indicates the firmness of her conviction

in the matter. She has been a consistent advocate of better India-Bangladesh ties and has helped steer the relationship in a positive direction.

After long initial travail, Bangladesh has succeeded in overcoming many of its early problems and is today rightly to be regarded as a significant partner in India's growth and development plans. In some respects Bangladesh has moved ahead of India, as for instance in its progress in programmes for poverty reduction, health, and education: India may have something to gain from closer interaction in these sectors. India's constant effort to combat terrorism and to lead the international community in that direction is an important area of mutual interest. At one stage the authorities in Dhaka were reluctant to press too hard against religious extremists who often targeted India but ever since Sheikh Hasina came to power there has been none of the former ambiguity in this matter. Bangladesh itself has been targeted and is a resolute opponent of terrorism in all its manifestations.

One must also recall that Bangladesh has a fine record as a creative source of many significant regional initiatives. The most important of these is the setting up of SAARC, which is now an established part of the regional architecture but could scarcely have come into existence without Dhaka's persistence and its creative diplomacy. Bangladesh has promoted projects of long distance connectivity and has drummed up multilateral support for development projects like new bridges and roads to bind the region closer.

India's recent initiative to establish a rail link between Dhaka and Istanbul is in some respects an updating of an earlier Bangladeshi concept. Maybe this imaginative idea will receive a decisive boost from the meeting of the two Prime Ministers.



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The Hindu
Rajasthan Patrika (Hindi)
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Flood alert in Kashmir

April-7-16

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JAMMU, 6 APRIL

A flood advisory asking people to remain vigilant was today issued for those living in south and central Kashmir after a rise in the water level of River Jhelum and its tributaries.

Jhelum has crossed the 'alarm level' of 18 feet at Sangam in Anantnag district, officials said.

"We have issued the advisory after the water level in River Jhelum crossed the 18 feet mark at Sangam," a senior official of the Irrigation and Flood Control department told PTI.

He said although the water level was still rising in the river, the rate of increase had showed a downward trend in the past couple of hours.

"The rate of increase in the water level has shown a decline and it bodes well if the weather starts improv-

ing soon," the official said.

He said the water level at noon at Sangam was 18.40 feet while at Ram Munshi Bagh in the city it stood at 15.50 feet.

"In March 2015, a year after the devastating floods of 2014, the water level at Ram Munshi Bagh had reached 21.5 feet. So there is no need to panic yet," he added.

The 2014 floods had caused widespread destruction in the valley as more than 300 persons were killed in the deluge that struck in the month of September.

According to MET department officials, Srinagar received 83.9 mm rain and snowfall over the past 24 hours while Kokernag in south Kashmir received 69.9 mm of rains in the corresponding period.

Pahalgam, also in south Kashmir, recorded rainfall of 64.2 mm of rains in the past 24 hours, the officials said.

The incessant rains have

forced closure of the arterial Jammu-Srinagar National Highway as the downpour has triggered landslides and shooting stones at several places along the 300-km road.

Massive traffic jams were witnessed in many parts of the city as the road were inundated as drains were overflowing.

The divisional administration has pressed into service pumps and fire tenders to dewater the city roads.

The authorities have also closed down all schools in the valley till Sunday in view of the rain and snowfall at this time of the year.

The University of Kashmir and Islamic University have postponed all examinations for the day.

The Health Department has directed all district and block level officers to prepare for exigencies in case of flood.

Express
Tribune
Hindustan (Hindi)

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Rajasthan Patrika (Hindi)
Deccan Chronicle
Deccan Herald

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Jhelum in spate, triggers flood threat in Valley

Several low-lying areas evacuated | Avalanche warning in Kargil, north Kashmir | 10 flights cancelled

AZHAR QADRI
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, APRIL 6

A rare mid-spring snowfall and stormy rainfall that continued for the third consecutive day on Thursday swelled the Jhelum river to an alarming level, prompting closure of the highway after landslides and evacuation of several low-lying localities in the Kashmir valley.

It was one of the highest recorded rainfall since the 2014 floods with Srinagar city receiving 83.9 mm precipitation in 24 hours. The extreme weather condition in the region also caused a significant drop in mercury, which came down by nearly 15 degrees from the normal, and led to a rare snowfall. Srinagar city recorded 3.8°Celsius. In the last 13 years, it is for the first time that the region has received snow this month.

The downpour made the Jhelum waters cross the flood alarm level in south and central Kashmir. At 6 pm on Thursday, the water level of the Jhelum had touched 20 feet at Sangam in south Kashmir, a foot away from the flood declaration level.

In Srinagar, the Jhelum water level at 6 pm had

touched 18 feet—marking the point of 'flood declaration', an official of the Irrigation and Flood Control department said.

Several of the river's tributaries were also flowing above the danger mark. The heavy downpour also led to the continued blockade of the Jammu-Srinagar highway.

Several inter-district and

intra-district roads were either blocked or inundated by the rain water. In Srinagar, several areas which included the city's commercial hub were inundated.

The state government took several preventive measures and announced closure of schools and colleges till Monday. The police launched rescue operations

to evacuate residents from low-lying localities in north Kashmir's Sopore sub-district, and the Health Directorate announced helplines.

In Panzpora, a Rashtriya Rifles battalion launched a rescue operation to evacuate locals stranded in the waterlogged areas of Parray Mohalla.

On receiving the distress calls from the residents, the

Army immediately reached the Panzpora area and rescued at least 10 children stranded in flooded houses.

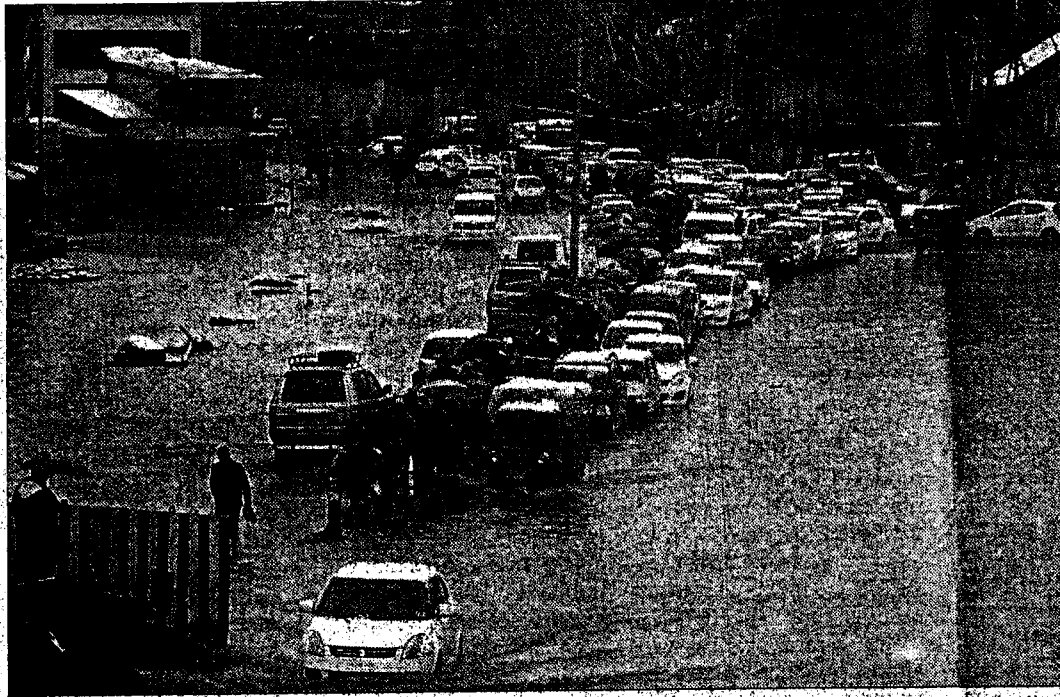
The Kashmir administration has issued a high-danger avalanche warning for the next 24 hours for Kargil district and medium danger avalanche warning for three districts of north Kashmir.

The state meteorological

department has forecast significant decrease in precipitation during the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, the air traffic at the Srinagar airport was affected on Thursday due to bad weather, leading to cancellation of 10 flights and delaying others. Five incoming and five outgoing flights were cancelled.

(Inputs from agencies)



Vehicles make way through a waterlogged street in Srinagar on Thursday. TRIBUNE PHOTO: AMIN WAR

Set up unified control room: CM

Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti at a meeting with officials in Srinagar on Thursday issued directions for immediate constitution of a unified control room to monitor the situation arising out of the continuous rain in the Valley for three days.

2 feared dead as taxi falls into stream

Two persons were feared drowned while five others were rescued after a taxi skidded off the road and fell into an overflowing stream in the Kokernag area of Anantnag district on Thursday, the police said. The passenger vehicle with seven persons on board fell into Barang nullah at Dandipora village.

Vehicles stranded on highway

Hundreds of vehicles were stranded on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway since Wednesday night due to landslides at several places in the Jammu region after heavy rain. Although debris was cleared from the highway in some areas, fresh landslides at Seri, Panthial and Digdol on Thursday kept the traffic off the road.

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‘झारखंड को दुनिया से जोड़ेगी मां गंगा’

साहिबगंज | विशेष संवाददाता

दि-7-4-17

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने गुरुवार को साहिबगंज में फोर लेन गंगा पुल, मल्टी मॉडल टर्मिनल के शिलान्यास और साहिबगंज-गोविंदपुर सड़क का उद्घाटन किया।

इस मौके पर जनसभा को संबोधित करते हुए प्रधानमंत्री ने कहा, कहते हैं मां सब कुछ देती है। गंगा मां अब झारखंड को दुनिया से जोड़ने जा रही है। रेल, रोड, हाईवे आदि के बारे में सुना होगा। अब वाटर-वे की बात हो रही है। साहिबगंज में बनने जा रहा मल्टीमॉडल टर्मिनल और



साहिबगंज में गुरुवार को जनसभा को संबोधित करते प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी।

गंगा नदी पर पुल। झारखंड में आजादी के बाद विकास कि इतनी बड़ी लागत की योजनाओं का एक साथ शुभारंभ शायद

पहली बार हो रहा है। इससे इस प्रदेश में विकास का द्वार खुलेगा।

उन्होंने कहा कि न केवल पूर्वोत्तर, बल्कि बंगाल की खाड़ी के जरिए इन योजनाओं से दुनिया के कई देश झारखंड से जुड़ेंगे। गंगा पुल दो राज्यों को जोड़ने वाला सबसे बड़ा पुल बनने जा रहा है।

प्रधानमंत्री बोले कि अटल जी की सरकार ने इंफ्रास्ट्रक्चर के मामले में देश को दो बड़ी योजनाएं स्वर्णिम चतुर्भुज तथा प्रधानमंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना दी। उसी तर्ज पर देश में वाटर-वे यानी जलमार्ग पर काम कर रही है। साहिबगंज में पुल और टर्मिनल की योजना लटकेगी नहीं।