

# **International Conference on Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Rivers: Impact of the Indian River-linking Project (ICRCTR)**

## **ICRCTR REPORT**

### **01. Organizers**

The “International Conference on Regional Cooperation on Transboundary Rivers: Impact of the Indian River Linking Project”(ICRCTR) was organized jointly by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA), Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB); Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET) & University of Dhaka (DU) in association with Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP), Bangladesh Geographical Society (BGS), Bangladesh Geological Society (BGS), Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), Bangladesh National Geographic Association (BNGA) and Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (ASB).

### **02. Date & Venues**

The Conference was inaugurated at 10 am on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2004 at the Osmani Memorial Hall and closed at 03-00 pm on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2004 at the same venue. Interim programs were held mainly in four seminar rooms & the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), Ramna. The Cultural Event was staged at the neighboring Roads & Highways (R & H) auditorium.

### **03. Chief Guests, Special Guests & Guest Speakers**

Mr. Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Bir Bikram, MP, Honorable Minister for Water Resources, Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest while Mr. A.M.A Muhith, former Minister for Finance & Planning, Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Special Guest for the Inaugural Session. Being presided over by Prof. Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Chairman of the conference Organizing Committee, the session was also addressed by Prof. Abdullah Abu Sayeed (Vice President, BAPA), Prof. Nazrul Islam (Coordinator, BEN), Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad (BEA), & Prof. Eng. Anwarul Azim (President, IEB). Eng. Qamrul Islam Siddique (Chairman, BWP) presented the welcome address & Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin, Member Secretary, conference Organizing Committee delivered the vote of thanks.

Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan MP, Honorable Minister for LGRD & Cooperatives; Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest and Mr. Toriqul Islam MP, Honorable Minister for Environment & Forest, Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh & Begum Motia Chowdhury, Former Minister for Agriculture, Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh were the Special Guests at the Concluding Session. Being chaired by Prof. Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Chairman of the conference Organizing Committee, the session was addressed by Ms. Vina Shikry, Her Excellency the High Commissioner of India, Prof. Nazrul Islam (Coordinator, BEN), Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad (President, BEA), Prof. Nazrul Islam (University of Dhaka), Prof. Feroze Ahmed (BUET) & Eng. A.N.H. Akhter Hussain (HGS, IEB). Prof. Badiul Alam Majumder, Chairman, General session Sub-Committee

and Prof. Md. Khalequzzaman, Joint Convener, Technical Sessions Sub-Committee presented the summaries of the General & Technical Sessions respectively. Mr. Mohidul Hoque Khan presented the vote of thanks.

#### **04. River Rally**

A rally was held from Osmani Memorial Hall to IEB just after the first plenary session at the OMH on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2004 with the participation of a part of the participants.

#### **05. Participation**

This program was participated by registered 291 registered persons of whom 70 were from abroad. Another 34 participants attended the conference from 17 registered organizations. They were the experts & activists on concerned subjects like rivers, water, ecology, environment and related affairs from Bangladesh, different parts of India (West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Bangalore, Moyesore, Mumbai, Delhi, Kerala), Nepal, United States, Pakistan, United Kingdom & Australia. Few Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) also attended from USA, Singapore, & Japan.

#### **06. Foreign experts and dignitaries**

The experts and dignitaries who attended the conference were:

01. Ms. Medha Patkar (India)
02. Mr. Rameswami R. Iyer (India)
03. Prof. George Verghese (India)
04. Mr. Dwarika N. Dhungel (Nepal)
05. Dr. Sudhirendar Sharma (India)
06. Prof. Jayanta Bandopadya (India)
07. Mr. Upendra Gautam (Nepal)
08. Mr. Iswar Raj Onta (Nepal)
09. Mr. Santa Bahadur Pun (Nepal)
10. Mr. Biksham Gujja (India)
11. Mr. Dinesh Mishra (India)
12. S.G. Vombatkere (India)
13. Steve Bricchieri-Colombi (UK)
14. Mr. C.P. Sinha (India)
15. Ms. Jasvin Joyrath (India)

#### **07. Interim Programs**

Interim Programs of the conference included:

- a. Total 12 Technical Sessions allowing about 48 Technical papers for presentations. 70% of the papers were from abroad.
- b. Total 05 Plenary Sessions to hear total 11 dignitaries on specific topics.
- c. One Special Session to hear six Experts including one expert from the Embassy of the Netherlands.
- d. One General session to hear the politicians of the country on the issue.
- e. One Strategy Forum for the invited activist individuals and organizations only, to gather suggestions for future working plan. Total 25 speakers spoke in the forum.

- f. Cultural Event on 18<sup>th</sup> December evening at R & H. It was a Dance Drama entitled SABUJ NARI which was written by Kazi Md. Sheesh, directed by Wafi Rahman Ananna & Produced by Nritya Mancha
- g. One thematic Exhibition having the components like the utility of Natural River flows, good practices and bad practices on rivers, documents & geo-mappings and photographs at the IEB. Total 08 stalls were opened in the exhibition.
- h. A thematic photography competition at the venue.
- i. One Exhibition with the selected arts from the Children's Art Competition held just before the conference.
- j. A launching ceremony of the book "The Dispute over the Ganga" written by 07 experts of India, Nepal & Bangladesh) with Mr. Gautam Chakraborty MP, Honorable State Minister for Water Resources, Govt. of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh as the Chief Guest.

## **08. Pre-Conference Programs**

- a. Total Seminars on the Local River & related environmental problems on the perspective of the IRLP were held at Rajshahi, Chittagong, Jessore, Barisal and Old Dhaka one month prior to the conference.
- b. A "Boat Race" on the Buriganga was held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2004.
- c. A Children's Art Competition was held at IEB on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2004 with the participation of about 500 children of different ages. Winners will be awarded. Good performances will be displayed at the IEB.

## **09. Publications:**

Conference Brochures, Posters, Conference Souvenirs & Conference Volume having most of the papers presented were published before the conference and distributed among the people, participants & guests. A post Conference Proceedings is expected to be published as early as possible.

## **10. Outcome of ICRCTR.**

The conference enabled the experts, specialists, activists, policy makers, administrators and the people as a whole to have an intellectual exercise on the topics and pave the ways of achieving an all round positive consensus on saving the rivers & water as well sharing the common natural resources among Bangladesh, India & other co-riparian states. Regional Cooperation was the prime focal point in view of the detrimental Indian River Linking Project (IRLP). Apart from academic exercises & consolidation of views cum concepts on the crisis, the conference explored the ways and means, inter-expert, inter-organization as well as inter-people understanding & networking for the future movements on the issue. Post Conference communication, networking & joint moves for saving the rivers, water and environment.

## **11. Conference Resolution**

A Conference Resolution prepared with consensus from all the organizers & associate organizers was adopted & read out in the closing session on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2004. The resolution is as below:

## ICRCTR RESOLUTION

“Recognizing that large potential for cooperation in using the water resources in the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna basins exists and unfortunately unilateral action by India in planning projects with transboundary implication, without consulting the other co-riparian of international rivers is giving rise to mistrust and apprehension that these are likely to have serious implications in the lives of the 630 million people who are dependent on the waters of these rivers,

The conference expressed deep concern that in spite of the commitment made earlier by the Indian Task Force on Interlinking rivers that information would be available to the public on various aspects of the project, complete secrecy is being maintained and there has been no public disclosure on the details of the components. From the preliminary information available and reflected in the papers from experts from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, USA, and other countries it appears that links under the Himalayan River component would have serious impacts on the overall environment and lives of Bangladesh.

The following recommendations were adopted:

1. Water-centered and water-based cooperation is the way forward for realizing the large potential benefits from the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) transboundary river systems;
2. All the GBM regional governments would recognize the potentiality of large benefits to be derived from the GBM river systems and would announce their commitment to collaborate on basin-wide management of the transboundary rivers for mutual benefits, in accordance with the principles of equity and no harm to any party;
3. Access to data and information concerning any intervention in any transboundary river in any country to all concerned from all sources, particularly from government sources to all the regional countries, should be ensured;
4. In so far as Indian River Linking Project is concerned, complete transparency within and across countries should be ensured so as to dispel mistrust and concerns from arising;
5. Civil societies of the GBM countries should continue to work to clarify issues and assist the process of decision making by the regional governments;
6. Transboundary rivers should be managed from the “Mountain Top to the Sea”,
7. Water resources of all transboundary rivers should be recognized as common national resources of all co-riparian countries and hence regional co-operation is necessary for proper management of all transboundary rivers;
8. That the countries carry out a thorough review of the experience of the current approach inspired river intervening water projects that they have already implemented;
9. That the countries of the South Asia are urged to emphasize the Ecological Approach to river management.”

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