

BAPA-BEN Resolution on Tipaimukh Dam

Observations and Analysis

In view of the fact that

1. Tipaimukh Dam is *not an isolated* project; it is part of a comprehensive Indian plan of using rivers that flow from India into Bangladesh, and hence needs to be viewed in the broader context of sharing of international rivers by these two countries;
2. In general India has been using its upper riparian position and its economic and financial strength to take *unilateral steps* with regard to the flow of these international rivers;
3. Most of these unilateral steps have been of *diversionary character*, diverting the water flow to destinations inside India and thus reducing the flow of water into the rivers of Bangladesh. Glaring example of such diversionary interventions are the *Farakka* Barrage on the Ganges and the *Gozaldoba* Barrage on the *Teesta*. The *Farakka* diversion has drastically reduced the flow of *Padma*, drying up south-western Bangladesh. The *Gozaldoba* barrage on the other hand has drastically reduced the flow of *Teesta* in Bangladesh; India has undertaken numerous other diversionary and flow-controlling structures on most of the 54 common rivers flowing from India into Bangladesh.
4. These diversionary projects of India go *against the international norms* regarding sharing of international rivers. In particular, they *violate Bangladesh's right to prior and customary use* of river water. The entire economy and life in Bangladesh have evolved on the basis of rivers. Any major change in the volume and direction of flow of these rivers seriously disrupt the economy and livelihood in Bangladesh; Furthermore, river intervention structures affect the flow of not only water but also of sediment, which are vital for the long-run sustainability of the deltaic Bangladesh, in particular in face of the threat of submergence by rising sea level caused by global warming;
5. There is a *pent up emotion among Bangladesh people* against India's unilateral river intervention projects. They perceive *Farakka* as unjust. Similarly, they perceive *Gozaldoba* and other barrages as unfair to Bangladesh and as proof of India's hubris. These unilateral river intervention projects are a thorn in Bangladesh-India bilateral relationship, which should be not only good neighborly and mutually beneficial, but also warm and friendly given India's crucial help in Bangladesh's Liberation War;
6. After many years of hiatus, Bangladesh and India signed the *Ganges Water Treaty* in 1996 specifying the sharing of the *Ganges* water at *Farakka*. Though Article IX of this Treaty enjoins India not to undertake unilateral projects intervening rivers shared with Bangladesh, in practice India has not shown much respect to this provision of the Treaty. Instead, it has proceeded with many intervention projects, on a more or less unilateral basis.
7. The *Tipaimukh project* is one such example of unilateral intervention aimed at construction of a dam on the *Barak* river that flows into Bangladesh from India. India went all the way to

floating international tender inviting bids for construction of the project without even sharing the DPR (Detailed Project Report) with Bangladesh. Only in May 2009, when the news of construction of *Tipaimukh* dam has generated considerable civic protest in Bangladesh, the Government of India (GoI) has apparently sent to the Bangladesh foreign ministry some information about the *Tipaimukh* project;

8. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is yet to make public the information on Tipai that it has received from India;

9. The GoB has proved to be ineffective in dealing with India with regard to the *Tipaimukh* project, as is the case with sharing of rivers in general. The GoB did not take up the *Tipaimukh* issue with India in a serious and timely manner. In particular, the political parties who are in opposition now did not play their expected role when they were in power during 2001-2006, when India moved *Tipaimukh* project from conception to implementation stage;

10. The current GoB has decided to send a delegation of Bangladesh Parliament on a fact-finding mission to *Tipaimukh* project site, and the Prime Minister has stated that GoB would express its opinion on the *Tipaimukh* project after studying the report of that delegation.

11. Unfortunately various Bangladesh ministers are expressing opinions that contradict Bangladesh's official position as expressed by the Prime Minister, and are thus creating confusion;

12. There is the possibility that the *Tipaimukh* dam with its reservoir can be helpful in stabilizing the *Barak* flow across seasons, as has been pointed out by some water experts and reflected in some of the ministers' statements. However there are many reasons why the suggested across-season flow-stabilization may not hold true and may not be beneficial for Bangladesh.

First, Bangladesh does not yet have the necessary facts to assess the changes in *Barak* flow that the *Tipaimukh* dam will bring about;

Second, dams can also be a source of destabilization of river flow, not only in the extreme situation of dam break, but in the often recurring situation when the excess water needs to be released in order to protect the dam from overflow. Such unplanned releases lead to unseasonal floods or floods of unusual depth and extent. For example, the unusual 2008 floods in Bihar were caused by unexpected release of water by the dams that India has constructed on the *Ganges* tributaries near the border with Nepal;

Third, for Bangladesh to benefit from stabilization of the *Barak* flow, it has to have a say or some control over the release of water at the *Tipaimukh* dam. This would suggest that *Tipaimukh* dam should be put under joint control of India and Bangladesh. As of now, *Tipaimukh* dam will be entirely under the Indian control, and the water release decisions will be made by India alone, putting Bangladesh at the mercy of the Indians operating the *Tipaimukh* dam. Such a helpless situation is not in Bangladesh's interests;

Fourth, river flow contains not only water, but also sediments, which are very important for the deltaic Bangladesh. One important impact of the *Tipaimukh* dam will be reduced sediment volume of the *Barak* flow reaching Bangladesh, with detrimental effects on Bangladesh;

Fifth, Bangladesh has to assess the costs and benefits for her economy of the seasonal changes in the *Barak* flow that the *Tipaimukh* dam will bring about. For example, current *Boro* is the main crop for many in the *Surma-Kushiara* basin, cultivated in the *haors* and other low lying areas that become dry due to low winter flows of the rivers. If now the winter flows increase due to the *Tipaimukh* dam, cultivation of *Boro* may become impossible in many areas, disrupting the economy and livelihood. Without detailed studies to determine whether these losses will be offset by gains in other respects, it is difficult to say whether the net benefit of the across-season stabilization of the *Barak* flow will be positive for Bangladesh;

Sixth, apart from economy there is the issue of ecology to consider. The flora and fauna of the *Surma-Kushiara-Meghna* basin have developed on the basis of a certain river flow seasonal pattern, which is going to be affected markedly by the *Tipaimukh* dam. Detailed studies are necessary to gauge the environmental and ecological impact of the *Tipaimukh* dam;

13. The *Tipaimukh* dam project cannot be separated from the other project in the offing, in particular the *Fulertal* barrage project, meant to divert *Barak* water for irrigation to the Kachar district of Assam. As of now, with a price tag of \$1.8 billion, the *Tipaimukh* project uneconomical, because per unit cost of electricity, even assuming the advertised production of 1500 MW, will be too high. The cost irrationality of the *Tipaimukh* dam can be justified only if it is viewed jointly with water diversionary projects at *Fulertal* or some other point on *Barak* allowing benefits from irrigation to be counted against the *Tipaimukh* costs. However, combined with such diversionary projects, the *Tipaimukh* dam is completely unacceptable to Bangladesh. In such combination, the *Tipaimukh-Fulertal* duo will be a repetition of *Farakka* for Bangladesh, now only on the eastern side her.

14. The worldwide experience shows that large scale interventions in the volume and direction of river flows do not prove to be that beneficial in the long run. The hydro power generated often proves to be meager and costly. The irrigation carried out on the basis of diverted water often proves wasteful and leads to salinity and deterioration of the soil quality. Meanwhile, the reservoir submerges huge amount of land, destroying the ecology and displacing thousands of (often most vulnerable, indigenous) people, destroying their culture, causing permanent problems of alienation and insurgency. The reservoir also becomes a source of methane, undercutting the emission reducing potentiality of hydro-power generated. The reservoir and the upstream flow often becomes a cesspool of pollution. The diversionary projects end up harming not only the basin from which water is withdrawn but also the basin or area to which water is directed and transported (at a great cost). The experiences of the *Amu Darya* and *Syr Darya* rivers are prominent examples of such negative consequences. Dams also destroy the natural

rhythm of the river flow, obstruct the free movement fish stock, and obstruct the sediment flow. Finally while many of the damages prove to be permanent, the dams themselves expire their lifetime, becoming obsolete due to sedimentation and filling up of the reservoir, etc. In view of the negative consequences BEN is generally skeptical about dams, barrages and other large-scale river intervention projects. BEN is therefore skeptical that the *Tipaimukh* dam will be beneficial in the long run in net terms even for India.

15. It is therefore not surprising that many in India are opposed to the *Tipaimukh* dam. Protests from local, indigenous people and the state governments of Manipur and Mizoram did hold up the project for a long time. It is true that by providing various monetary benefits and by offering free electricity, etc., the North East Electricity Production Company (NEEPCO), the current *Tipaimukh* implementing agency, has been able to pacify the state governments. However, many in India, particularly the indigenous people of the area, continue to oppose *Tipaimukh* dam project precisely because of the many reasons cited above;

16. Worldwide there is now disenchantment with the Commercial Approach to river that suggested that any flow of river water to the sea is a waste, so that all of it should be used up. The approach led to degradation of rivers and increased conflict and animosity among countries of the river basin. In view of the experience there is now a move towards the Ecological Approach that recommends preservation of the natural volume and direction of river flow and helps to foster friendly neighborly relationship among the countries of the river basin. Instead of being a source of discord, as is the case under the Commercial Approach, rivers under the Ecological Approach become a bond of friendship and good neighborliness.

17. World wide there is also move away from the unilateral approach toward multilateral, basin wide approach that includes all countries of a river basin in decision making regarding the use of the river.

Recommendations and Demands

In view of the above, BAPA and BEN

1. Demand that India halts proceeding with the *Tipaimukh* project any further and engages in serious, sincere discussion with Bangladesh about the fate of this and all other projects of intervention in the shared international rivers;
2. Demand that India agrees to abandon its current unilateral approach and adopts a multilateral, basin-wide integrated water resources management approach to rivers of the region;
3. Demand that India agrees to adopt the multilateral approach with regard to the *Tipaimukh* dam project;
4. Demand that India should under no circumstances undertake water diversionary project (such as at *Fulertal* or at other points) on the *Barak* river;

5. Demand that India should under no circumstance undertake water diversionary projects on rivers shared by Bangladesh either directly or through tributaries and distributaries;
6. Urge Bangladesh, India, and all countries of the sub-continent to abandon the current *Commercial Approach* to rivers and to adopt the *Ecological Approach*;
7. Demand that GoB immediately makes public the information that it has received on the *Tipaimukh* dam project from India so all interested parties and scholars can conduct necessary analysis on the basis of the information;
8. Urge that GoB sponsors independent research by Bangladeshi experts on the possible impact of the *Tipaimukh* dam on Bangladesh economy and ecology;
9. Urge all political parties of Bangladesh to adopt a non-partisan approach to the *Tipaimukh* issue (and issues of water sharing with India in general) and cooperate to develop a united national position with regard to *Tipaimukh* and to dealing with India on this issue;
10. Urge all parties to lend cooperation to the government, to the extent that it sincerely tries to find a solution with India regarding *Tipaimukh*, defending Bangladesh's national interests and legitimate rights;
12. Urge all citizens of Bangladesh to build a strong civic movement to save the rivers of the country;
13. Urge formation of a region-wide (including India, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, and Bhutan) civic movement for protection of rivers and for promotion of the Ecological Approach to rivers in place of the Commercial Approach to rivers.
14. Urge all concerned in Bangladesh, including political parties, civil society organizations, NGOs, think tanks, media, mass organizations, local peoples' organizations, non-resident Bangladeshis, etc. to come together, leaving aside narrow partisan and sectarian interests, and develop and rally behind a united national position regarding *Tipaimukh* dam and other river sharing issues. Bangladesh needs national unity in order to defend its rivers.

[The Resolution was adopted jointly by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) and Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN). For any clarification or further information on this document, please contact: Dr. Nazrul Islam, Coordinator of BEN, s_n_islam@yahoo.com or Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin, General Secretary of BAPA, memory14@agni.com]