Chapter 5

West Bengal as a Factor in India-Bangladesh Relations
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A key principle of India’s foreign policy has been to maintain peaceful and cooperative relationship with all its neighbouring countries in South Asia. In this context, the relations with Bangladesh are of critical importance to India’s South Asian relations and its relations with the South East Asian neighbours. Bangladesh is an important neighbour of strategic and political importance to India and India’s interest in Bangladesh not only confines to the security concerns in the eastern border but also several other strategic advantages. Therefore maintaining a good relationship with Bangladesh is inevitable for India. Geographically good relations with Bangladesh are inevitable for India since it shares a land border of 4094 km on three sides of the country, practically encircling it. The geographical proximity between the two countries presents them with both opportunities and challenges, economically and politically.

India and Bangladesh share a common economic, political and civilizational heritage which is reflected in the linguistic and cultural commonalities between the countries. Bengali, the national language of Bangladesh, is spoken in the Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura. India and Bangladesh share the common history of freedom struggle against the British rule. India played a crucial role in the independence and creation of Bangladesh and supported its endeavours to get recognition from the international community. Being the first country to recognize Bangladesh immediately after its independence, India established diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in December 1971 itself. The intricate and expanding relations between the two countries have its roots in the common history and heritage. But the relationship between both the countries is neither so cordial nor free from squabbles and discords. The relation between both the countries have seen periods of stagnation due to a variety of reasons like border problems and an attitude of negligence towards important issues concerning both the countries.
When it comes to bilateral relations between the two states, India has concerns on security-related issues, such as arms trafficking, movement of people, transit, and the tripartite gas pipeline, whereas important issues for Bangladesh are sharing of the waters of the joint rivers and the river linking project, trade, and a variety of border related concerns, including smuggling. It is in the interest of both the countries to have cordial and friendly bilateral relations. For a peaceful coexistence, they have to work towards ending the deep-rooted cynicism and distrust that characterize the relations between both these countries. The cultural and civilizational linkages between both India and Bangladesh are based on West Bengal as a linking factor and the state features in almost all the aspects of India-Bangladesh Relations.

**Cultural and civilizational linkages**

India’s role in the Bangladesh’s War of Liberation was a determining factor that was to influence the course of the relation between the two countries in the coming years. Following the partition of India in 1947, the states of India and Pakistan were created and East Pakistan was a part of Pakistan with Dacca as its capital. During the war of liberation, more than ten million people crossed the India-Bangladesh border to seek refuge in the neighbouring states of India. The war of Liberation was fought, based on Bangladeshi peoples’ aspirations for democracy, identity and for a more progressive society. The new state of Bangladesh was the product of a ‘Bengali nationalism’ that arose to challenge West Pakistan’s economic exploitation of its eastern wing, its attempt to impose religious hegemony and its repression of Bengali political voice.

The historical association between the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh has resulted in the rich Bengali heritage which is evident in their culture, traditions and way of life. Such was the power of Bengali identity and nationalism that it led to the separation of the Bangladesh from Pakistan thus shattering the “two nation theory”\(^1\). The new state of Bangladesh was a product of ‘Bengali nationalism’ thus demonstrating that religion alone was not sufficient to bind people with a cohesive national identity. East Pakistanis viewed themselves as primarily Bengali rather than Pakistani and were more concerned about their language and culture than religion.

Bengal as a region has developed a unique identity of its own over the years, resulting from the interaction of the region with different cultures. Bengal’s rich and unique
heritage is quite evident in its language, cuisine, cinema and architecture. Bengal also boasts of several eminent personalities who have made their marks in different areas of life including arts, science and literature. Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. Amartya Sen and Dr. Mohammad Yunus are a few among them. Many of the national leaders and eminent personalities famous in India have roots in undivided Bengal. Many of the actors who enriched Indian cinema through their works in Bengali, belonged to erstwhile East Bengal. Modern Bangla literature began in the nineteenth century which was enriched by the works of popular poets known as Panchokobi. Rabindranath Tagore lived in present day Bangladesh for close to twenty years of his life and some of his best compositions were born there. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the National Poet of Bangladesh, was born in the Churulia village of Burdwan in India and spent a large part of his life time in India. The National Poet of Bangladesh was conferred one of India’s highest civilian award, Padma Bhushan, in 1960. Both Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam are shining examples of the shared rich common literary heritage of India and Bangladesh. The cultural icons like Rabindra Nath Tagore and Satyajith Ray are admired in both the countries. The 150th birth anniversary of Tagore marked a joint celebration by India and Bangladesh as a tribute to the great poet who represents the common heritage and philosophy of both the countries. Bangladesh’s struggle for self determination was to a large extent influenced by the strong sense of linguistic nationalism that grew around the works of Tagore. This motivated the people to launch a strong cultural and political movement which culminated in the formation of Bangladesh.

The similarities in the language and dress amongst the people of undivided Bengal are such that it is difficult to distinguish people of the two countries based on their customs and language. In addition to this, a wide diversity of religious festivals is celebrated by the people of both Bangladesh and India. There are also some common festivities like Pahela Baishakh (Bangla New Year), and Rabindra and Nazrul Jayanti that are celebrated by Indians and Bangladeshis. Though both the countries share a lot in common culturally, there have been certain issues affecting the smooth functioning of their bilateral relations. An array of bilateral issues characterizes the relations between India and Bangladesh and among this multitude of issues; the chapter mainly focuses on the few issues that have a direct impact on West Bengal.
India- Bangladesh Border issues and implications for West Bengal

The border between India and Bangladesh is very unique as it cuts across cultivated fields and barren lands, hills and forests, marshy patches, rivers, canals and ponds. The demarcation of boundary line between India and present day Bangladesh was made in 1947 when India and Pakistan came into being as independent entities and when Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan. The border between India and Pakistan was drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliff based on the Two Nation Theory within just weeks of partition. The border was drawn based only on religious lines that Hindu majority people must be placed on the side of India and Muslim majority people on the side of Pakistan. This unscientific and random demarcation of border has given rise to a host of issues which act as a source of tension between India and Bangladesh.

The border has an extremely porous terrain since it constitutes a wide variety of landforms including hilly tracts, plains, and jungles and low-lying land areas. The tough terrain makes the construction of roads and fences virtually impossible making border patrolling difficult. Insurgent groups make use of this opportunity to smuggle arms and drugs across the border. The rivers on the border constantly shift their courses and form charlands, which abets illegal migration from Bangladesh.

The Indian side of the Indo-Bangladesh border passes through West Bengal (2216.7 Km), Meghalaya (443 Km), Assam (263 Km), Tripura (856 Km) and Mizoram (318 Km). The entire stretch is devoid of natural obstacles and consists of plain, riverine and hilly terrain. The area is heavily populated, and the cultivation is carried out extensively right up to the last inch of the border.

In order to prevent illegal migration and illegal activities including anti-national activities from across the border, the Government of India had sanctioned the construction of border fencing with floodlights. According to the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs, a total of 3326.14 km of the border was sanctioned for fencing, out of which about 2710.02 km of fencing has been provisionally completed (see Table 5:1) up to 31.12.2015. Adverse climatic conditions prevailing in the region damages the fences frequently and this requires reconstruction from time to time. The fence is intended to curb infiltration, movement of militants and enhance management on the India-Bangladesh border.
The border fencing by India, to prevent smuggling of humans, cattle, drugs and arms, has been a prickly issue in bilateral relations. The fence was seen as an outrage among the Bangladeshi public, and the government of Bangladesh has made repeated protests to the Indian government over the matter. Though Assam shares only 263 km of the 4096-km international boundary between India and Bangladesh, the construction of the barbed wire fence along it has remained incomplete due to various factors. An important reason is that over 44 km of the boundary passes through the Brahmaputra River which changes course every year post floods, making it unfeasible to erect a permanent boundary.

The India Bangladesh border is guarded by the Border Security Force (BSF) of India and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) respectively. The density of population on the Indo-Bangladesh border varies from state to state and the habitation along the border makes patrolling a difficult task. In West Bengal, the density of population is 766, in Assam and Meghalaya it is 181 and in Tripura and Mizoram it is 268.6. The people on both sides of the heavily populated border areas lives in close proximity and the border pillars remain the only identification of the international boundary.

The border area which is thickly populated provides easy access to the infiltrators and smugglers to cross over to India. West Bengal shares a border stretching 2216 km with Bangladesh making it the most vulnerable border area for illegal crossover to Bangladesh especially the areas in southern West Bengal. Though smuggling of a variety of commodities such as sugar, salt, diesel and narcotics are carried out through the border

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**Table 5:1 State-wise detail of fencing along India-Bangladesh Border**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of State</th>
<th>PHASE I</th>
<th>PHASE II</th>
<th>TOTAL (PH.I + PH.II)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sanctioned</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Sanctioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
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<td>W. Bengal</td>
<td>507.00</td>
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<td>913.33</td>
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<td>Assam</td>
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<td>149.29</td>
<td>77.57</td>
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<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>198.06</td>
<td>198.06</td>
<td>263.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>865.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>348.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>857.37</strong></td>
<td><strong>854.35</strong></td>
<td><strong>2468.77</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs – Annual Report 2015-2016
areas, cattle smuggling is the most lucrative.\textsuperscript{11} People risk their lives to smuggle cattle across the border and this illegal business is worth Rs. 15,000 crores annually.\textsuperscript{12} Even though cattle smuggling takes place through Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya frontiers, West Bengal is the major hub of activities with sixty eight smuggling corridors in the state border itself.\textsuperscript{13} Cattle from different parts of India including Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Bihar are sent to West Bengal to be smuggled into Bangladesh. The smuggling activities are mainly centred on the South Bengal districts of North 24-Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda and about 60,000 cows are smuggled into Bangladesh every day.\textsuperscript{14} Cattle smuggling is a major issue in the bordering districts of West Bengal owing to the plight of economy there. Lack of industries and employment in the border areas force the people to indulge in illegal activities and cattle smuggling is a driving factor for the local economy. Cattle smuggling and other related illegal activities along the border have resulted in the collision between the local people and the Border Security Forces. Of the 4096 km border that India share with Bangladesh, 119.1 km is riverine and this provides an opportunity for the smugglers to take the cows to Bangladesh by crossing the water channel owing to the large portion of unfenced riverine areas. Due to the increased cattle smuggling there is depletion in local cattle that would affect the farming economy in the border districts.

The killing of Bangladeshi nationals by Border Security Force (BSF) has been a major irritant in the relationship between India and Bangladesh. A strong public opinion has been created in Bangladesh against the killing of civilians by the Indian security forces. Bangladesh Human Rights Watch organization Odhikar, reports that BSF has killed 907 Bangladeshis from 1 January, 2001 to 31, March 2012.\textsuperscript{15} India has adopted a policy of restraint at the border and has directed the BSF to avoid firing due to continued requests from the Bangladesh government. BSF Instead of firing, has adopted the policy of detaining intruders and handing them over to the local police for further action. Though there have been some positive steps taken by the BSF like the use of non-lethal weapons while apprehending smugglers, the issue of border killing still remains a sensitive issue.
The reports of cattle smuggling being used as a source of funding terrorism has raised serious concerns for the security establishments in West Bengal. It could be used as a disguised source of terror funding unlike the smuggling of the fake Indian currency notes, narcotics and arms peddling which are under the constant surveillance of intelligence agencies. The violence to man and animals that surrounds the cattle trade can be reduced if the beef export to Bangladesh is legalized. A sensitive issue like this has to be dealt with utmost concern by the union and state governments taking into consideration the country’s security and economic interests.

The effectiveness of border fencing in stopping cattle smuggling and border killings is doubtful since the smugglers simply cut through the fence to cross the border. But strong patrolling in the border areas could control the extent of smuggling if not stop it completely. Recently the issue has gained much attention and the union government and the government of West Bengal have taken several stern steps to curb the menace of cattle smuggling. In January 2016, nearly 600 BSF personnel were deployed to patrol the Brahmaputra in boats to check smuggling and seizure of smuggled cattle increased considerably.

The international border in the state of West Bengal comprises about half of the total India-Bangladesh border which makes the state a crucial factor in India-Bangladesh border related issues. India’s primary concerns on the Bangladesh border involves preventing the smuggling of narcotics, fake currency, cattle, human trafficking; containing the unauthorized influx of Bangladeshi migrants and to inhibit the intrusion of militants into Indian territory. Any substantial initiative taken by the union government to resolve the India-Bangladesh border issues requires the complete cooperation and backing of the West Bengal government. It is in India’s interest to review the approach to border related issues and build a political consensus with parties involved, aligning national policy with the ground realities in the border states.

**West Bengal and illegal migration from Bangladesh**

Illegal migration from Bangladesh is one of the major concerns of the government of India, since it causes ethno political tensions in the country. Illegal Immigrants from Bangladesh is a challenge being faced by India since 1971 and is one of the crucial aspects
of border management. Besides posing demographic, economic and cultural challenges to India the issue of illegal migration has become a matter of grave concern for the national security of the country due to the increased activities of non state actors across the borders.

There was movement of people across the borders due to the cultural and geographical proximity of West Bengal and Bangladesh, historically. It was only after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 that the people crossing the borders were considered as Bangladeshi migrants. After the “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace” was signed between the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman, India took the responsibility of all the migrants who entered India on or before March 24, 1971. But migration and illegal activities still continue along India’s Eastern borders which are a constant challenge to the policy makers. Hindu migrants crossing the border was common before the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, but later Muslim migrants in search of livelihood and employment dominated the scene.19

Though the people in West Bengal were more tolerant towards the migrants due to the cultural and linguistic similarities, certain states like Assam witnessed violent ethnic backlashes against the migrant population. A report of the Group of Ministers states that there are around fifteen million Bangladeshi migrants living in different parts of India.20

India is apprehensive of the influx of illegal immigrants, Islamist terrorists and Muslim extremists from Bangladesh who could destabilize the states in the North East and West Bengal. The issue of illegal migration is highly sensitive in Bangladesh and all governments have regularly denied the existence of the phenomenon. Although the issue has been raised in the meetings between border officials, Bangladesh finds it difficult to accept the fact that its citizens are illegally crossing over into India in search of livelihood. The steady flow of Bangladeshis into India in search of livelihood had resulted in demographic changes in the bordering states of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. The economic climate in the northeastern parts of the country which was already bad became worse due to the influx of Bangladeshi migrants and this created a feeling of ‘nativism’ among the people.21 The perceived economic deprivation and diversion of resources are a constant source of anti migrant conflicts in these states.
Thousands of Bangladeshis cross the border illegally due to high population growth, adverse environmental conditions like floods and poor economic conditions prevailing in the country. Even though economic reasons were the main contributing factors for the migration, ethnic, linguistic and religious commonality between people living on both sides of the border has also encouraged migration. Even though India has raised its concern over the issue, Bangladesh government seems to be in a denial mode. Bangladesh’s attitude could be understood from the fact that it wants to ease the pressure of its own bursting population.22

The ethnic commonalities and cultural heritage that unite Bangladeshis with West Bengal act as a pulling factor for migration. The migrants consist of both the Muslim migrants and Hindu refugees perpetuated by different sets of reasons for migration. The demographic impact of illegal migration is evident in many bordering states especially West Bengal. According to the 2001 census, the population of ten districts of West Bengal including Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Darjeeling, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, Dakshin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, South 24 Parganas, Nadia and Birbhum has grown faster than the population growth of the entire state between 1991 and 2001. All these districts except Birbhum and South 24 Parganas, share the border with Bangladesh. The magnitude of cross border migration and the resulting demographic upheaval is reflected in the increased population in the border districts of West Bengal.23 The large scale migration has several security implications including the growth of radicalism, regionalism and encroachment of foreign powers on the country’s territorial sovereignty. There are concerns being raised in West Bengal and Assam about the increasing Muslim migrant population in the border districts and they suspect that these regions might demand for a possible merger with Bangladesh in the future.24

There were violent agitations and communal riots in Assam for protecting their cultural and linguistic identity from the invasion of an alien culture. These incidents had a demonstrative effect since there were attack against migrants in the neighboring states of Tripura and Nagaland accusing them of disturbing their social and economic security and causing distress in the demographic balance. The unchecked migration from Bangladesh resulted in the marginalization of the tribal population in Tripura. Certain Naga tribes are less populous than the population of illegal migrants.25 A new community called Sumias26
was formed in Nagaland as a result of migration and these developments have created a sense of alarm among the indigenous people who fear that they are undergoing a silent demographic invasion. Similarly, the influx of Chakma refugees and the Hajongs from the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) of Bangladesh has been a source of ethnic tensions in the states of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The issue of granting citizenship to Chakmas is a source of ongoing controversy in Arunachal Pradesh and has resulted in the polarisation of the society along ethnic lines.

The religion based demographic changes have brought the focus on the growth of Islamic radicalism particularly regarding the growth of madrasas in the border districts of West Bengal and Assam. The madrasas could be misused as safe havens for illegal activities by radical elements carrying out their propaganda. The separatist elements demand for a greater Bangladesh consisting of the North Eastern parts of India and West Bengal might seem as a distorted idea in the current circumstances. Given the fast changing demographic profile of the North East and West Bengal, it is a serious issue that needs to be addressed both from the security point of view and for the sustenance of these Indian states.

The political parties in these states and at the national level use the issue of migration for gaining political leverage by manipulating the voters to their advantage which has worsened the situation. The inhabitants in these border states are scared of being outnumbered and uprooted by the illegal migrants and losing their culture and identity to them. It is a common occurrence that the migration becomes politicized and remains unresolved. The agitation and secessionist movements resulting from the migration issues in the North East and West Bengal are detrimental to national security and affect the union-state relations.

Illegal migration is a matter of grave concern for the Indian states bordering Bangladesh and especially West Bengal. Though most people cross the border to India in search of livelihood and better living conditions, certain unscrupulous elements take advantage of this vulnerable situation. Illegal activities including smuggling, drug trafficking and trafficking of women which are a serious threat to the national security, are done under the disguise of migration. India-Bangladesh border is the longest international border India shares with any country. The demographic profile and close ethnic and kinship affinities
shared by people on both sides of the border make it very difficult to identify a citizen from a migrant. Due to the historic linkages, the political boundary that divides the two countries is seen as irrelevant by the borderland people and they consider crossing the border their birthright.

Illegal migration has started putting additional demographic pressure on West Bengal which is already a state with high density of population. The illegal migrants are settlers in the region and they compete for space, land, water, services and jobs with the natives. Hence, their presence is perceived as a potential threat, capable of altering the demographic and political profile of the region. Demand for gainful employment among low-skilled Indians is shrinking due to continued influx of low-skilled workers who offer cheap labour, from across the border. Hence, cross-border migration contributes to unemployment among the natives. Increased crimes and incidents related to human trafficking have also increased as a result of the increased migration. The possibility of Muslim fundamentalists from Bangladesh entering West Bengal along with the illegal migrants and setting up their bases in the border districts has caused great concerns for the security establishments in the state. Based on the intelligence reports, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has even asked West Bengal to carry out security operations in the border districts. The illegal migrants also put a burden on the tax based services thus affecting the welfare initiatives of the state.

The issue of illegal migration should be addressed immediately by the state and national governments before it becomes unmanageable. Tight border security and building fences along the borders seem as suboptimal measures since migrants use alternate methods to bypass it. A majority of the migrants cross the border to escape poverty and natural disasters and to find a better livelihood across the border. Unless the governments from both sides of the border find ways to address the fundamental factors that trigger migration, the issue of illegal migration will continue to happen.

Efforts should be taken by the Government of India to bring the Bangladeshi authorities on board to tackle illegal migration and considering their position of constant denial it might require some serious diplomatic efforts. Any initiative of the union government to resolve the issue requires meaningful participation from the Government of West Bengal. Thus West Bengal and the states in the North East India play an important role in the
government of India’s policy towards Bangladesh. It is high time that the union government realized the gravity and scopes of security threats involved in the issue of illegal migration and formulate a realistic policy to curb the issue of illegal migration involving the states who are affected by the perils of illegal migration.

**Illegal and informal trade**

The geographical proximity of India to Bangladesh has made it one of its biggest trading partners. The facts that Bangladesh has a large bilateral trade deficit with India and the menace of large volumes of informal imports from India across the land border which avoid Bangladeshi import duties are causes for serious concerns in Dhaka. The bilateral trade deficit the country has with India has been increasing rapidly on average at about 9.5% annually. For Bangladesh, India has now become the largest single source of its imports. The huge trade gap, along with the fact that India has a lot of non trade barriers for Bangladeshi exports spurs political discontentment in Bangladesh. Even though exports from Bangladesh are growing at a healthy pace, there is no sign of reducing this trade gap.32

Since the initial years of the birth of Bangladesh, informal trade has been carried out through porous land border between India and Bangladesh. This adds to the trade deficit between the two countries. Because of the wide participation of local people in the India-Bangladesh border areas who operate in connection with the anti-smuggling enforcement agencies, the sizeable, informal and unrecorded trade, done across the border, is more semi-legal in nature, and is often described as ‘informal’ rather than illegal. “Bootleg” smuggling is another term used to denote this kind of informal trade that involves large numbers of local people individually transporting small quantities as head loads or through bicycle rickshaws and other means.33

While “bootleg” smuggling is quasi-legal in nature, a different kind of informal trade, termed ‘technical’ smuggling, involves explicit illegal practices such as under invoicing, misclassification and bribery of Customs and other officials. ‘Bootleg’ and ‘technical’ smuggling at the land borders add about 70% to total land border imports between the both of them.34 During the 1990’s about three quarters of imports were by land and sea which has recently shown a decline. Trade deficit is intertwined with other issues like
trans-shipment, transit and export of natural gas, one of the natural resources possessed by Bangladesh.

**Transit Issues**

Having played a very vital role in the liberation of Bangladesh, India had hoped that Dhaka would allow not only transit routes through rivers and roads, but also allow the use of Chittagong Port to land-locked North East. However, Bangladesh was not on the same page on this issue. Dhaka felt that its infrastructure was not adequate to handle the additional traffic. Sensing the unfavourable attitude of Bangladesh, India has decided to develop the port of Swette in Myanmar for the development of trade in the North East.

After the independence of Bangladesh, it allowed transit in air and sea routes to India while the major issue of transit through road remained unattended. India has been urging Bangladesh to provide rail and road transit to connect with its North Eastern states. Technically speaking, the issue of transit was resolved in 1972 when both sides agreed on a mutually beneficial arrangement for the use of their waterways, railways and roadways for commerce between two countries and for passage of goods to places in one country through the territory of the other. Bangladesh and India had no ground transport link for forty three years starting with the partition of India in 1947. The Kolkata–Dhaka Bus (1999) and the Dhaka–Agartala Bus (2001) are the primary road links between the two countries. Inland water transit has been functional, but the rail and road transit is still waiting to be fully operational.

Bangladesh's initial reluctance to granting India rail and road transit was on the grounds that transit facility once given was difficult to take back, and such a facility may encourage terrorism and insurgency. Other concerns included damage to the roads and bridges in Bangladesh by the increased traffic flow from the Indian side. During the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in 2011, the two sides agreed to resolve the issue but there has been no major progress. The reason for the delay was that Bangladesh's infrastructure was not yet prepared to take the load of the increased traffic that will follow with the granting of transit to India.

Addressing Bangladesh's concern, India provided a credit line of $1 billion to Bangladesh for development of infrastructure projects. But the credit line could not be used to its potential because of the strict conditions India imposed, to the effect
that eighty five per cent of the raw materials for the road projects has to be procured from India, on the ground that it produces all the materials necessary. Bangladesh has countered by claiming it too has the necessary raw materials. India reduced the quantum to seventy five percent, but Bangladesh still finds it too high. India may have to reduce the quantum still more. Bangladesh, on its part, should also work to implement the projects on a priority basis and take advantage of the economic benefits from transit.

The goods carried from the North East of India reaches the mainland after traversing Assam and North Bengal, taking a route much longer than what could have been the shortest through Bangladesh. In spite of India’s frequent attempts to pursue the Bangladesh government to open transit for its economic activities, Bangladesh has refused it on the grounds of a possible threat to national security. Anything produced in the Northeast region of India faces the difficulty of marketing to the rest of the country, the main reason being the distance to the port of Kolkata. Potential investors are hesitant to invest in the North East corner of India owing to several hassles, including the rise in transportation cost thus hampering the development of the North Eastern market. To deal with the logistical problems of linking the Northeast with the rest of India, New Delhi is left with the only option of urging the reopening of the North Eastern routes through Bangladesh to its West, and with Myanmar and South-East Asia to the East. The region that is also rich in energy resources like natural gas and hydro-electricity can progress, thus addressing problems that give rise to long-standing grievances, which in turn encourage insurgency surrounding the region. The benefits of transit facility between India and Bangladesh are not limited to the India alone; it could benefit Bangladesh as well.

Transit would not only boost connectivity between the two countries, but also offer opportunities for regional connectivity and help Bangladesh develop Chittagong port into a regional hub. Transit was used by India with Pakistan till the 1965 war, after which it declined, but with the consequent emergence of Bangladesh, it failed to change. Immediately after Bangladeshi independence, it allowed transit in air and sea routes to India while the major issue of transit through road remained unattended.

However, with Prime Minister Modi’s recent visit to Bangladesh in June 2015, a direct bus between Kolkata and Agartala was introduced. It covers a distance of 500 km, as compared to the 1650 km, if it ran through the states in India. The bus was flagged off by
Conflicts on river water sharing

The issue of water sharing is a crucial factor in India-Bangladesh relations since the two neighbouring countries share fifty four rivers between them. The Ganga, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna are the three major river systems that India and Bangladesh share. Bangladesh being the lower riparian state has an abundance of water during rainy season and scarcity during summer season. Intensive use of the Ganga river water in India and Bangladesh, along with the seasonal variations in the flow of water has created a conflict of interest for both the countries. The river has a dramatic seasonal variation in its flow and any attempt to harness the river water during the lean season disturbs the natural equilibrium. This has served as the major cause for the water dispute between India and Bangladesh.

The proposal to construct the Farraka Barrage in the state of West Bengal in India across the Ganges River had led the two countries to come to the negotiating table to discuss respective claims and justifications that date back in the 1950s. The dam was built chiefly to divert the Ganges waters into the Hooghly River (a tributary of the Ganges) during the dry season in order to remove the silt that had been hindering operations at the Kolkata Port – one of the busiest in India. The 1996 Ganges Treaty (a thirty year comprehensive treaty) provides for the distribution of water from Farakka for the two countries between 1 January and 31 May. The origin of the dispute can be traced back to the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace signed by the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Bangladesh’s founding leader and Prime Minister Sheik Mujibur Rahman in March, 1972. According to the treaty, the two nations established a Joint River Commission to work towards the common interests and sharing of water resources, irrigation, floods and cyclone control. As per the treaty, the Farakka Barrage was built in 1974, about ten kilometers from the border of Bangladesh, controlling the flow of the Ganges, possessing strong economic and religious importance, diverting some of the water into a feeder canal linking the Hooghly River, keeping it silt free. With increasing demands for water in Kolkata for industrial and domestic use, and for irrigational purposes
in other parts of West Bengal, dispute over the sharing of water intensified. The objective behind the construction of the Farakka Barrage was to increase the lean period flow of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river branch of the Ganges to increase the water depth at the Kolkata port which was threatened by siltation. In November 1977, the two countries proposed a five-year agreement on water sharing. However, the basic issue remained unaddressed, leading to its lapse in 1982. Finally a comprehensive bilateral treaty was signed by the Indian Prime minister H. D. Deva Gowda and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheik Hasina in December, 1996. This treaty established a thirty year water sharing arrangement with guaranteed minimum quantities of water supply for Bangladesh, whose rights as a lower riparian country was recognized.

Bangladesh being a deltaic country needs more water per capita than India to keep the problem of salinity under control. It is in Bangladesh’s interest to sign agreements on water sharing on all common rivers since it is a lower riparian state. To fasten the deliberations on sharing water of fifty four trans-boundary rivers, a Joint River Commission (JRC) was set up in 1973 by the two countries. Since then, the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty signed in 1996, was the only agreement signed between the countries for a period of thirty years. JRC members have continued deliberations on sharing water of another seven rivers for over two decades. Being a lower riparian state, Bangladesh has expressed it concerns over the activities upstream especially the proposals like interlinking of rivers, which would affect them adversely.

Construction of Tipaimukh dam is another issue of controversy between India and Bangladesh. The proposed hydel power project on the river Barak in Manipur is said to have adverse ecological effect in the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Despite India’s assurance that no dam would be constructed overlooking Bangladesh’s concerns, a situation of distrust prevails.

The Teesta water sharing treaty has been troubling India-Bangladesh relations for quite a long time. Bangladesh accuses India of withdrawing water from forty three common rivers through artificial structures. Both countries had in principle agreed on the need for such an agreement. The Teesta river water sharing treaty was all set to be concluded in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Dhaka in September 2011. But the protest from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee prevented the signing of the treaty. The proposed ratio of 50:50 water sharing agreed to in the draft agreement was objected by the West
Bengal Chief Minister claiming that the proposed ratio would be disadvantageous to the interests of West Bengal. Bangladesh is heavily dependent on India for the flow of the fifty four rivers the two countries share. Bangladesh has complained that its share of river waters, in comparison with India’s, remains unfair. The construction by India of the Farraka Barrage—a low dam in West Bengal province designed to increase water supply in the Hoogli river—was a major bone of contention between the two countries.

**Energy cooperation**

Bangladesh is a country which faces severe power shortages and India has become one of the key partners in Bangladesh’s energy sector. The power cooperation between the two countries has been increasing over the years. India’s bilateral engagement with Bangladesh in power sector has expanded after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s assumption of office in January 2009.38

The installed power capacity of Bangladesh is only 10,283 MW which is much below the total requirement of the nation. The growth of the country’s economy is retarded by the fact that there is a daily shortage up to 1,500 MW of electricity. Adding to this, nearly two-fifth of Bangladesh’s 160 million people does not have access to electricity by an estimation of the World Bank.39 Due to these circumstances, Bangladesh is seeking international financial and technical assistance to improve its power sector and India could assist the eastern neighbour in meeting its rising demand for electricity.40

India and Bangladesh signed an agreement in 2010 during Prime Minister Hasina’s visit to New Delhi to enhance cooperation in the field of energy cooperation. Bangladesh subsequently upgraded its power transmission network and India started supplying power to its neighbour from December 2013. India now provides 500 MW of power from the Bahrenpur-Bheramara inter-connection.41 India has set up a 400 KV switching station at Bahrenpur in West Bengal to seamlessly transmit power to Bangladesh. A cross-border interconnection has been established between Bahrenpur in West Bengal and Bheramara in India, for this purpose. The cross border interconnection is the first inter country power grid in South Asia.42 (See fig 5:2). Thus West Bengal plays a significant role in the power transmission between India and Bangladesh. In another significant development in March 2016, Modi inaugurated 100 MW power supply from Tripura’s Palatana to Bangladesh, while his counterpart Hasina provided 10GB internet bandwidth to India simultaneously.
The bilateral power cooperation received further impetus when India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Dhaka in June 2015. India, responding to the persistent demands of Bangladesh, decided to supply additional 600 MW of electricity to Bangladesh in the next two years by constructing one more grid inter-connection in the western region of the neighbouring country.

India now supplies 100 MW power from the 726 MW gas-based thermal power project at Palatana in southern Gomati district of Tripura. Bangladesh, for the project, facilitated movement of heavy project equipment and turbines to project site through its territory by road and waterways from Haldia port in West Bengal. This is a good example of growing friendship and cooperation between India and Bangladesh. This additional supply of power will help Bangladesh to address the power crisis in its eastern region especially Comilla. Similarly, Dhaka sought transit facilities through Indian territory to import power from Nepal and Bhutan and New Delhi accepted this request during Modi’s visit.
Indian firms are interested to engage in long-term power business with Bangladesh and Prime Minister Modi during his Dhaka visit urged Bangladesh government to facilitate the entry of Indian companies, in power generation and distribution sectors of the country to help the country achieve its targeted capacity of 24,000 MW by 2021. India also seeks to send power from the North Eastern region to other parts of the country via Bangladesh and submitted a proposal to the latter’s government in this regard. There is ample scope for investment in the arena of energy cooperation between Bangladesh and India’s North East given the region’s geographical proximity and hydro-electric potential.

**Land Boundary Agreement**

India shares its longest border with Bangladesh and a settled and properly managed boundary is an essential condition for effective cross-border cooperation between neighbouring countries. It helps to avoid border-related conflicts and promotes confidence in building better relations. The Radcliffe line (based on the recommendation of the Bengal Boundary Commission chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe) became the border between India and East Pakistan after the partition of the India in 1947. Following the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the same became the border between India and Bangladesh. Though the demarcation of border between India and Pakistan began soon after the partition, it had a slow progress because of the difficulties in determining the border line. This had created hostilities between India and Pakistan even before the formation of Bangladesh. After the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the two countries inherited the legacy of border problems which was a source of conflict in their relationship. The land boundary agreement concluded in 1974 tried to address the complex issue of border demarcation. Though the agreement was not ratified by India, some provisions of the agreement have been implemented except for the issue relating to undemarcated land boundary of approximately 6.1 km, exchange of enclaves and adverse possessions. The treaty could not be materialized since India did not ratify the agreement. Bangladesh Parliament ratified the treaty which led to the return of Berubari to India by Bangladesh. In return India gave permission to Bangladesh to use the Tin Bigha corridor in 1992 which provides an entrance to Bangladesh’s enclaves inside India. The delay in the implementation of land border agreement contributed to the increased differences between the two countries. To resolve this issue, additional protocols for the Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 were signed during Prime Minister Manmohan
Singh’s visit to Dhaka in September 2011.\textsuperscript{53} However, to make the new border line official, a constitutional amendment was needed as an exchange of land is involved. The hasty partition of the subcontinent resulted in the unresolved issue of ‘enclaves’ in both India and Bangladesh. The enclaves are islands of Indian and Bangladeshi territory surrounded completely by the other country’s land. There were 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh (17,160.63 acres) whereas there were fifty one Bangladesh enclaves in India (7,110.02 acres).\textsuperscript{54} The Indian enclaves were located in four districts in Bangladesh – Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Nilphamari. All Bangladeshi enclaves were situated in West Bengal’s Cooch Behar district. According to a headcount conducted jointly by both the countries in 2011, the total population in the enclaves was determined to be around 51,549 among which 37,334 people lived in Indian enclaves within Bangladesh and 14,215 lived in Bangladeshi enclaves within India.\textsuperscript{55} Since these enclaves were located in India as well as Bangladesh, the access to these places was being controlled by the respective countries, although the sovereignty over the territory was with the respective countries. Due to the problem of their geographical location, people in these enclaves were unable to enjoy their basic, political, economic, social and cultural rights as being enjoyed by the other ordinary citizens of the respective countries. The problem of accessibility to these areas as well as the free movement to the respective mainland made their life miserable. The people residing in these enclaves were denied basic human rights enjoyed by the people in their respective countries. They did not have access to health or basic education facilities, electricity, clean drinking water and decent livelihood.

The people residing in these areas were denied of their basic political rights. The Indian citizens who live in the Bangladeshi enclaves were never included in the census and had almost no proof citizenship. The same was the condition of the Bangladeshi enclaves. People residing in these areas were deprived of their basic human rights because of no faults of theirs but because of the fact that there was no administrative machinery to look after their interest. Due to these and many more factors a state of lawlessness existed there and these enclaves, in certain cases, had reportedly become the dens of criminal elements.

Though the exchange of enclaves between India and Bangladesh seem like a loss of Indian land to Bangladesh, the actual scenario is quite different. The enclaves are located inside the territory of both countries and there has been no physical access to them from either country. India transferred 111 enclaves with a total area of 17,160.63 acres to Bangladesh,
while Bangladesh transferred fifty one enclaves with an area of 7,110.02 acres to India. In the case of adverse possessions, India received 2777.038 acres of land and transferred 2267.682 acres of land to Bangladesh through implementation of the 2011 Land Boundary protocol. The area transferred to Bangladesh by India was already in the possession of Bangladesh and the handing over of this area to Bangladesh was only a procedural acceptance of the defacto situation on the ground. Similar is the case with the areas in adverse possession of India in Bangladesh. The provisions of the agreement allow the people living in the adversely possessed areas to remain in the land to which they have sentimental and religious attachments. With the signing of the agreement, the long pending land boundary issues between India and Bangladesh got settled. The undemarcated boundary in all three segments, viz. Daikhata-56 (West Bengal), Muhuri River-Belonia (Tripura) and Lahitila-Dumabari (Assam) has been demarcated.

When the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited India in January 2010, the two countries expressed their willingness to finally resolve the long-standing problem and they, in the spirit of the 1974 land boundary agreement, agreed to comprehensively address all outstanding boundary issues. Following this, officials from both India and Bangladesh undertook detailed negotiations, joint visits to the concerned areas and land surveys. This resulted in the protocol to the 1974 land boundary agreement, signed in September, 2011 by the foreign ministers of India and Bangladesh in the presence of the prime ministers. The protocol paves the way for a settlement of the long pending land boundary issues between the two countries. Demarcation of the remaining un-demarcated areas and territories under adverse possession and exchange of enclaves were included in the settlement. A resolution of the un-demarcated segments of the land boundary by an agreement does not require a constitutional amendment as this is within the competence of the Executive wing of government. But, the issue of exchange of enclaves and redrawing of boundaries to maintain status quo in areas of adverse possessions involves the transfer of territories from one state to another and therefore requires a constitutional amendment.56

The Parliament of India passed the 119th constitutional amendment act on May 7, 2015.57 India ratified the agreement with this constitutional amendment. Under this agreement, the enclave residents could continue to reside at their present location or move to the country of their choice. In June 2015 Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sealed a landmark
agreement with Bangladesh to exchange tiny enclaves where thousands of people from both countries have been trapped for decades.  

The land boundary agreement solves a problem that has lingered on since colonial days. After signing the pact in Dhaka, Prime Minister Modi compared the agreement with the dismantling of the Berlin wall stressing the importance of the agreement in the future initiatives between India and Bangladesh.

**West Bengal’s influence on India-Bangladesh relations**

Local state politics has influenced India–Bangladesh relations for a long time. Though there were a bunch of external and internal factors that led to the liberation of East Pakistan, it could be said that the domestic politics in India to some extent was responsible for the creation of Bangladesh. India and West Bengal in particular played a significant role in East Pakistan’s struggle for freedom and ultimately in the creation of Bangladesh. Due to close geographical and economic ties, West Bengal has serious stakes in the political and economic situation in Bangladesh. The efforts of East Pakistan to gain cultural autonomy and recognition of Bengali as one of the national languages of Pakistan received support from West Bengal. The political establishment in Pakistan considered this as interference from India in Pakistan’s internal affairs and accused them of supporting the divisive claims of East Pakistan. The allegation that their demand for self determination and democracy was instigated by India infuriated the people of East Pakistan. When the massive guerrilla warfare was launched by the Mukthi Bahini, Indian newspapers especially those based in Calcutta published extensive reports. In the initial stages of the struggle, India did not respond favourably to the call for assistance from the local leadership of East Bengal. But eventually, India’s approach to the crisis changed due to the overwhelming Bengali sentiment and public reaction which ultimately led to the intervention in East Pakistan. The atrocities committed by the Pakistan army on the hapless masses of East Bengal led to the influx of refugees to the bordering Indian states, especially West Bengal. The massive influx of refugees from East Bengal into India which could have serious repercussions in West Bengal and the North Eastern states was one of the crucial factors which forced New Delhi to intervene in Bangladesh. There was a mass exodus of refugees into the Indian border states of West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam.
Nearly ten million refugees from East Bengal spilled over India and their presence was significantly concentrated in the state of West Bengal. The social and economic consequences of the refugee problem had to be dealt with in these border states. Their presence made states such as Tripura, Assam and West Bengal to pressurize the union government to actively participate in the liberation of Bangladesh. However, the issue of Bangladeshi migration did not stop with the liberation of the country and subsequently became a major issue in the Indian states bordering Bangladesh leading to a prolonged violent movement. It has influenced India–Bangladesh relations in the past and continues to do so. The presence of illegal Bangladeshis in India is a major bilateral problem between both the neighbouring countries and West Bengal is an important party to this issue. West Bengal could be said to have played an important role in the creation of Bangladesh by pressurizing the union government to take proactive steps and by the moral support extended to the people of East Pakistan by the Bengali civil society. West Bengal had to act diligently since it had greater stakes in the issue compared to other Indian states considering the socio-cultural linkages and the overwhelming refugee problem. West Bengal has been a constant stakeholder in India’s relations with Bangladesh beginning with its act of influencing the union government’s policy towards Bangladesh liberation struggle. There were instances of the state playing a proactive role in India-Bangladesh relations including the significant role played by Jyoti Basu in resolving the Ganga water treaty. At the same time the state had to play a negative role to protect its interest as in what happened in the Teesta water sharing treaty.

West Bengal becomes an important party to the multitude of issues between India and Bangladesh owing to the geographical proximity and cultural affinity the state shares with Bangladesh. Some of the instances where West Bengal acted as an influencing factor in India-Bangladesh relations are discussed below.

**Water sharing: A crucial issue**

West Bengal is a state with eight per cent of the total Indian population but just 2.7 per cent of national territory. The water resources in the state are becoming increasingly scarce with the uncontrolled growth of population, expansion of the irrigation network and developmental needs. The Bengal delta now faces an acute shortage of water in the lean months. The state also faces the problems of flood and drought because of the spatial and temporal variability of rain. The shortage of water is causing problems with navigation in
rivers and even the Kolkata port faces the problem of siltation despite artificial augmentation of water from the Farakka barrage. The rivers flowing in the state have frequently changed course and some have disappeared from the map.

![Figure 5: 3 Rivers shared by India and Bangladesh](http://www.bluebird-electric.net/)

The irrigation sector and the inland navigation sector are the two largest consumers of water. The demand for water in the agriculture sector increased with the introduction of high yielding paddy in the early 1970s. The state has been suffering from the problem of arsenic poisoning due to the overexploitation of ground water. The increasing dependence on ground water for irrigation and drinking led to the decay and abandonment of the age-old surface water management system of Bengal. Monsoon rain is the main source of river water, which is only for three months. Since the upper catchment of most of the rivers which flow through West Bengal lies in Sikkim or Bhutan, the conservation or storage of water in this tract is difficult. The creation of additional storage and demand-side management are dual challenges of present water management. West Bengal is currently trying to reduce its over-dependence on ground water so that it is utilized within the rechargeable limit.

It is in this context that West Bengal has always tried to protect its interest when it comes to sharing of river water between India and Bangladesh. India and Bangladesh share fifty
four rivers between them and river water sharing is of great importance (See Fig 5:3). Since most of the rivers flow from West Bengal to Bangladesh, West Bengal is in the position of upper riparian state and becomes a party to controversial river water sharing agreements.

**Involvement of West Bengal in the Ganga water sharing treaty**

In order to keep Kolkata port functional, India built a barrage at Farakka in 1975 and diverted water from river Ganga. This development led to a dispute over sharing of Ganga waters between India and Bangladesh. In India there was an opinion that Bangladesh had greatly overstated its water needs. It is said that Bangladesh also magnified the adverse effects due to reduced water availability and blamed India for its flood problem. The whole issue became more complicated and West Bengal felt that its interests were not adequately taken care of by the union government while negotiating with Bangladesh over this issue. This led to standoff between union and state governments which continued for several years after 1990.

However, West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu played a remarkable role in the resolution of the Ganga water issue during the term of the United Front Government. The negotiations made during his six days’ official visit to Bangladesh resulted in the signing of water sharing treaty between the two countries in December 1996. It was impossible for the union government to resolve this issue without addressing the sensitivities of the state government, and the involvement of Jyoti Basu was therefore considered crucial. The success of the Ganga water treaty owed a lot to the major role of then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in finalising it. The treaty was based on agreed figures of water flows in the Ganga and beneficial sharing ratios were agreed upon. The constructive role played by Basu garnered praise from several leaders including the then Foreign Minister I K Gujral.

**West Bengal and the impasse on Teesta water sharing treaty**

The Teesta River is the major source of water for agriculture in North Bengal and in North-West Bangladesh. The river which originates in Sikkim flows through West Bengal before entering Bangladesh. India has built a barrage at Gazaldoba from which eighty five percentage of the water flow is diverted from the Teesta River.

In the lean season (January and February) Bangladesh does not get enough water from the river whereas in the monsoon season it gets more than enough water which results in
floods. Since Sikkim and West Bengal draw water from the river, the flow has been reduced to the disadvantage of Bangladeshi farmers. Since India has built a barrage upstream in Teesta in Gozaldiba, Bangladesh has to depend on the water released from upstream. The issue was regarding the sharing of water in the lean season with Bangladesh demanding fifty percent share whereas West Bengal was given seventy percent.

Constructive solutions to this problem could be arrived at if both sides cooperate on this issue. The surplus water during floods could be stored upstream and could be released during the lean season. This could be a viable solution to the problem of both parties. This is possible only if the two countries are ready to put extra effort to resolve the differences. In 2010, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited India and signed a joint communiqué with the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Resolving the Teesta issue immediately was part of the deal between the two leaders. In accordance with this, a draft agreement along with a statement of principles for sharing of river waters in the lean season was prepared. The two countries agreed to share the water available at the Gjoldoba barrage in India equally, keeping twenty percent for the river, for an interim period of fifteen years.

The deal was supposed to be signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Dhaka in September 2011. But the deal fell through as the Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee refused to approve the treaty. This was due to the concern of West Bengal that the loss of higher volume of water to the lower riparian state would cause problems in the northern region of Bengal especially during the lean season.

A confusion over the agreement remained since it was seen more of a political agreement than a technical one by West Bengal government. The independent data collection by the union water resources ministry and the government of West Bengal on the Teesta’s flow in lean season were reportedly highly divergent, leaving the Chief Minister alarmed enough to refuse to travel to Dhaka. Mamata was accused of indulging in political grandstanding at the cost of a historic diplomatic breakthrough with Bangladesh. Some even stated that by opposing the treaty she was aiming to build a political base for herself in North Bengal’s Malda, Jalpaiguri and North Dinajpur districts.

Since Mamata was the coalition partner of Congress, and was also known to have good relations with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her support was taken for
granted. She was usually supportive in the initiatives on India-Bangladesh relations and this made the union government to believe that she would go along with the entire package being worked out for Dhaka. The union government claimed that Mamata was adequately consulted. However, Mamata had objections both to the content of the treaty and the treatment given to her state over an issue that was going to directly impact it. She even stated that had the Left Front been in power, they would not have been treated this way. This was in contrast to the Ganga water agreement in 1996, when the Left Front government was consulted at every stage.\textsuperscript{72}

In West Bengal there was a rare political consensus regarding Mamata Banerjee’s valid argument. Mamata’s representatives expressed the likely difficulty in convincing people about this treaty, which they believed would lead to protests. The state unit of the Congress party actually supported Mamata and there was no animosity towards her. One Congress leader went to the extent of criticizing the union government, saying that ‘the national interest cannot be in conflict with the state’s interests. It appears the whole gamut of issues had not been carefully analysed before finalizing the deal.’\textsuperscript{73} The Left parties also agreed that a 52:48 sharing ratio was not desirable for northern Bengal. They felt that the agreement could have seriously affected agriculture in North Bengal.

After withdrawing from the Prime Minister’s team that went to Bangladesh, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee appointed a one-man committee headed by noted hydrologist Kalyan Rudra to examine the availability of Teesta water, particularly during the dry season, and the quantum that could be shared by India and Bangladesh. Rudra was also to highlight the point of sharing – the location from where water could be released to Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{74} Although the report has been submitted but not made public, an attempt has been made to draw inferences from Rudra’s various studies and statements. They have indicated that this agreement was hastily crafted and that there is no science and sustainability. Indians have been under the impression that if the Teesta deal is signed, they would get transit from Bangladesh. However, Bangladeshis have never committed to this. Even before Mamata had cancelled her visit, reports emanating from Bangladesh clearly indicated that Bangladesh was not going to sign a transit pact with India or at least allow road transit in the near future.
Conclusion

It is an undisputable fact that West Bengal is an influencing factor in India-Bangladesh relations. The Teesta water sharing treaty between India and Bangladesh could not be signed as the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, opposed it citing that it is against her state’s interest. Her party, Trinamool Congress, was a coalition partner in the UPA government at the union and she threatened to withdraw the support given to the government. The survival of Manmohan Singh’s twenty-party coalition government depended on the support of 19 MPs from the Trinamool Congress.

When Mamata Banerjee withdrew from the Prime Minister’s delegation, she was presented as someone obstructing the progress of India-Bangladesh relations. But it is important to note that it was Mamata Banerjee’s state that was to bear the cost of the union government’s initiatives to improve India-Bangladesh relations. West Bengal was supposed to lose 10,000 acres of land and share water of the Teesta river to the detriment of its own interest.

There were not enough efforts at the political level to bring Mamata on board while the officials were working on the details of the agreement. Mamata’s concern was that she was not consulted adequately by the union government while taking a decision that affects her state. Even though it was in India’s national interest to maintain good relations with a friendly Bangladesh, West Bengal made it clear that it could not be at the cost of a constituent state’s interest.

The union government believes that its relations with Bangladesh are affected by the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s actions. Regional politics act as a detriment to the relationship between the two neighbours. While closely examining the Teesta water treaty, one could easily understand that the union government acted in haste without giving importance to the technicalities involved in it. It affects a large number of people on both side of the border and therefore should be carefully drafted after consulting the parties concerned. Even if the treaty is signed without having the consent of West Bengal, it will remain un-operational without the state’s full support.

Even though, the union government is responsible for the policy changes, it is the state government that has to face the political backlashes of such policy changes. Mamata Banerjee might have acted for her political gains, but there was truth behind her concern.
for farmers of North Bengal who were to be adversely affected by the treaty. Another interesting fact is the consensus that the political parties in West Bengal showed in the Teesta water sharing treaty issue. The Congress Party and the Communist Party supported Mamata’s stand stating that the treaty is detrimental to the interests of the people in the state.

Mamata Banerjee succeeded in stopping the union government from signing the treaty with Bangladesh stating that it was against her state’s interest. While taking decisions which have implications on the state governments, the union government could consult the constituent states so that there is a proper channel of communication between the two governments. There should be a consensus between the union and the state governments regarding issues concerning them so that there should not be a conflict of opinion regarding “states’ interest” and “national interest”.

The assertiveness shown by West Bengal points to a new direction in Indian politics and it has its implications on the federal structure of India. The changing environments, both domestic and international, have their implications on the union-state relations in India. The emphasis given to cooperative federalism by the union government is reflective of the fact that India is becoming more federal, that it has to be more attentive to the constituent units’ aspirations.

**Notes and References**

1. The two nation theory stated that religion is the primary identity and unifying factor of Muslims in South Asia rather than their language or ethnicity. Therefore it proposed that Indian Hindus and Muslims are two distinct nations regardless of their ethnicity or cultural commonalities. It was the founding principle of Pakistan movement which voiced for Pakistan as a Muslim nation state in South Asia which resulted in the partition of India in 1947.

2. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, D.L Roy, Atul Prasad and Rajnikanta Sen are known as Panchokobi in Bengali literature.


4. The hilly and forested tracks with thick vegetation is more common in North Bengal, South Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.
5 Char lands are river islands formed from sedimentation and are extremely vulnerable to natural disasters. They often act as a hub for illegal activities like smuggling and drug trafficking. They are weather bound and might disappear during floods. These islands are weather bound that they are clearly visible during the dry seasons and disappear when the floods happen during the monsoons.


7 ibid


9 ibid

10 ibid

11 Pushpitha Das (ed), “India’s border management, select documents”, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, 2010

12 ibid


14 ibid


22 Report on Illegal Migration in Assam submitted to the President of India by Lt Gen S K Sinha, Governor of Assam, November 8, 1998. see www.satp.org

23 Dr. Subakantah Behera, “Trans-border identities: A study on the impact of Bangladeshi and Nepali migration to India”, ICRIER policy series, No.1, May 2011.

24 Sinha, n.22


26 The children of the immigrants, who marry local girls, are referred to as ‘Sumias’. These children are given Naga names. They cannot be detected by the authorities when they apply for advantages like jobs, which are meant only for the indigenous people of Nagaland.

27 Originally, the inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) Chakmas had to flee from their land as it was submerged by the construction of Kaptai dam in the 1960s. Chakmas are Buddhists while the Hajongs are Hindus and they also faced religious persecution in East Pakistan. Most of those who came to India were Chakmas and there were only a few Hajong people among them. They entered India through what was then the Lushai Hills district of Assam which is situated in today’s Mizoram. While some stayed back with Chakmas already living in the Lushai Hills, the Indian government moved a majority of the refugees to present-day Arunachal Pradesh.


29 Samudra Gupta Kashyap, “Why Chakmas and Hajongs are India’s nowhere people”, The Times of India, 2 October, 2015.

30 Rajendra Chaddha, “Mushrooming Madrassas a menace to nation”. See www.hvk.org/articles/0502/64.html.


33 ibid


40 Rupak Bhattacharjee, n.38

41 *ibid.*


43 Gireesh Chandra Prasad, “Bangladesh to source 600MW more power from India”, *The Financial Express*, 1 December, 2014.


46 Jamwal, n.8

47 *ibid*

48 Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh, Public Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

49 *ibid*

50 Jamwal, n.8

51 Land Boundary Agreement. n.48


Ananya Bhattacharya, n.52


Land Boundary Agreement. n.48


It is a popular Bengali term which refers to the guerrilla resistance movement formed by the Bangladeshi military, paramilitary and civilians during the War of Liberation that transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971.


See Ganga Water Sharing, at http://www.nih.ernet.in/rbis/Ganga_treat.htm

ibid

ibid


ibid


“Joint Communiqué issued on the occasion of the visit to India of Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh”, 12 January, 2010. See from http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/3452/Joint+Communiqu+issued+on+the+occasion+of+the+visit+to+India+of+Her+Excellency+Sheikh+Hasina+Prime+Minister+of+Bangladesh


“Cong Feels Mamata’s Teesta Stand Valid”, The Telegraph, 6 September, 2011.

“Focus on Teesta in Dry Season”, The Telegraph, 3 December, 2011.