
Role of Media towards Transboundary Water Disputes Between India & Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Connectivity' has become a catchword in the context of globalization. In recent times, the focus of the socio-economic development strategy of Bangladesh has shifted to regional connectivity, especially in sectors such as trade, power and energy, infrastructure, security, etc. With India, which shares with Bangladesh almost the whole of the latter's land border, connectivity in all its senses, is inevitable. If this connectivity can be forged and nurtured in a friendly, equitable, and mutually benefiting manner, that can lead better exploitation of the untapped possibilities of the bilateral relations. The recent strengthening of relations between the two countries reflects such a positive and mutually beneficial direction.

India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers between them. Despite setting up a Joint River Commission for water management as early as 1972, tensions between the countries on how to share resources recently came to a head in a dispute over the Teesta River. At stake are the lives of countless people from West Bengal and Bangladesh who depend upon the river for survival. In 1983, a water sharing agreement was reached between India and Bangladesh, whereby both countries were allocated 39% and 36% of the water flow respectively. This was set to change in September 2011 when India's Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was due to sign a pact with his Bangladeshi counterpart regarding access and use of the Teesta River. But unfortunately the treaty was not signed at that time. In the month of June, 2015 Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh along with Chief Minister of West Bengal Ms Mamata Banerjee to solve the dispute of Teesta water but nothing has been finalised yet.

This paper likes to analyse how different medias of both India and Bangladesh interpreted this vital issue. The media content analysis would also show that nationalistic sentiments were predominant in reportage in both India and Bangladesh. However, nationalism as a sentiment was not always present in a negative sense. Thus, for example, both in India and Bangladesh it was used to create a public mood for reaching a settlement on a sharing the waters of the Teesta.

Key Words: *Content Analysis of Indo-Bangladesh Media Coverage on Teesta Issue*

INTRODUCTION

Global flow of media is concomitant with other globalized flows marked by increased flow of goods, services, capital, humans, and ideas across borders. Hence globalization of media is part of the integration of global experiences, values and practices. Media enables globalization in a number of ways. First of all, it ensures unfettered information flow across

borders. Despite all efforts, the Syrian government has failed to suppress leaking of information of how it has been trying to brutally suppress the protesters. Secondly, globalization helps undermine nationally-controlled information regimes. No matter how hard the Mubarak regime tried to stymie the revolution by shutting off mobiles and internet and feeding only government controlled propaganda machines, tech savvy younger generation found ways to connect and spread the messages of defiance to the dictatorial regime. The more repressive the regime tried to be with the social media and cellular networks, the more fuller the Tahrir Square became with protestors.

Connectivity' has become a catchword in the context of globalization. In recent times, the focus of the socio-economic development strategy of Bangladesh has shifted to regional connectivity, especially in sectors such as trade, power and energy, infrastructure, security, etc. With India, which shares with Bangladesh almost the whole of the latter's land border, connectivity in all its senses, is inevitable. If this connectivity can be forged and nurtured in a friendly, equitable, and mutually benefiting manner, that can lead better exploitation of the untapped possibilities of the bilateral relations. The recent strengthening of relations between the two countries reflects such a positive and mutually beneficial direction. This article will analyze the challenges and potentials of the role of the media in further advancing the common issues to the advantage of both the countries in an era of globalization.

India and Bangladesh are South Asian neighbours. Historically and culturally the two nations have been considerably close to each other. Generally relations have been friendly, although sometimes there are border disputes. They are common members of SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA and the Commonwealth. In particular, Bangladesh and the East Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura are Bengali-speaking. Bangladesh has a high commission in New Delhi with consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata. India has a high commission in Dhaka with a consulate in Chittagong. In a survey, 70% percent of Bangladeshis expressed a favorable opinion and perception of India.

MAJOR AREAS OF CONFLICT

- A major area of contention has been the construction and operation of the Farakka Barrage by India to increase water supply in the river Hoogly. Bangladesh insists that it does not receive a fair share of the Ganges waters during the drier seasons, and gets flooded during the monsoons when India releases excess waters.
- There have also been disputes regarding the transfer of Teen Bigha Corridor to Bangladesh. Part of Bangladesh is surrounded by the Indian state of West Bengal. On 26 June 1992, India leased three bigha land to Bangladesh to connect this enclave with mainland Bangladesh. There was a dispute regarding the indefinite nature of the lease. The dispute was resolved by an mutual agreement between India and Bangladesh in 2011.
- Terrorist activities carried out by outfits based in both countries, like Banga Sena and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami. Recently India and Bangladesh had agreed jointly to fight terrorism.
- Bangladesh has consistently denied India transit facility to the landlocked North Eastern Regions of India. Although India has a narrow land link to this North eastern region, which is famously known as the Siliguri Corridor or "India's Chicken Neck"

- Illegal Bangladeshi immigration into India. The border is porous and migrants are able to cross illegally, though sometimes only in return for financial or other incentives to border security personnel. Bangladeshi officials have denied the existence of Bangladeshis living in India and those illegal migrants found are described as having been trafficked. This has considerable repercussions for those involved, as they are stigmatized for having been involved in prostitution, whether or not this has actually been the case. Cross border migrants are also at far higher risk of HIV/Aids infection.
- Continuous border killing of Indian and Bangladeshi people, aiding illegal immigrants, helping in armed dacoity, fake money transfer and illegal drug trades by both Indian and Bangladeshi people are the major problems between Bangladesh and India.
- Both Bangladesh and India make claims over the same seawater at the Bay of Bengal before settlement of the issue.
- There was a minor glitch in their relation when former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh accidentally mentioned that 25% of Bangladeshis are anti-Indian, during an informal press meet.

OBJECTIVE

This paper would like to analyse the issue related to Teesta water sharing between India and Bangladesh.. Though there are several other important issues which are mentioned above but within short span of time it is not possible to cover all those issues. It is apparently quite clear now that Bangladesh for now has failed to ensure that India inks a deal to share water of common rivers, mainly Teesta. Now it is Bangladesh which has to do what it should have started long ago. Apart from traditional diplomacy, they should have transmitted the feelings of its public to those on the other side of the border. The sky is locked for Dhaka as no Bangladeshi channels are broadcasted by Indian cable operator. Most Indian newspapers were supportive for Bangladesh's cause on Teesta. That's a positive side. What about engaging with West Bengal's public? Nevertheless, looking beyond the political rhetoric, West Bengal's concerns about water security for its northern region cannot be overlooked and need to be allayed. India is already beginning to feel the strain on its water security given the ever rising demands for more water for its burgeoning population. According to a 2010 report 'Water Security for India: The External Dynamics' published by the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). India is facing a serious water resource problem and as trends suggest, it is expected to become 'water stressed' by 2025 and 'water scarce' by 2050. Both countries, therefore, need to develop a well thought out, balanced treaty that will enable equitable sharing of the waters of the Teesta, thereby enhancing bilateral ties and reducing the possibility of water conflict.

The objective of my study incorporates the increased and constant demand of Bangladesh and Indian government to finalise the Teesta agreement. I have also acknowledged the controversies following this Agreement and how the medias of two countries look after this issue and how much coverage this issue has got in different newspaper in the time of our Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh. Not only quantitative but also the qualitative content analysis of media reports are depicted in this study.

The aim of this research is to show

How many people aware about Teesta agreement controversies

How the medias of India and Bangladesh look after this transboundary water crisis

How much coverage medias of two counties has given in the time of Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh

HYPOTHESIS

Here are few assumptions which may come out as research report after survey is done.

This political issue is known by the people less in number.

Compare to television newspaper gave much coverage of this issue.

Most of the people think that political discussion only can help to solve this problem.

2. SAMPLE SURVEY: A sample survey is a study that obtains data from a subject of a population, in order to estimate population attributes. The science of survey sampling has greatly transformed the way we view society and issues facing society.

The three parts of sample surveying are-

1. Sample selection
2. Data collection
3. Estimation: using estimators from the collected data to make inferences about the population as a whole

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This topic of the study, "A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INDO-BANGLADESH MEDIA COVERAGE OF TEESTA DISPUTE" is very diverse in itself. Therefore, I have focused in the issues that occurred at the recent visit of our prime minister along with West Bengal chief Minister in June, 2015. The focus of this report will be the anticipated Teesta agreement. The media monitoring report would thus identify the reflections of journalists on bilateral relations regarding trans-boundary rivers, the concerns of the people affected regarding different issues related to water management with focus on the Teesta agreement. The following methods were used by me through the project:

- A brief study of the entire history of the Teesta water sharing issue.
- Understanding the clauses of this agreement and their pros and cons.
- A study of all the actions taken by the government through this Agreement. Also the controversies spurred by such actions.
- Content analysis of different newspapers of two countries has been done. News articles that were included dealt either directly or indirectly with an issue of Teesta water sharing between two countries. The overall amount of coverage of that issue

was calculated by counting the overall amount of news space in the publications in the time of Mr. Modi's visit to Bangladesh. In case of Bangladesh, five newspapers were chosen for content analysis and for India two national dailies and two regional newspapers have been selected.

- Various parameters like percentage of Teesta issue news coverage, types, subjects, tone, formats, origin of news, space allotted for news were analysed for this study.
- The differences in reportage in the two countries; the sources used by the media; the media's own understanding of the issue of trans-boundary resource sharing between neighboring countries.
- Survey among Indian public regarding the awareness about this issue and from which media they came to know about this crisis.

TRANS-BOUNDARY WATER CRISIS

Bangladesh and India share three major river systems: the Ganga, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. Along with their tributaries, these rivers drain about 1.75 million sq km of land, with an average runoff of 1,200 cu km. The GBM system also supports over 620 million people. Thus, the need for cooperation on trans-boundary waters is crucial to the future well-being of these millions. It will develop a common understanding to generate policy options on how to develop and manage natural resources sustainably such that livelihoods and water and food security improve. Inter-disciplinary research studies will be conducted by bringing together experts from various fields from both countries so that relevant issues are holistically grasped. The initiative centres around five broad thematic areas: food security, water productivity and poverty; impacts of climate change; inland navigation; environmental security; and biodiversity conservation.

The Teesta – which has its source in Sikkim – flows through the northern part of West Bengal in India before entering Bangladesh, where after coursing through about 45km of irrigable land, merges with the Brahmaputra River (or Jamuna when it enters Bangladesh). In 1983, an ad-hoc water sharing agreement was reached between India and Bangladesh, whereby both countries were allocated 39% and 36% of the water flow respectively. The new bilateral treaty expands upon this agreement by proposing an equal allocation of the Teesta River. To date, only one comprehensive river pact has been signed by India and Bangladesh – a 1996 bilateral treaty that established a 30-year water-sharing arrangement between the India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers between them. Despite setting up a Joint River Commission for water management as early as 1972, tensions between the countries on how to share resources recently came to a head in a dispute over the Teesta River. At stake are the lives of countless people from West Bengal and Bangladesh who depend upon the river for survival.

This was set to change in September 2011 when India's Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was due to sign a pact with his Bangladeshi counterpart regarding access and use of the Teesta River. However, the deal fell through when the then newly elected Chief Minister of West Bengal, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, refused to approve the treaty, fearing that the loss of higher volume of water to the lower riparian would cause problems in the northern region of state, especially during drier months. In May 2012, during a visit to India, the Bangladesh

Given that water is a state issue in India, and that Banerjee’s political party, the All India Trinamool Congress, is a key coalition partner of the ruling central government, the deal could not go through without her approval. While a large section of the Bangladeshi populace as well as the Indian media vilified her rigid stance, her opposition to the terms of the treaty was not without its share of support.

Foreign Minister, Ms. Dipu Moni, warned that bilateral relations would be complicated if India fails to deliver on the Teesta water-sharing agreement. Despite this pressure tactic, the treaty remains a slow burner as India continues its efforts of domestic political consensus building. However, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, S.M. Krishna tried to diffuse tensions and assured Bangladesh that India remains committed to an early solution on the issue of sharing Teesta waters. Bangladesh also wants a quick resolution to the issue, and may even be willing to soften their stance because of mounting pressure at home to get the deal done. Last June in 2015 when Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh with West Bengal Chief Minister Ms. Mamata Banerjee then everybody thought that at last the Teesta Agreement would be finalised but she maintained silence on this topic. There was renewed hope for a Teesta agreement when Hasina visited India in 2017. Hasina and Modi signed 22 MoUs covering defense, education, space technology, nuclear energy, IT, cyber security, trade, R&D, judiciary, shipping, mass media and public health (MEA, GoI, 2017). Modi’s support to the agreement and his initiative in breaching the topic increased hopes further, but the agreement continued to remain unsigned as Ms. Banerjee steadfastly maintained her opposition to the current nature of the agreement and offered “other river systems” to meet Bangladeshi needs, namely the Torsa, Sankosh and Raidak rivers, all three of which flow down to West Bengal from Bhutan (Ghosal, 2017). Predictably, this suggestion was met with little enthusiasm, and Hasina returned to Bangladesh without a Teesta deal where she was criticised vociferously by her main political rival, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia for giving “unilaterally” while “issues crucial for Bangladesh were not discussed in the visit.” Zia and BNP essentially accused Hasina of failing the people and signing MoUs which would “only increase India’s military, political, and geopolitical influence on Bangladesh” and declared that the involvement of Ms. Banerjee in the Teesta treaty “undermined the sovereign status of Bangladesh” (Prothom Alo, 2017). Currently, while both Government of India and Government of West Bengal want to sign the agreement, it is the Ms. Banerjee-led Government of West Bengal which is standing in the way of the finalisation of the Teesta Treaty.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA

The media content analysis shows that nationalistic sentiments were predominant in reportage in both India and Bangladesh. However, nationalism as a sentiment was not always present in a negative sense. Thus, for example, both in India and Bangladesh it was used to create a public mood for reaching a settlement on a sharing the waters of the Teesta. It is true that now a day’s no media maintains objectivity and related ethics fully because all the media houses are owned by different business group so it’s very obvious that their editorial policies are also different from each other and that is reflected in their news coverage of most important issues related to politics, administration, finance and other social issues.

In case of Teesta issues I have observed that Bangladesh's mainstream media have given front page coverage to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's maiden visit there, describing it as the "dawn of a new era" in bilateral ties while lamenting the lack of "definite progress" on the contentious Teesta water sharing issue. "The New Horizon in relations", with this headline--- a report was published highlighting that the visit had yielded 22 agreements and MoUs to take bilateral ties to a new height in the most popular newspaper 'Prothom Alo'. In its main editorial, the newspaper said, "for different reasons, the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be remembered...the visit is going to resolve the border dispute and enclaves which was pending unresolved for nearly seven decades.

The widely circulated 'Samokal' another newspaper of Bangladesh carried the headline "Friendship in new height" and highlighted Modi's comments in which he paid tributes to Bangladesh's founder and his counterpart Sheikh Hasina's father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It also highlighted the Bangladesh premier's priorities for enhanced connectivity

The New Age, widely known for its anti-government stance and bias towards ex-premier Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), carried the visit as its main report, saying "Modi gets transit boost; He pledges fair share of Teesta water, Hasina for fulfilment of commitments." "India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh is, indeed, important, for both the countries, in areas such as trade, internal peace and communal harmony, investment and development," an article in the 'The New Age' daily said. "India has a long and vital list of expectations from Bangladesh and Bangladesh too has a long list of dues, appeals, objections and accusations to deal with India," under the headline "Modi's wish list and people's agenda".

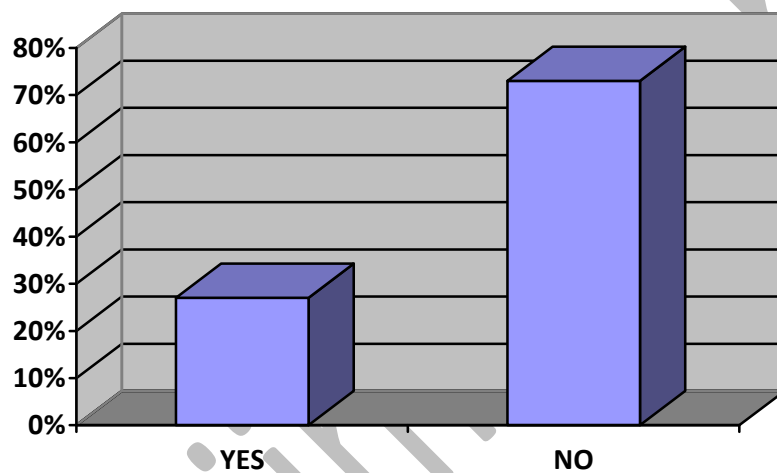
Leading English newspaper, 'The Daily Star', published the headline, "Dawn of a new era", with its subtitles saying "Hasina, Modi, pledge mutual growth; land deal documents exchanged; 22 deals signed; USD 2 billion fresh Indian credit." In an editorial titled, "No breakthrough on Teesta", the newspaper, said, "we did not expect the (Teesta) deal to come through on this visit but had certainly hoped for some definite progress in the regard." The Teesta water is crucial for Bangladesh, especially in the leanest period from December to March when the water flow often temporarily comes down to less than 1,000 cusecs from 5,000 cusecs every year. The Bangla daily 'The Jugantor' published a headline saying, "Hasina-Modi mainly remain vocal on 'connectivity'; red carpet reception to Indian premier in Dhaka." The newspaper published an editorial with a headline "Let a new horizon of relations be opened,"

In case of Indian newspapers it was found that most of the national dailies like The Hindu and Indian Express were in favour of that Teesta agreement but the flavour of regional dailies like Ananda Bazar Patrika and Bartaman of Bengal were quite different. Before Mr. Modi's visit to Bangladesh an article was published in Ananda Bazar Patrika on 1st June, 2015, with a headline "Mamatake erie kono ghoshona hobena dhakai". It has been Sushma Swaraj the foreign minister, declared that nothing would be finalised regarding Teesta issue without the discussion with the West Bengal government. On 6th June this newspaper gave more importance on the opening ceremony of Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus service which will be helpful for business of both countries. The difference between the national dailies and the Bengali newspapers in India was that while the former supported the water-sharing agreement and blamed the West Bengal government for throwing a spanner in the works, on

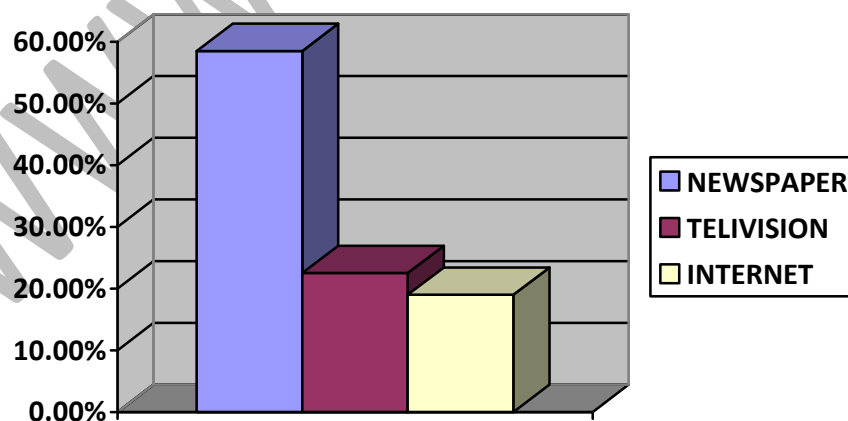
the other hand the Bengali media by and large took a state- centric attitude in justifying the position taken by its state government and defending its position on the anticipated agreement. Because they are anticipating that after the 50-50 Teesta agreement the Northern parts of West Bengal will become dry, and problems of water shortage for drinking and irrigation would arise.

SURVEY RESULT

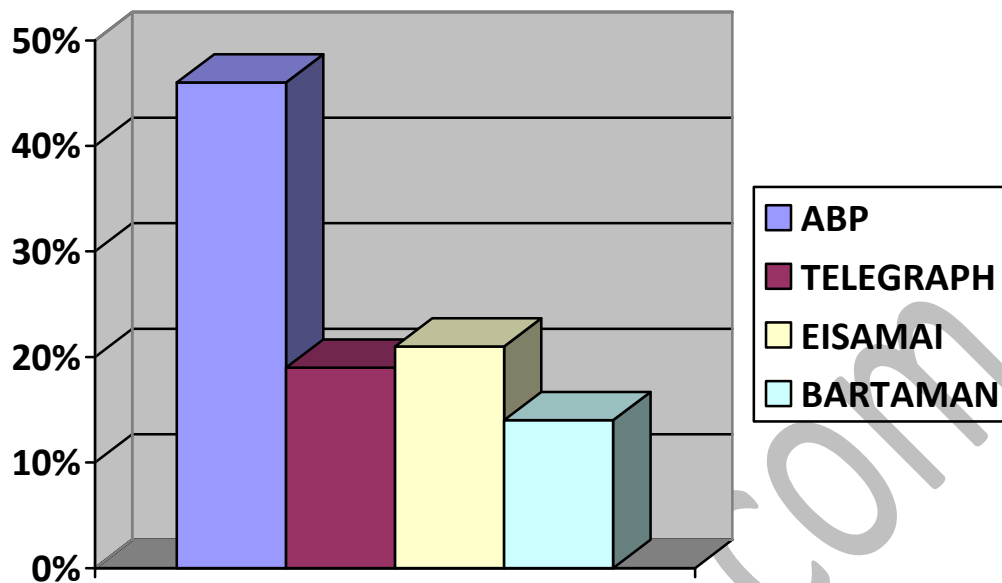
Percentage of People who know the Teesta Water Dispute between India and Bangladesh



Through which media people came to know about the issue.



Percentage of Teesta news coverage by regional newspaper of West Bengal.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study pointed out that both the country's media gave importance to this issue in a large extend and irrespective of their political differences everybody is waiting eagerly to solve the issue as early as possible. It was also found that Bangladesh's newspapers were very vocal to solve the trans-boundary water issue and even sometimes they criticised the Indian government for delaying to solve the Teesta issue. The most important finding is that national dailies of India was in favour of Teesta agreement where as the regional dailies of Bengal supported the state government's policy regarding this issue because they were looking the agreement in the eye's of affected of peoples of that area. So it is clear that regional dailies of West Bengal had a negative tone towards the Teesta water sharing agreement. One reason why the media tends to give a one-sided picture of trans-boundary resource sharing issues is because often it does not know where to get a contrary point of view – domestic experts giving nationalistic point of view are easily accessible but there is nobody to provide the other country's point of view. To overcome this hurdle to balanced reporting, there is a need to collate a list of public resources -- resource persons, relevant research institutions in both the countries, internet sites, government departments dealing with that particular resource, university departments and NGOs active in the area. Such a list should provide email addresses and telephone numbers of the individual experts and institutions. Given modern communication technology, it should not be difficult then for the journalists in one country to get the views of experts from the other country.

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