Mahabhu Brahmaputra and Ecowar

Maha Bahu Brahmaputra and Indian Subcontinent Face Ecological Attack
This Time
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China and we India have many things in common. We have mutual relationship of thousands years. Nostalgia is the silk route, in memory of which the Nathu La Pass is open today. Chinese leader Zintao will be visiting India very soon and the red carpet is ready. But the warring mood has not disappeared as yet. We had a border disput in 1962 which turned in full fledged war , well documented in a book Himalayan Blunder. We the Himalayan students track the story and history in our college days. We enjoyed the film by Vijaanand Goldie, Haqikat and read all available printed matter in sixties and seventies. china claimed NEFA and now it claims Arunachal just before it`s topmost leader`s Delhi visit despite the opening of much hyped Nathu La.

The things don`t stop here only, as we know that according to media reports, China is planning to divert 200 billion cubic metres of water to feed the Yellow River in an attempt at easing acute water shortage in Shaanxi, Hebel, Beijing and Tianjin.The 2,906 km long Brahmaputra is one of Asia`s largest rivers that traverse its first stretch of 1,625 km in Tibet, the next 918 km in India and the remaining 363 km through neighbouring Bangladesh before converging into the Bay of Bengal.While China has denied reports that it is planning to divert waters of Brahmaputra river to its Yellow river to feed the parched northern regions, India proposes to engage China on this issue in a serious manner.One of India's biggest water resources, the Brahmaputra may soon lose its ferocity.India and Bangladesh will also remain at the mercy of China, which could withhold water for power generation and irrigation during the dry season and release water during the flood season with catastrophic consequencesfor eastern South Asia. Taking into view that it is impossible to divert the mighty Brahmputra conventionally, China is planning to accomplish this project "with nuclear explosives". The Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics in Beijing has recommended this peaceful use of a nuclear device, said a London-based science journal. Since the region isan earthquake-prone zone, India's Disaster Relief Committee Chairman Sam Kannappan has asked the government to talk seriously with China tosecure the future of millions in India.

Of course at the moment, China is downplaying its plans."Whenever we do it we will discuss it with India, but as of now we are not considering it seriously. It was floated by a private person and is not high on the agenda," said Sun Yuxi, Chinese ambassador.

India too is keeping its plans under wraps until the time China unveils its own. But sources tell NDTV India's plan is good enough to undo most of the damage the Chinese dam will do.

At the moment, 500 BCM of water flows through the Brahmaputra. With China intercepting 300 BCM, India will get only 200 BCM.But by harnessing the 30 tributaries, India can get another 150 BCM. So, even after the
Chinese dam comes up, India will still have about 450 BCM of water, just 50 BCM less than now.

More than border disputes, the relations between the two growing economies in the next decade will be dictated by water and trade. The Brahmaputra issue is the first indication of that.

But anticipating the situation, India has a counter project. The Water Resources Ministry plans to harness the Brahmaputra's tributaries that rise in India to make up for the deficit the dam in China is expected to cause. It comprises more than two dozen big and small dams on over 30 tributaries connected with an intricate canal system.

"I am sure that China will pursue the project to meet its requirement. It has been discussed at several levels between the two countries." The issue had figured in the last two visits of the heads of state. The best way for India and China would be a cooperative mechanism," said Monoranjan Mohanty, China expert, Institute of China Studies.

Any person well aware of the geopolitics of South Asia must know how relevant is Brahmaputra for the biotic sustenance of the people in this subcontinent. It is not only the lifeline flowing across China, India and Bangladesh, but its flow holds together our greatest mangrove forest, The Sundervanas, which protects us from cyclone - tsunami like calamities. It is strange that the ruling Left front in West Bengal underplays the issue. The communists lead the front government here who were divided in many parties and factions as follow up of the 1962 war. The river is the lifeline for a vast majority of the people in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Bangladesh - most of them depend on the river for irrigating their agricultural fields, fishing and transportation of goods. Agriculture forms the backbone of the economies in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh with nearly 80 per cent of the 27 million people in the two states eking out a living through agriculture.

This project would definitely have cascading effect in the northeast of India and could lead to natural calamities. For South Asia and more particularly for India, the enormity of the scheme and its closeness to the Indian border cannot be ignored. It is not only the sheer size of the project, which has to be considered, but also the fact that, if accomplished, it will have ominous consequences for millions of people downstream. It is in this context that a panel discussion was organised by the Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, to shed some light on the political, social, economic, environmental fallout of such a project on India, Bangladesh besides the issue of livelihood of millions in these two countries.

China is claiming Arunachal Pradesh, rich in varied flora and fauna, is the home of a large number of tribes of different socio-economic and religious pattern. These are Buddhist tribes, Vaishnavite tribes and others with their own distinctive ways of life, living side by side in perfect communal harmony and peace. Studded with hills and valleys and comprising frontier divisions of Kameng, Tirap, Subansiri, Lohit and Siang, Arunachal is predominantly rural and pastoral. About 94 per cent of its total population of 6,31,839 live in 3,257 villages. About 62 per cent of its area is under forest cover. Government of India, in a diplomatic move, just emphasised that Arunachal is a non-separable part of Indian territory. But the leftists pose to be soft as they were in 1962.

My father Pulin Kumar Biswas, popularly known as Pulin Babu had been a communist leader who led the peasants’ uprise in Nainital Terai, Dhimri Block in 1958. In 1960, as a communist leader he visited riot torn Assam and worked to sustain communal harmony and helped the administration in relief and rescue operations. He was an all India refugee leader fighting for the citizenship, reservation, mother tongue, human and civil rights for East Bengal dalit refugees. He stayed in Kamrup, Gualpara, Nagao, karimpur and other riot hit areas. Later he sent his RMP brother, my uncle Dr Sudhir Biswas to the refugee remote colonies in Assam. My uncle expired in 1994 and father succumbed ailing and suffering from cancer in 2001.
Thus, when I got an opportunity to visit Assam back to back my visit in Tripura in December 2002, I went to Guahati during Baishakhi Bihu in January 2003. There I enjoyed Brahmaputra festival on the Brahmaputra beach. I was staying by riverside in the circuit house with Anil Sarkar, education, sc welfare, information and culture minister of Tripura, who was the chief guest in the festival and in his speech he declared that Bihu will be a compulsory subject in all Tripura schools. It was a rare occasion. We started the day with a visit to the riverside fish Market where big Chital fishes were being sold on large scale. Day and night, we were received with so many invitations full of delicious ahmia dishes. I had an opportunity to address poets, writers and intellectual in Guahati, just after my arrival as the flight was very late. I had to dash from Bardoloi Airport to the programme directly. I was acquainted with Bihu Guru Prafulla Gaagoi and Bihu Empress Mausumi Saikia in Neermahal Utsav in tripura and we met again. I was present in their Baishakhi Bihu Programme in Malaagon. Later, they came over to Kolkata with their team to perform in Keutia, the home of Lok Kavi Vijay Sarkar and in the Lokutsav held in Netaji Indoor Stadium in February, 2003.

I was lucky to visit Guahati and around during a Bihu festival and there were artist friends like Prafulla and Mausumi, well reputed in entire north east. It was a rare occasion for me to interact with ahmia nationality. Bihu is the most important festival of Assam; equally popular both among tribal and non-tribal population of the State. It is celebrated three times every year both by men and women. Of these three, Baisakh Bihu is of the greatest significance. It is observed during first week of the Indian New Year. The other two Kartika and Megha Bihu come in autumn equinox and winter solstice respectively. On these occasions, after early morning ablutions, the people visit each other exhausting sweets, gifts and good wishes; worship the cows and other cattle and then follows in the evening the seasons of dance and music in groups called the Husari. They collect in the open and begin at slow tempo in a circle. One of the participants sings the refrain and the rest follow him in a chorus. Gradually the tempo increases leading to a crescendo. The musical accompaniment includes the drum (dhol), the cymbals (tala), the bamboo clappers (tokka), the paupa (buffalo horn) and flutes.

In fact, being a part of nationality movement in uttaranchal, I supported full heartedly by the AGP AASU movement against foreigners. But my father who was a refugee leader, was against this and he was afraid that one day, all resettled refugees would be termed Bangladeshis and be driven out from India. We in Uttarakhand and UP, always had a very good relationship with the locals. Til this date, the locals all over India protect partition victims. Thus, I held the view that the Assamese people are quite justified to uphold the ahomima identity. As a himalayan state, we Uttarakhandies are well aware of the colonial attitude of New Delhi towards entire North East.

My Father was in direct contact with Mrs Indira Gandhi during her comeback trial in erly eighties. The Bengali refugees were staunch supporters of Mrs Gandhi for her role in the creation of Bangladesh, a homeland for Bengali the language and Bangla nationality. Thogh forcibly cut off from history and geography, the Bengali refugees were very happy for Indian intervention to end military pakistani rule in their erstwhile home. They supported Mrs Gandhi and her party until nineties. As a student leader I was against Emergency and was fighting against it. Thus, differences with my father deepened and at a point he openly abandoned me in 1977. I did not go home to fetch my books while I was appearing in BA final exams. Father was a committed refugee leader and knew that only Mrs Gandhi and congress would support refugees in North India. His lifelong personal relationship with leaders like ND Tiwari and KC Pant convinced him thus. But I was aware that Tiwari and Pant were using refugees as Vote Bank. My father called a refugee convention in Dineshpur, then under Nainital District and invited Narendra singh, then a minister in Up cabinet and other Congress leaders to discuss the situation arising as fall out of Assam Movement. I was just married. It was May, 1983. We had returned from Honeymoon. My wife Sabita was also there in the convention. Heated exchanges followed between Narendra Singh and all congress leaders as I
supported the Assma students. I was in Dhanbad then and we were fighting Press Bill introduced by congress government led by Dr Jagnnath Mishra, the CM Bihar. So I became very irritated and walked out of the convention with my supporters. Sabita hitched to come with me she hung there as her fther in law had sold two acre land to organize the convention to protect his people from future dangers. I did not care as I had seen his all activities of sacrices for refugee causes.

I was astonished to know about the undercurrents of brahmaputra. I remebered all those days. The days while my uncle returned to Nainital village with a radio set, on which the news of Indo- Sino War broke.

The north-east India, popularly known as the "Land of Seven Sisters", is characterized by simple and exotic tribals, lofty mountains, lush valleys, dense forests teeming with varied flora and fauna, fascinating scenery and pastoral life amidst isolated splendour. Ethnically, the area, very rich and varied in dance and music, presents a complex pattern of large tribal population. The multi-layered and intricate cultural design makes difficult if not impossible the classification and categorization of the hill and tribal folk comprising over seventy-five percent of the total population of the area.Assam, remote, exotic and an extravaganza of landscape scenery, lies in the extreme north-east corner of India. Assam is bounded in the north by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, in the east by Nagaland and Manipur, in the south by Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya, and in the west by Bangladesh and West Bengal. Drained by the mighty River Brahmaputra and a network of its tributaries, Assam presents a vast canvass of varied tropical flora and fauna including the last of that endangered species, the one horned Indian rhino, sprawling tea carpets, lofty hills, deep valleys and a simple but spectacular tribal life. Lying at the foothills of the Himalaya, the abode of gods, Assam is linked to the rest of India by an isthmus winding its way between Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Assam is a land where clouds float at your feet, hills emerge from its bosom and soar high like a chorus, and panorama changes with unbelievable frequency. It is here that one feels the freshness of the very first dawn of creation and has the ecstasy of almost touching the sweet dreams with his fingers. Far from the madding crowd, it is altogether another world, a walking reverie you are traveling through.

The Tibetans consider the area around the Great Bend, one of the last pristine regions of the world, the home of the Goddess Dorjee Pagmo, Tibet's Protecting Deity. They believe this site, locally known as Pemako, is the sacred realm often referred to in their scriptures: a last hidden Shangrila.

The massive diversion of the river to China's northwest would have even more devastating consequences. North India and Bangladesh would be starved of their life line. Nutrient-rich sediments that enrich the soil of these regions would be held back in the reservoir instead of reaching the river's delta. Millions would be affected. A water war could ensue.

Another aspect to be considered is once a project is on the drawing board in China, it has to be executed. Whatever the consequences, the leaders in Beijing do not like to lose face.

The scheme has three segments: the eastern, central and western routes. The third is the trickiest; it is the one which should make India and Bangladesh nervous. The southern part of the western route envisages the diversion of the Yarlung Tsangpo which will have an immense bearing on the lives of millions in the sub-continent. Originating from a glacier near Mount Kailash, it is the largest river on the Tibetan plateau and the highest on earth. It runs 2,057 kilometers in Tibet before flowing into India, where it becomes the Brahmaputra. One of its interesting characteristics is a sharp U turn (known as the Great Bend) near the Indian border. It has been discovered recently that the river’s gorge forms the longest and deepest canyon in the world. It is in the Great Bend that China is planning one of the most important projects of the diversion scheme. There are two parts: One is the construction of the world's largest hydroelectric plant on the Great Bend dwarfing all other similar projects (it will generate 40,000 megawatts, more than twice the electricity produced by the Three Gorges Dam); the second is the diversion of the waters of the Tsangpo which will
be pumped northward across hundreds of kilometers of mountainous region to China's northwestern provinces of Xinjiang and Gansu.

Panel of experts at the discussion included Mr. Claude Arpi, Writer and Expert on India-Tibet-China who has been following the Brahmaputra issue for several years; Prof. V Subramanian of the School of Environmental Sciences, JNU; Mr. Gopal Krishna, Convener, Water Watch and Mr. Himanshu Thakkar, Coordinator, South Asia Network of River Dams and People.

As compiled by Meenakshi Iyer, Friday, November 17, 2006 (New Delhi): Some of the grave consequences of blasting of the Himalayan terrain at the point where Brahmaputra makes a sharp downward bend towards India (The Great Bend), include:

- India and Bangladesh would be at the mercy of China for adequate release of water during the dry season, and for protection from floods during the rainy season
- Unpredictable impact on the geologically young Himalayan ranges and the adverse tilting of ecological balance.
- Precipitation in Assam and Bangladesh is very high (80 per cent) between June to September and low (20 per cent) during the remaining eight months.

It is likely that China could withhold water for power generation and irrigation during the dry season and release water during the flood season with catastrophic consequences for eastern South Asia.

- Nutrient-rich sediments that enrich the soil of these regions would be held back in the reservoir instead of reaching the river's delta.
- Possibility of earthquakes because of the impounding of large quantities of water in reservoirs in mountain valleys and also because The Great Bend is located in a highly earthquake prone area.
- China itself may face serious problems of water-logging if the waters of the Brahmaputra are blocked from flowing into the ocean.

wo of the most acute problems China faces today are food and water. These two issues are closely linked and, if not solved, are bound to have grave social and political consequences for the country. The leadership in Beijing has proclaimed 'China can feed itself in the next century,' but the fact that the problem is often discussed at the highest level of the Chinese hierarchy shows it is not solved. The new emperors are not sure where the solution lies or even if there is a solution.

A few years ago, Lester Brown, the famous agronomist, advanced a theory: With the growth in China's population (predicted to reach 1.6 billion in 2045) and the increase in industrial development, arable lands reduce rapidly while the needs of population increase simultaneously. With water becoming a rare commodity and agriculture needing more water to sustain production, China has a problem. Moreover, the blue gold is not equally distributed in the Middle Kingdom. Brown's World Watch Institute explains: 'Hydrologically, there are two Chinas -- the humid south, which includes the Yangtze River basin and everything south of it, and the north, which includes all the country north of the Yangtze basin. The south, with 700 million people, has one third of the nation's cropland and four fifths of its water. The north, with 550 million people, has two thirds of the cropland and one fifth of the water. The water per hectare of cropland in the north is one eighth that of the south.'

The fact that the Chinese government published a White Paper titled 'The Grain Issue in China' shows the issue's vital importance for Beijing's leadership.

This led Chinese experts to look around for water. The answer was not far. The Tibetan plateau is the principal watershed in Asia and the source of its...
10 major rivers, including the Brahmaputra (or Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet), the Sutlej and the Indus. About 90% of the Tibetan rivers’ runoff flows downstream to China, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The idea to divert the waters from the South to the North was born.

For South Asia and more particularly for India, the enormity of the scheme and its closeness to the Indian border cannot be ignored. It is not only the sheer size of the project which has to be considered, but the fact that, if accomplished, it will have ominous consequences for millions of people downstream. Ismail Serageldin, a former senior vice-president of the World Bank, once wrote: 'The next World War will be over water.' China’s green light for the project could indeed be considered a declaration of war by South Asia.

The project was first reported in Scientific American in June 1996. This article giving credence to the Chinese plans stated: 'Recently some Chinese engineers proposed diverting water into this arid area [Gobi Desert] from the mighty Brahmaputra River, which skirts China’s southern border before dipping into India and Bangladesh. Such a feat would be impossible with conventional methods, engineers stated at a meeting held last December at the Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics in Beijing. But they added, "we can certainly accomplish this project” with nuclear explosives.'

The Journal continued: 'This statement is just one of the many lately in which Chinese technologists and officials have touted the potential of nuclear blasts for carrying out non-military goals.'

One of the reasons for China's refusal to ratify the CTBT could be the desire to keep open the option of experimenting with what is called PNE (Peaceful Nuclear Explosion).

In January 1998, the German television channel ZDF presented a feature on the Yarlung Tsangpo project in a program titled Die Welt [The World]. Its chief planner Professor Chen Chuanyu described the plan to drill a 15 km (9.3 miles) tunnel through the Himalayas to divert the water before the U turn and direct it to the other end of the bend. This would shorten the approximately 3,000 meters altitude drop, from 200 km to just 15 km. He explained that the hydropower potential could be used to pump water to Northwest China over 800 km away.

An complicating aspect is that this area had never been visited by outsiders. The difficult access to this unexplored region must have been one of the greatest obstacles for the engineers in Beijing. At the end of the 1990s, the Chinese government decided to permit foreigners to explore the Grand Canyon. A National Geographic expedition, with ultra sophisticated materials and highly professional rafters, made the first discoveries. The opening of this area to adventure tourism was certainly the first step to find an approach route to the dam site.

In recent years, the Chinese have been more discreet about the project although a few reports have continued to come in. The correspondent of The Telegraph in Beijing wrote in October 2000: 'Chinese leaders are drawing up plans to use nuclear explosions, in breach of the international test-ban treaty, to blast a tunnel through the Himalayas for the world's biggest hydroelectric plant.'

The construction of this multi-billion dollar project is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2009. The consequences of a huge storage dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo and the diversion of the waters to northwestern China are multiple and far reaching for Tibet, India and Bangladesh. Most importantly, this project represents a direct threat to the people living downstream. Let us first look at the dam.

India and Bangladesh would be at the mercy of China for adequate release of water during the dry season, and for protection from floods during the rainy season. India knows from its internal problems how difficult it is to
solve a water dispute. When it comes to a transboundary question (where
the boundary is not even agreed upon), it seems practically impossible to
find a workable understanding. Precipitation in North India (particularly
Assam) and Bangladesh is very high (80%) during the four monsoon
months (between June to September) and low (20%) during the remaining
eight months. China, for her own interests, could withhold water for power
generation and irrigation during the dry season and release water during
the flood season with catastrophic consequences for eastern South Asia.

An event in June 2000 could be a small illustration of what may happen on
a much bigger scale if the Tsangpo project is completed. At that time, the
breach of a natural dam in Tibet led to severe floods and left over a
hundred people dead or missing in Arunachal Pradesh. Obviously areas
downstream in Arunachal or Assam are extremely vulnerable to what takes
place upstream in Tibet.

Iftikhar Gilani wrote in his article, `China’s move to divert Tibetan rivers
upsets India's plan (TDT)', published in `THE DAILY TIMES', 4 November
2003:

NEW DELHI: China’s move to divert Tibetan rivers has upset India’s
grandiose plans of interlinking its rivers. Experts now believe that China’s
not raking up its claims on eastern states of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh
during Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's recent Beijing visit could be a
diplomatic diversion to hide a far more serious matter for India.

India has planned to link 30 rivers at a cost of Rs 5,600 billion by 2012. A
task force, headed by former minister Suresh Prabhu has already completed
the feasibility report on six links.

The Tibetan plateau is the principal watershed in Asia and the source of
its 10 major rivers, including the Brahmaputra (or Yarlung Tsangpo
in Tibet), the Sutlej and the Indus. About 90 per cent of the Tibetan rivers’
flows downstream to India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. India’s
major concerns are the diversion of the Brahmaputra, which will =
make Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s mega project
redundant. Coinciding with Mr Vajpayee’s visit, a team of experts was
studying to construct a major hydropower project on the Brahmaputra River
in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Mr Vajpayee’s critics here draw parallels between his visit to Lahore in 1999
and to Beijing in 2003. "It is almost the same, when Mr Vajpayee was
signing the Lahore Declaration, Pakistanis were digging trenches in Kargil.
Now, when he was dancing in Beijing over China’s reportedly =
giving up its claim on Sikkim, Chinese were drawing plans to put India in
the doldrums," they say. Experts argue China’s move not only threatened
the environment but also national security. If Beijing goes ahead with the
Brahmaputra project, it would practically mean a declaration of war against
India, they believe.

Originating from a glacier near Kailash, the Brahmaputra is the largest river
on the Tibetan plateau and the highest on earth. It runs 2,057 kilometres in
Tibet before flowing into India. It has been discovered recently that the
river’s gorge forms the longest and the deepest canyon =
in the world. China plans to construct the world’s largest hydroelectric
plant at the Great Bend to generate 40,000 megawatts. Also the diverted
water will be pumped northward across hundreds of kilometres of
mountainous region to China’s arid northwestern provinces, Xinjiang
and Gansu (Gobi desert).

NK Pant writes in `TRAGEDY OF TIBET’:

One wonders why has the world at large been a mute witness to the
ruthless butchery of Tibet’s docile population at the hands of the Chinese
Communists for so long? Why was the extreme agony and
profound misfortune of innocent inhabitants of the Shangri-La sidelined when =

Mao’s monstrous red army overran the tranquil land in 1950 forcing
its spiritual and temporal ruler Dalai Lama and thousands of his subjects to flee the country and take shelter in friendly India? Why did the myopic leadership in New Delhi at that time quietly acquiesced to Beijing's military assault on the unique serenity of the Himalayan plateau justifiably called roof of the world? History will perhaps have to provide difficult answers to the foregoing questions when the future generations come across the description in their history books telling them that once upon a time in not so distant past, there was a country called Tibet inhabited by meek and mild people.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) now views the culturally and historically distinct region as integral part of the Communist country. Ever since the Communist China brutally occupied Tibet, it has vigorously formulated and implemented a cleverly visualized plan of swamping the Tibetan culture with the very aim of obliterating its identity. The PRC has left no stone unturned during its more than half a century's iron-fisted rule, in forcing repressive and tyrant local governments on the hapless people and fostering grave human rights climate in the region. It is now learnt that Tibetans will become a minority in their own land of birth in the next few years as swarms of ethnic Chinese immigrants from the mainland move in to take part in a new official drive to develop the region's economy. A Chinese official was recently quoted as saying that infusion of investment and influx of skilled labour to Lhasa and elsewhere will bring unprecedented prosperity and stability to the remote Himalayan region.

According to Pant, India, in fact, committed a grave historical blunder in 1950 when the triumphant red army menacingly marched into Lhasa in 1950. Strangely, British India had maintained military outposts in Tibet but the rulers of free India clearly lacking strategic vision and basking under the false glow of non-alignment decided to dismantle them in 1954. New Delhi should have opposed tooth and nail these belligerent developments in its northern Himalayan neighbourhood but it quietly bowed to Beijing's military occupation of Tibet recognizing the region as Chinese territory. For this grave lapse, we had to pay a heavy price as the PRC followed the invasion of Tibet by laying claims to large chunks of Indian territory and finally in 1962, massive columns of red army from their bases in Tibet launched an all-out attack on our Himalayan borders which were till then considered impregnable. The wily communists now donning business suits, thus invented a complicated border problem with India and till date continue to evade its settlement despite holding numerous meetings with Indian External Affairs Ministry officials during the last couple of years.

"Asia's Coming Water Wars"

Water is increasingly emerging as a scarce commodity, fueled by population pressures, intensive irrigation, and erratic weather patterns brought on by global warming. According to the International Water Management Institute, by 2025 one-third of the world's population will lack access to water. Developing countries bear the brunt of water shortages given the lack of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation in these states, which has been exacerbated by rapid development, population pressures and significant rural-to-urban migration. Developing countries are also the most likely to face water-related conflict, given the lack of cooperative management mechanisms between developing states on managing shared water resources.

In the 21st century, however, Asia may emerge as the new focal point of water-related conflict given the rapid growth of the region, which is likely to put pressure on water resources, coupled with the concentration of long-standing internal and inter-state tensions, which can act as a spark for turning water-related disputes into full-scale conflicts. South Asia's water tensions include the Indo-Pakistan dispute over the Wular Barrage, Indo-Bangladesh water dispute over the Farakka Barrage and the Indo-Nepal dispute over the Mahakali River Treaty.

Furthermore, all three regions are plagued by long-standing historical animosities and internal instabilities and water disputes serve to focus these tensions. The fact that these river systems run through multiple countries -- notably the Aral Sea, Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Mekong Rivers are...
each shared by at least five states -- creates the potential for regional conflict over water.

Beijing has been slow in sharing information on its river-diverting projects along the Upper Mekong Basin. While China claims to support multilateralism, it has refused to join the four-country Mekong River Commission (M.R.C.) comprising Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, although both Myanmar and China are Dialogue Partners. The M.R.C. was established in 1995 as the successor to the 1957 Mekong Committee (Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Meko