

Press Release, Mumbai, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013

## **INDIA-BANGLADESH ROUNDTABLE CALLS FOR RESTRUCTURING OF THE JOINT RIVERS COMMISSION**

An India Bangladesh Round table on Blue Peace in the Eastern Himalayas was held in Mumbai on 1-2 July 2013. It was convened by the Strategic Foresight Group and attended by 25 senior diplomats, Members of Parliament, former ministers and experts from India and Bangladesh.

The roundtable was co-chaired by Ambassador Tariq Karim, Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi and Prof Muchkund Dubey, former Foreign Secretary of India. The participants included Dr Gowher Rizvi, Chief Advisor to Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Ambassador Sabihuddin Ahmed, Advisor to the Chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, former Foreign Minister and leader of Jatiya Party-Ershad. The Indian participants included BJP Leaders Anil Dave, former Minister Dr Sanjay Paswan and Leader of West Bengal BJP Tatagatha Roy, Congress MP Sanjay Nirupam and Rajan Medhekar, former Head of National Security Guards.

The roundtable took place at a time when relations between India and Bangladesh are improving, particularly since the visit of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India in 2010 and the Indian Prime Minister to Bangladesh in 2011. There are unresolved issues with regards to trans-boundary water resources which need to be addressed urgently and earnestly in the spirit of good faith and cooperation that currently exists between the two countries.

It is necessary and possible to finalize the Teesta river agreement, bearing in mind the importance of environmental flows for sustenance of the river and ecological security of the basin. However, in the long run it is not feasible to negotiate a separate agreement for each of the 54 trans-boundary rivers between India and Bangladesh. It is necessary to move towards integrated collaborative and sustainable management of all shared rivers between the two countries. It is necessary to apply the principles of Integrated Water Resource Management to the entire Ganges-Brahmaputra basin shared by India and Bangladesh.

Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President of Strategic Foresight Group said, “The roundtable emphasized the importance of creating robust and sustainable institutions for collaborative water management which can withstand short term political dynamics. In this context, the current functioning of the Joint Rivers Commission is extremely inadequate as there are in effect two parallel national river commissions, instead of one joint commission. It is necessary to establish an India Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission headed by a prominent Indian or Bangladeshi leader on an alternative basis.” The proposed Commission should have a team comprising of nationals from both the countries who can undertake necessary activities for sustainable management of shared water resources in a joint and collaborative manner. It is also important for the Joint Rivers Commission to have an arbitration clause with a well defined mechanism to resolve differences and conflict of interest.

Considering that many of the rivers shared by India and Bangladesh originate from third countries, it is also important to have a gradual multilateral approach towards including third countries in the process of water cooperation. The roundtable welcomed the trilateral talks between India, Bangladesh and Bhutan and the possibility of similar talks between India, Bangladesh and Nepal in the future. In the long term it would be necessary to explore ways of cooperation between all countries in the Eastern Himalayan river systems.

The roundtable emphasized the importance of taking into account the impact of climate change on water resources in the river basins shared by India and Bangladesh. As climate change can influence floods, droughts, sea level, rainfall and salinity, any long term planning for the sustainable management of water resources must take into account the potential impact of climatic and environmental factors.

Any effort for sustainable management for water resources in trans-boundary resources would only be meaningful if there is also efficient utilization and quality control of resources within the countries. Therefore the roundtable emphasized the significance of sound water governance and pollution control in domestic and international waters alike.

The participants in the roundtable were optimistic about the prospects of India and Bangladesh for sustainable management of water resources because of the new trends in cooperation for conservation and governance of natural resources. The two countries have already agreed on a programme of collaboration for preserving the ecology of Sunderbans, and particularly replenishing the fresh water supply to the area. There is also an agreement for joint Environmental Impact Assessment and sharing of information with regards to the Tipaimukh project. More such agreements are under discussion.

With this existing spirit of cooperation, it should be possible to construct sustainable institutions for cooperation such as the reinvention and restructuring of Joint Rivers Commission. Moreover, it will be appropriate to explore how water cooperation can be used as an instrument of broader economic cooperation by increasing connectivity, harnessing the energy potential, exploring eco tourism and other innovative commercial activities for improving livelihood conditions of the people in the basin. The roundtable concluded with confidence in the prospects of bilateral cooperation between India and Bangladesh driven by cooperation in shared water resources achieving a momentum with support from all political forces and other stakeholders in the two countries.

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The list of participants in the roundtable is attached.

## BANGLADESH:

- Mr. Tariq Karim, High Commissioner of Bangladesh in New Delhi and Minister of State
- Dr Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Advisor to Prime Minister of Bangladesh
- Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh (Jatiya Party-Ershad)
- Ambassador Sabihuddin Ahmed, Advisor to the Chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party
- Ambassador F. A. Shamim Ahmed, Founder Director at the Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies (CFAS)
- Ambassador Humayun Kabir, Vice President of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
- Mr. Mohammad Shafiqul Karim, former Bureau Chief in Delhi for Bangladesh Sangsbad Sangstha (BSS)
- Dr. Zaidi Sattar, Chairman, Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh
- Dr. Mohammad Rezaur Rahman, Professor, Institute of Water and Flood Management at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
- Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor of International Relations and Director, Centre for Genocide Studies at the University of Dhaka University of Dhaka
- Air Cdre (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, Registrar, BRAC University

## INDIA:

- Prof. Muchkund Dubey, former Foreign Secretary of India
- Shri. Anil Madhav Dave, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Bharatiya Janata Party
- Mr. Sanjay Nirupam, Member of Parliament, Congress Party
- Dr. Sanjay Paswan, former Minister of State for Human Resources and Chairman of Bharatiya Janata Party's Scheduled Caste Cell
- Mr. Tathagata Roy, former President of West Bengal BJP State Committee, Member of National Executive, Bharatiya Janata Party
- Ambassador Deb Mukharji, former Indian Ambassador to Bangladesh



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- Dr. Sreeradha Datta, Director, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies
- Mr. D. Sivanandan, former Director General of Police, Maharashtra
- Mr. Rajan Medhekar, former Director General of the National Security Guard
- Mr. Kumar Ketkar, Chief Editor of Dainik Divya Marathi and Leading Commentator on National and International Politics
- Dr. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay, Advisor to International Union for Conservation of Nature for the Ecosystem for Life project and Advisor to Tufts University on Water Diplomacy
- Dr. Sanjay Bhardwaj, Assistant Professor for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University
- Mr. Sunil Chavan, Economist

#### Strategic Foresight Group

- Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President
- Ms Ilmas Futehally, Executive Director
- Mr Shrikant Menjoge, Senior Advisor
- Ms. Anumita Raj, Senior Programme Manager
- Ms. Aneesha Kumar, Research Analyst
- Ms. Diana Philip, Research Analyst
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