



**International Workshop Report
Benefits of Cooperation in the Himalayan River Basin Countries**

Singapore, 2-3 December, 2010

Singapore Suggestions



Strategic Foresight Group (SFG) and the S Rajaratnam School for International Studies (RSIS) organized the Third International Workshop on Benefits of Cooperation in the Himalayan River Basins in Singapore on 2-3 December 2010. The Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies was the co-host, on behalf of RSIS at the Nanyang Technology University of Singapore. This is part of a long term process to build confidence and cooperation between countries that make up the central and eastern Himalayan River Basins.

This process is supported by the John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation, USA.

30 distinguished policy makers and scholars from India, Bangladesh, China and Nepal, including former ministers of Water Resources of India, Bangladesh and Nepal, as well as the President of the International Water Resources Association from China participated in the workshop. Mr. Tan Gee Paw, Chairman of the Public Utilities Board of Singapore, delivered the Opening Address. Mr. Vijay Darda, Member of Parliament from India and Chairman of Lokmat Group of Newspapers delivered the Closing Address.

The workshop was based on the SFG report *The Himalayan Challenge: Water Security in Emerging Asia*, which had been launched at Singapore International Water Week in June 2010 and received well by almost 100 newspapers and websites.



Former Water Ministers of India, Nepal and Bangladesh: Sompal, Dipak Gyawali and Hafiz Uddin Ahmad

The workshop emphasised the need to take a long term and futuristic view while identifying the contours of cooperation in the Himalayan River Basins. It recommended a holistic perspective of water resources, taking into consideration rivers, tributaries and ground water. The workshop underlined that regional cooperation should be an instrument to promote human development and security, and not an activity to be pursued for its own sake. Even though the countries in the region have achieved high GDP growth rates for pockets of population, the challenge of poverty remains to be addressed for large segments of people. Water stress can accentuate poverty and create pressures for

migration, internal strife, and conflict between the countries. Thus, water is at the core of security in Asia and therefore cooperation in the management of water resources has to be at the core of peace in the region. However, the workshop suggested that efforts for enhancing security and development in Asia, using water as a mechanism for confidence building, must be very concrete and realistic. In this spirit, participants in the workshop made several specific suggestions for the policy community and the civil society.



Tan Gee Paw, Chairman, Public Utilities Board of Singapore, with ANM Muniruzzman of Bangladesh

Modern Management

Regional cooperation in water resources would be possible if riparian countries take due responsibility for efficient sector management within their respective countries. This would include appropriate pricing policies, conservation, demand management, mitigation of conveyance losses. If each country takes responsibility for reducing scarcity of resources for its own population, cooperation between riparian countries is possible.



Prof Jun Xia, President of International Water Resources Association ; Prof He Daming of Asian International Rivers Centre and Ilmas Futehally

Enabling Technologies

Technology can be an enabler to resolve social problems and pre-empt conflicts. Research and development in water related technologies in the last 10 years has been unprecedented as compared to the previous 100 years. New technologies for treating used water and desalination of saline and brackish water offer tremendous potential. The price of desalinated water is declining gradually. The advent of nanotechnology is expected to have a substantial impact on both desalination and used water processing. Singapore is in the lead to take advantage of emerging technologies and is therefore in a position to manage its relationship with Malaysia in a harmonious way. The Himalayan river basin countries can also use water technology to solve social problems.



**Ambassador Tariq Karim of
Bangladesh and Vice Chancellor
Mahendra Lama of Sikkim University**

**Vijay Darda, Member of Parliament
and Chairman of Lokmat Group of
India, with Prof Mely Caballero
Anthony, Head of the Centre for Non
Traditional Security of RSIS,
Singapore**



Local Initiatives

Local initiatives for conservation and changing of cropping patterns can transform water scarce areas into water surplus zones. There are several examples of community leaders coming together to shift cropping patterns from high water intensity crops, such as rice and sugar cane, to less water intensive and better paying cash crops. Check dams, rain water harvesting, community ponds are some of the examples of small and low cost local initiatives. Local communities can also promote security between countries by creating friendly relations and information exchange at the local level in border areas. In light of tremendous damage suffered by the people of India and Nepal following the flooding of the Kosi river, the importance of information exchange and confidence building by communities in the border villages is particularly relevant.



Dileep Padgaonkar and Kumar Ketkar, leading Indian editors

Role of Educational Institutions

Educational exchanges between universities in the region can go a long way to clear misunderstanding and enable students to build a regional rather than nationalistic perspective on water and environmental issues. Some universities in South West China have a significant proportion of their student body constituted by nationals of neighbouring countries such as India, Nepal and Burma. Universities and educational institutions can also promote short term student exchange, cross fertilisation of ideas between faculty and similar initiatives. They can also involve students in various efforts at the local level. Some participants gave examples of students in their educational institutions contributing a certain number of hours every week, amounting to several million man hours per year together or planning hundreds of thousands of trees to help environmental sustainability.

Inter-disciplinary Research

As water security covers a number of interconnected areas, such as hydrology, geology, geography, social sciences, security it is necessary to bring together different disciplines to be able to make accurate and realistic projections for the future of water courses. Joint research projects between scientists from India, Bangladesh, China and Nepal are required. Joint mountaineering expeditions to glaciers that are the common source of rivers need to be undertaken with a sense of urgency. So far, they have been planned, but not undertaken. Remote sensing, flood control, flow modelling are some of the areas where interdisciplinary research is required. It is necessary to reduce scientific uncertainties with satellite based studies.

Hydro-electricity

Cooperation in hydroelectricity is a promising area. It is necessary to set up a working group from experts from 4 countries to examine this area further to look at economic viability, market realities, transmission cost, and a realistic cost benefit analysis.

Regional Convention

India and China, the two large countries, in the Himalayan region have not signed and are not expected to sign the UN Convention on Water Courses of 1997. There have been further developments in the international water law since then. In the absence of these two countries being signatories to the 1997 Convention, there is effectively no international water law in the Himalayan River countries. It is therefore necessary to explore a regional protocol or agreement which is specifically catered to the needs of the riparian countries of the Himalayan Rivers. As the governments are not expected to enter into any negotiations for a regional protocol, social scientists and legal experts from the concerned countries can form an independent task force to prepare the framework of such a Regional Convention. They should begin this effort by seeking consensus on principles of cooperation, and particularly the principle of fairness as accepted by all.



Kwa Chong Guan of RSIS with Sunil Karve, Vice Chairman of MET Group of Colleges of India

Himalayan Rivers Commission

The SFG report *The Himalayan Challenge* has proposed the Himalayan River Commission. It is a long term vision. In the short term, it is necessary for independent experts to come together to prepare groundwork for such a body. It is particularly necessary for them to consider how to establish a dispute resolution mechanism.



Dr Afsarul Qader of BEI and Dr Dwarika Dhungel of Tanka Prasad Acharya Memorial Foundation, Nepal

Political Forum

In order to enhance regional security and cooperation, it is essential to have political ownership. Members of legislative bodies, office bearers of political parties, former ministers who continue to participate in political processes are a link between people and the state. They can encourage the state apparatus for certain policies on the one hand and mobilise the public opinion on the other. It is necessary to have better understanding between political representatives and leaders of the four countries in the form of a forum, which is especially dedicated to the water challenge. It can be in the form of an inter-parliamentary forum on water resources or a broader platform that brings politicians together to discuss the water issue and collaborative solutions in order to enhance overall security of the region.

Experience from Southeast Asia

The workshop was hosted in Singapore since it was felt that the Himalayan countries can benefit from some of the best practices and experiences in Southeast Asia. The experience of Singapore Public Utilities Board in using modern management and emerging technologies was shared by the chairman, as noted earlier. The Southeast Asian countries have a practice where one Head of State decides to be a champion of a particular cause and mobilises his colleagues, other Heads of States and Governments, around it. Once government leaders are committed, they harness the strength of the state to bring about policy change. There are also examples of cross-border cooperation outside the state structure. Several universities in the Mekong Basin engage in scientific exchange and cooperation through concrete programmes and networks. The Himalayan River Basin countries can benefit from these experiences.

PARTICIPANTS

Guest of Honour:

- Mr. Tan Gee Paw, Chairman, Public Utilities Board of Singapore

Workshop Participants

- Mr. Abhijit Vasant Ghorpade, Assistant Editor of Loksatta, Indian Express Group, India
- Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, President, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, Bangladesh
- Professor Bibek Debroy, Research Professor, Centre for Policy Research, India
- Dr. Bishnu Bhandari, Wetlands Specialist, ICIMOD, Nepal
- Professor He Daming, Director, Asian International Rivers Center, Yunnan University, China
- Mr. Dileep Padgaonkar, Consulting Editor, The Times of India, India
- Mr. Dipak Gyawali, Former Minister of Water Resources, Nepal
- Mr. Dwarika N Dhungel, Governing Board Member, Tanka Prasad Acharya Memorial Foundation, Nepal
- Mr. Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, Former Minister of Water Resources, Bangladesh
- Mr. Jun Xia, President, International Water Resources Association, China
- Mr. Kumar Ketkar, Editor of Loksatta, Indian Express Group, India
- Dr. Afsarul Qader, Vice President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, Bangladesh
- Professor Mahendra Lama, Founding Vice Chancellor, University of Sikkim, India
- Mr. Md Shafiqul Karim, Bureau Chief and Senior Editor, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, National News Agency, Bangladesh
- Mr. Sompal, Former Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Water Resources, India
- Mr. Sunil Karve, Founding Trustee and Vice Chairman, Mumbai Education Trust, India
- Ambassador Tariq Karim, Senior Ambassador, Bangladesh
- Mr. Vijay Darda, Member of Parliament, Chairman of Lokmat Group, India

RSIS Singapore

- Mr. Kwa Chong Guan, Head of External Programmes
- Ms. Mely Caballero-Anthony, Associate Professor, Head of Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies
- Mr. Mushahid Ali, Senior Fellow
- Mr. Yang Razali Kassim, Senior Fellow
- Dr. Arpita Mathur, Visiting Fellow

Strategic Foresight Group

- Mr. Sundeep Waslekar, President
- Ms. Ilmas Futehally, Executive Director

Workshop Coordinators (*Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*)

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- Ms. Li Hongyan, Associate Research Fellow
- Ms. Irene A. Kuntjorom Associate Research Fellow
- Ms. Josephine Ng, Administrative Officer
- Mr. Pau Khan Khup Hangzo, Associate Research Fellow
- Mr. Steven Poh, Multimedia Webmaster