Bangladesh PM Visit

Teesta issue: What is it?

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- Sharing the waters of the Teesta river, which originates in the Himalayas and flows through Sikkim and West Bengal to merge with the Brahmaputra in Assam and Jamuna in Bangladesh, is the most contentious issue between two friendly neighbours.
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- The river covers nearly the entire floodplains of Sikkim, while draining 2,800 sq km of Bangladesh.
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- For West Bengal, Teesta is equally important, considered **the lifeline of half-a-dozen districts in North Bengal.**
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- Bangladesh has sought an “equitable” distribution of Teesta waters, on the lines of the Ganga Water Treaty of 1996, but to no avail.
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- Following a half-hearted deal in 1983, when nearly equal division of water was proposed, the countries hit a roadblock. Talks resumed after the Awami League returned to power in 2008.
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- As both countries are gearing up for another general election, Teesta remains an unfinished project. And one of the key stakeholders **West Bengal Chief Minister is yet to endorse the deal**.
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- The West Bengal CM opposed an arrangement in 2011, by which India would get 42.5% and Bangladesh 37.5% of the water during the lean season, and the plan was shelved.
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Why does it matter?

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- India witnessed a **surge in insurgency in the northeast** during the rule of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) from 2001.
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- Bangladesh allegedly sheltered insurgents engaged in anti-India activities, and nearly all the Home Ministry-level talks ended without agreement, and India had to **increase the security budget** for the northeast.
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- In a couple of years of assuming office in 2008, the Awami League targeted insurgent camps and handed over the rebels to India.
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- But in 2017, the Awami League is on a sticky wicket. It will be facing one of its toughest elections in two years and **water-sharing will be one of the key issues.**
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What next?

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- The answer is embedded in the **construction of giant artificial reservoirs,** where the monsoon water can be stored for the lean season.
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- The reservoirs need to be built in India as the country has some mountain-induced sites favourable to hosting dams with reservoirs, unlike Bangladesh.
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- West Bengal CM, however, cannot be sidestepped as water is a State subject.
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22 pacts signed:

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- To **strengthen bilateral partnership** between both countries.
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- The 22 pacts were signed on a wide range of bilateral relations including energy, defence cooperation and infrastructure.
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- India announced a **$4.5 billion credit line** to Bangladesh for projects in priority sector and an additional $500 million for defence procurement.
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- India will also **finance diesel oil pipeline** from Numaligarh-Parbatipur wherein Indian companies will enter into a long-term agreement for supply of high-speed diesel.
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- The two leaders jointly inaugurated a bus service, a new passenger train service and a new rail link for running goods trains.
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- Bangladeshi PM called for cooperation in the South Asian region and talked about **better border connectivity** between India and Bangladesh.
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- She emphasized that regional cooperation is very, very important for development in south Asia and also wanted to make our borders free from criminal activity.
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The six-point agenda:

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- **To boost trade and investment** between both the neighbouring nations.
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- It included setting up a Joint Task Force (JTF) on Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers and another JTF to **promote Indian investments in Bangladesh** in the focus areas of infrastructure, education, healthcare, power and tourism.
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- The agenda also included connectivity initiatives for expansion of sub-regional cooperation among **BBIN** (Bhutan-Bangladesh- India-Nepal) countries to cover links through road, rail, rivers, sea, transmission lines, petroleum pipelines and digital.
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- It included pursuing joint investments and a road-map for **cooperation in the Bay of Bengal** in exploration of hydrocarbons, marine resources, deep sea fishing, disaster management, etc.,
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- It also included collaboration in **knowledge sharing** to facilitate innovation and research and forming a partnership on skill development.
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Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

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