Chinese Involvement in Teesta River

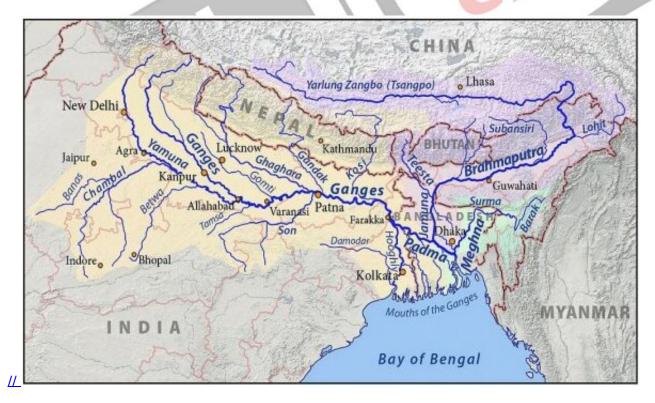
Why in News

Bangladesh is likely to receive **an almost USD 1 billion loan from China** for a comprehensive management and restoration **project on the Teesta river.**

 <u>The Teesta river water conflict</u> is one of the most contentious issues between <u>India and</u> <u>Bangladesh</u> and the discussion comes amidst the ongoing <u>India-China standoff</u> in Ladakh.

Teesta River

- It is a tributary of the Brahmaputra (known as Jamuna in Bangladesh), flowing through India and Bangladesh.
- Origin: In the Himalayas near Chunthang, Sikkim and flows to the south through West Bengal before entering Bangladesh.
- **Drainage:** It covers nearly the entire floodplains of Sikkim while draining 2,800 sq km of Bangladesh. For West Bengal, it is the lifeline of half-a-dozen districts in North Bengal.
- Latest Development: In March 2020, the <u>Border Roads Organisation</u> (BRO) opened a 360 feet long bailey suspension bridge over Teesta river in Munshithang, Sikkim.



Key Points

- About the Project: The management and restoration project is aimed at managing the river basin efficiently, controlling floods and tackling the water crisis in Bangladesh in summers.
- India-Bangladesh Teesta Dispute:
 - Bangladesh sought a **fair and equitable distribution of Teesta waters** from India, on the lines of the **Ganga Water Treaty 1996.**
 - The treaty is an **agreement to share surface waters at the Farakka Barrage** near their mutual border.
 - In **2015**, the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Dhaka **generated expectations** to take forward the issue but it **still remains unresolved**.
 - In India, individual states have significant influence over transboundary agreements, impeding the policymaking process.
 - West Bengal is one of the key stakeholders of the Teesta agreement and is yet to endorse the deal.

Bangladesh-China Relations

- China is the biggest trading partner of Bangladesh and is the foremost source of imports with the trade heavily favouring China.
 - In 2019, the trade between the two countries was USD 18 billion.
- China <u>declared zero duty</u> on 97% of imports from Bangladesh recently and the move has been widely welcomed in Bangladesh.
 - The concession comes from China's duty-free, quota-free programme for the least developed countries.
- China has promised around USD 30 billion worth of financial assistance to Bangladesh.
- China is the biggest arms supplier to Bangladesh which has been a matter of legacy, strengthening the defence ties.
 - After the <u>liberation of Bangladesh in 1971</u>, officers of the Pakistan Army joined the Bangladesh Army and preferred Chinese weapons because they were well-versed with them.
 - As a result, **Bangladesh forces are equipped with Chinese arms** including tanks, missile launchers, fighter aircraft and several weapons systems.

India-Bangladesh Relations

- Both countries enjoy a robust relationship with each other carefully cultivated since 2008, especially with the Sheikh Hasina government.
- Bangladesh's crackdown against anti-India outfits has helped the Indian government maintain peace in the eastern and Northeast states.
- Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and the economic and development partnership has benefitted it.
 - In 2018-19, India's exports and imports with Bangladesh stood at USD 9.21 billion and USD 1.04 billion respectively.
- India also grants 15 to 20 lakh visas every year to Bangladesh nationals for medical treatment, tourism, work and just entertainment.
- India has provided developmental assistance worth USD 10 billion, making Bangladesh the largest recipient of India's total of USD 30 billion aid globally.
- For India, Bangladesh has been a key partner in the <u>Neighbourhood First</u> Policy.
- Both have cooperated on <u>pandemic</u>-related moves and India has provided medical aid to

Bangladesh.

- Bangladesh supported India's call for a regional (<u>SAARC</u>) <u>emergency fund</u> for fighting <u>Covid-19</u> and declared a contribution of USD 1.5 million in March 2020.
- Bangladesh is **ready to collaborate in the** <u>development of a Covid-19 vaccine</u>, including its trial and looks forward to the early and affordable availability of the vaccine.
- The first trial run for trans-shipment of Indian cargo through Bangladesh to Northeast states under a pact on the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports took place in July 2020.
- However, the proposed countrywide <u>National Register of Citizens</u> (NRC) and the <u>Citizenship</u> <u>Amendment Act (CAA) 2019</u> have irritated the relations.
 - Bangladesh has expressed reservations about CAA and has held it unnecessary.
- Bangladesh has expressed concerns at the rise in killings at the Indo-Bangladesh border by the <u>Border Security Force</u> (BSF).
- Indian Foreign Secretary has recently visited Dhaka to discuss "security-related issues of mutual interest" while trying to address the potential irritant issues.
 - There was an agreement on **timely implementation of projects** and greater attention to development projects in Bangladesh under the **Indian Lines of Credit.**
 - Bangladesh has requested to reopen travel through **Benapole-Petrapole land port** which has been halted by the West Bengal government in the wake of the pandemic.

Way Forward

- In the wake of the Ladakh standoff, India needs to become even more sensitive to Chinese defence inroads into Bangladesh.
- The Teesta project is important and urgent from India's point of view, so it is crucial to solve it as soon as possible.
- India has to implement all its assurances in a time-bound manner otherwise the latent anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh threatens to damage the friendly ties.

Source: IE

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