

# India's Power Dominance In The Dynamics Of Transboundary Water Management Between India And Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

*This study employs the theory of political realism and the concept of hydropolitics to analyze the dynamics of transboundary water regulation between India and Bangladesh, with a primary focus on two strategic rivers, the Ganges and the Teesta. These rivers not only significantly contribute to tensions between the two countries but also serve as crucial elements in fostering cooperation. India acts as a regional hegemon due to its geographical, military, and economic advantages, granting it structural superiority in controlling water resources on which Bangladesh heavily depends for survival. This approach reflects the characteristics of a hegemonic state as proposed by Mearsheimer, wherein the dominance over strategic resource supplies becomes a key instrument for maintaining regional dominance. Moreover, India's hegemony is not solely exercised through central government policies but is also reinforced by domestic dynamics in states such as West Bengal, further complicating bilateral negotiations, particularly in the Teesta River dispute. On the other hand, Bangladesh, as a downstream country, faces major challenges due to its dependency on water supplies from India. This dependency contributes to food insecurity, climate-induced migration, and economic instability. This study adopts a qualitative method with a historical case study approach, grounded in the theories of realism and hydropolitics. The findings indicate that transboundary water regulation is not merely a technical issue, but rather a contest of power involving political interests, power rivalry, and survival strategies of states within an anarchic international system.*

*Keywords : India, Bangladesh, Realism, Power, Transboundary waters.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The South Asian region faces complex dynamics between water management in transboundary rivers, population density, and environmental vulnerability challenges. However, the primary challenge of water management in transboundary rivers in South Asia derives from India's policy in bilateral relations with its neighbors [12]. One of the dynamics of India's bilateral relations with Bangladesh is related to the regulation of the Ganges River, which has been the subject of a long-standing dispute. Beginning in 1975, Bangladesh agreed to India's actions to draw water to irrigate the Farakka Dam. However, India later violated the agreement. This has resulted in water scarcity in Bangladesh and an escalation in the frequency of flood incidents due to India's actions [21]. India has asserted that the water diversion measure is essential for safeguarding the population surrounding West Bengal and Kolkata from issues related to sedimentation and water [6];[27].

The reference [11] by Karim (2020) details the history of conflict and cooperation in water management on the Ganges River between India and Bangladesh, initiated by the construction of the Farakka Dam. In 1951, India unilaterally initiated plans to build the Farakka Dam, which is located 18 kilometers from the Bangladesh border. The construction process occurred from 1962 to 1970, and the

Farakka Dam commenced operation in 1975. In 1976, India initiated the operation of the Farakka Dam, drawing more water during the dry season, which resulted in a water crisis in Bangladesh. Subsequently, Bangladesh initiated diplomatic negotiations and cooperative agreements with India to regulate the distribution of water resources. This led to the establishment of a cooperative relationship between the two nations in 1977, which was initially set to last for a period of five years under the title Agreement on Sharing of the Ganges Waters at Farakka. After the period ended, the two countries signed extensions to the cooperation in 1982 and 1985. However, after 1988, there was no agreement regulating the sharing of Ganges River water. The conflict between the two countries escalated when India refused to negotiate with third-party mediation. Ultimately, in 1996, an agreement was reached between India and Bangladesh for a 30-year period through the Treaty Between India and Bangladesh on Sharing of the Ganges Waters at Farakka.

Apart from the Farakka Dam, which is a source of conflict between India and Bangladesh over water management, the conflict also involves water management in the Teesta River. In reference [9] Islam (2021) shows that India frequently implements realist logic in its interactions with neighbouring states. In the context of the Teesta River, the relationship between the two countries is no longer simply between nations, but rather between a nation and a state. In this case, Bangladesh is facing the Indian state government of West Bengal. The West Bengal state government, under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, has exhibited a pattern of "distant" actions in negotiations and the management and distribution of the Teesta River's water.

Based on the above explanations, this article aims to describe how India's power dominance plays out in the dynamics of transboundary water management between India and Bangladesh. The transboundary waters of India and Bangladesh are examined in this paper in relation to interactions and negotiations concerning two rivers, the Ganges and the Teesta.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since colonial and pre-colonial times until the formation of India in 1947, the dynamics of transboundary water management involving the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers have been a serious issue. In Saklani et al. (2020)[20] describe the dynamics of the Ganges and Brahmaputra river basins, linking the relationship between India and Bangladesh. The thirty-year transboundary water management agreement was marked by numerous disputes concerning water withdrawal for distribution in the Teesta and Feni rivers between India and Bangladesh. However, the most intense conflict between India and Bangladesh revolves around the distribution of the Teesta River, which is quite complex because it involves not only state actors but also the Indian states of Sikkim and West Bengal, which have a water management agreement dating back to 2011. However, the agreement failed to be implemented, as evidenced by the state government's rejection of the stipulated water distribution percentage. The situation is further complicated by the bilateral agreement between China and India on water management for energy purposes, which has become a contest of power between the two countries.

Meanwhile, in another study, Baidya (2022)[3] described the water management between India and Bangladesh through the construction of a water diversion system on the Teesta River, built in Gajaldoba, India, and Duani, Bangladesh. However, this project was unsuccessful due to limited water discharge. Subsequently, India began to recognize the Ganges River as part of a joint agreement with Bangladesh that has been in place since 1970. Moreover, the agreement between the two countries was successfully overseen by the Sheikh Hasina administration, with India agreeing to a 50-50 water distribution in the Teesta River. The consistent efforts of Sheikh Hasina were due to Bangladesh's

significant interest in the water resources along the Teesta River, which is home to twenty million people. However, the Indian state of West Bengal violated the agreement by unilaterally reducing the flow of the Teesta River to Bangladesh. As a result, farmers in Bangladesh suffered from a lack of water to irrigate their farmland. Meanwhile, the continuation of the Teesta agreement still faces obstacles, so there is no arrangement that benefits Bangladesh [3].

Due to the geography of the region, which includes 230 rivers, 57 transnational rivers, and 54 rivers flowing into India, Bangladesh is highly dependent on water supplies from India. This is due to the fact that Bangladesh is crossed by international rivers, including the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna Rivers [14]. One of the tributaries of the Teesta River in Bangladesh, which originates from the Ganges River, is a sensitive issue for Bangladesh. Meanwhile, India is leveraging its power to advance its political interests, notably by attempting to dam the water in response to China's plan to expand its influence and power to control transnational water sources in South Asia [14].

The dynamics of water management between India and Bangladesh have become even more complex due to the involvement of another actor, China. China has demonstrated its power in transboundary waters in South Asia. Referencing the work of Zhang (2016)[30], it is evident that India and China have "shared" the management of the Indus and Brahmaputra rivers, with implications for the water distribution to Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. Geographically, China is an upstream riparian country, while India is a downstream riparian country. The Brahmaputra River marks the border between the two countries, with India and China covering 50% of the river basin. The water source from the Brahmaputra River is also significant for the interests of both countries. However, India receives approximately 30% of its water supply from the Brahmaputra River, with the remainder being absorbed by China's hydropower projects. As a result, China has also articulated its interests regarding transboundary water resources with India.

### 3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study employs a theoretical framework that is supported by the concepts of hydropolitics and realist theory. The concept of hydropolitics is relevant as it involves a specific context, namely the contestation of power in transnational water management. The concept of hydropolitics offers insight into the competition between nations for water resources. This competition can be understood through the lens of realist theory, which explains the rationality of countries in the context of such competition.

#### A. Hydropolitics

Competition among countries along river basins often leads to conflict and the possibility of war. The occurrence of conflict is also influenced by the strength of regimes in the distribution of power in the region. Hydropolitics, a theoretical framework, explains how conflicts and collaborations over transnational waters are influenced by a multitude of factors, including power dynamics, doctrines in international relations, and historical records. Therefore, understanding hydropolitics requires an understanding of political agendas, water management regulations, and regulations that can influence global peacebuilding and interstate relations by understanding the interconnectedness of social, political, and environmental aspects in water management [16]. Meanwhile, dominant nations frequently employ their leadership to establish a hydrological regime in the region. The context of hydro-hegemony explains a country's relative position in the competition for control over water resources. This relative position is determined by a country's geographical location, its ability to exploit resources through its hydraulic capacity, and the maximization of power. The outcome of this dynamic is an unequal distribution of water resources. From a position of power, hydro-hegemony can further strengthen their position by

influencing discourse and directing development funding toward their national interests. Consequently, this hydro-regulatory context establishes a linkage between political realism, which portrays the state as the determinant of history [28].

In the study of transnational power over water resources, the concept of hydro-hegemony highlights the dominance that occurs at the watershed level, which is built through strategies of acquisition, integration, and control over water systems. The implementation of these strategies is achieved through a variety of tactics, including coercive pressure, agreements, and the construction of knowledge enabled by power imbalances within a weak international institutional framework. The political dynamics outside the water sector also shape interstate relations within the DAS. These relations range from mutually beneficial cooperation under hegemonic leadership to forms of domination that tend to be exploitative [29]. On the other hand, within the hydropolitical framework, the discussion expands to include the relationship between water and the political structure of the state, including how water management shapes or is shaped by the domestic power system. Rogers and Crow-Miller (2017)[18] states that in the context of semi-arid or arid regions, the need for centralized water regulation to support large-scale agriculture encourages the formation of a state that monopolizes water distribution and labor, which ultimately gives rise to despotic rule. Furthermore, the classification of forms of water control in irrigation societies into three models: first, the local subsistence model (communities control water), second, the agrarian state model (the state begins to design and manage water systems), and third, the capitalist state model (water management is controlled by the private sector and technocratic bureaucracy). All three demonstrate how internal power relations help determine the direction of water policy in various models of government [18].

Water management issues have a problemshed context that offers a perspective on water in geographical units involving boundary issues. The idea of problemshed provides an understanding of geographical issues against the backdrop of the global economy, where analysis of water issues has the potential to cause water scarcity. These issues fall within the realm of international politics and geopolitics, with the interactions and complexities of how water is distributed involving power struggles and the side effects of water management through hydroelectric power generation from upstream to downstream [15]. Additionally, the management of transnational water and rivers becomes complicated due to issues of national security, territorial integrity, and competition between nations [29].

## B. Realism

In analyzing international relations, political realism always adheres to existing realities, rather than idealistic concepts of how the world should be, as advocated by idealists. Realist thinking is predicated on the pursuit of power and domination, which are regarded as fundamental human traits and the primary catalysts of conflict. Realists adopt a pessimistic perspective, perceiving conflict as an inevitable and even essential element in the dynamics of international politics. When diplomatic channels or peaceful resolutions reach a dead end, the use of force becomes the primary option, and in some cases, war is regarded as the main means of resolving disputes between nations. Realists believe that the existence of an order in international relations is a fragile and uncertain outcome of the mechanism of power balance or dominance by a single great power. Therefore, acceptance of conflict as part of reality and recognition of the importance of power form the core foundation of the realism framework [7].

According to Chiaruzzi's analysis of Hobbes's perspective, although individuals may avoid direct conflict, this possibility does not extend to states. In the context of international relations, states are in a constant state of competition and potential conflict. The fundamental cause of this situation is the absence of a supreme authority that regulates interactions between states. In other words, the absence of sovereign power above states makes the dynamics of global politics fundamentally different from domestic politics, which is supported by sovereign governmental structures. In contemporary discourse, this phenomenon is often referred to as international anarchy. However, this term does not refer to chaos or disorder. Rather, it describes the fact that sovereign states are not subject to a single global authority that binds or

rules absolutely [7]. Realists situate power at the core of international political dynamics. In this perspective, power is understood not merely as a normative or moral capacity, but as a state's ability to utilize material assets such as military strength, economic capacity, and strategic position to influence the behaviour of other actors in the international system. In other words, power can be defined as a means by which one state can force or encourage other states to engage in actions that do not align with their rational choices or initial preferences. This approach reflects the fundamental assumption of realism that relations between states tend to be competitive and driven by national interests in an anarchic international environment without a supreme authority [4].

Political realism contains elements of opportunism and focuses on practicality, where decisions are heavily influenced by existing environmental conditions. According to Toft's view in reference [26], an offensive neo-realism, the structure of the international system plays a role in determining state behaviour, shaping how they view each other, and ultimately contributing to international anarchy [2]. It is this further development of structural realism that gave rise to the offensive realism approach, as outlined by Mearsheimer. Contrary to Waltz's defensive approach, which states adopt in order to maintain the status quo, Mearsheimer emphasizes that in an anarchic system, states are instead driven to aggressively increase their relative power in order to ensure their survival.

### C. Offensive Realism

According to Mearsheimer, conflicts between countries often occur for several fundamental reasons [26]. First, the international system is anarchic, meaning there is no supreme authority or global institution that can effectively enforce rules or impose sanctions. Second, countries can never fully know each other's intentions. They are always haunted by uncertainty about whether other countries will act aggressively. This uncertainty is exacerbated by limited information and the possibility of future changes in intent. Third, every state prioritizes its survival because only by remaining a sovereign entity can it pursue other goals. Fourth, states act rationally in an instrumental sense, meaning they assess external situations and formulate the strategies they deem most advantageous for maintaining their existence. Based on these considerations, Mearsheimer concludes that, in the absence of a global order, countries will be driven to increase their relative power in order to survive. The ultimate goal is to achieve a dominant or hegemonic position because, in his view, power is central to the dynamics of international politics [26].

Mearsheimer states that power is not merely an innate attribute; rather, it is achieved through material capabilities. Mearsheimer then proceeds to categorize a nation's capabilities into two classifications: first, latent power, encompassing the economy and population; and second, actual military power. In this case, military power is prioritized because the military is the ultimate ratio between geopolitics and power. The most significant asset for a state is its territory, which is why Mearsheimer emphasizes the importance of land power in achieving hegemony, or the ultimate goal of every state. In order to achieve hegemony, Mearsheimer offers two strategies: direct efforts to gain relative power and the prevention of other aggressors from gaining an advantage. War is waged when a state seeks to overthrow its rivals, and in other cases, coercion is also employed against smaller nations. This distinguishes defensive realism from offensive realism. In the defensive realist perspective, a state is seen as more focused on efforts to maintain and enhance its sense of security. In contrast, the offensive realism approach believes that a state is driven to continuously increase its relative power compared to other nations [26].

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative methods to understand the dynamics of water management between India and Bangladesh by chronologically reviewing the history of cooperation and conflict and observing

the latest dynamics in this study. Qualitative methods are employed in the field of international relations studies, with the fundamental operationalization of a concept or theory serving to analyze in a limited case context [25]. In order to comprehend the limited case under observation, the study employs secondary sources that facilitate an understanding of historical constructs. Additionally, the research employs a case study approach in the domain of international relations, integrating tracking processes and the utilization of specific theories to comprehend intricate dynamics [5]. Furthermore, the study of international relations uses new concepts for contextual understanding and understanding of observable dynamic processes.

## 5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As delineated in the introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, and research methods, the results and discussion section has been divided into three parts: the dynamics of water management cooperation between India and Bangladesh, the dynamics of negotiations on water management of the Teesta River, and the challenges of water management between India and Bangladesh.

### A. The Dynamics of Water Management Cooperation between India and Bangladesh

The cooperative sharing of water from the Ganges River between India and Bangladesh commenced when Bangladesh gained independence in 1972. On March 19, 1972, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and President of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman signed a peace pact and the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) agreement for water allocation for irrigation, flood management, and cyclone flood control. However, the JRC was established at a time when India had already initiated the construction of the Farakka Dam, which was initiated to mitigate sedimentation in the Hooghly River [16]. The construction of the Farakka Dam was underway when President Mujibur Rahman raised the issue of water sharing between the two countries during his visit to New Delhi. Unfortunately, the negotiations proved unsuccessful due to a lack of consensus between the two countries concerning the allocation of water from the Ganges River [8]. Bangladesh considered the importance of water distribution to its territory because the availability of water from the Farakka Dam did not reach 80 percent. The Farakka Dam is located at the point where the Ganges River flows into the sea.

The Ganges River traverses the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh. The three Indian states under consideration have large and growing populations and are experiencing intensified dry-season agriculture. This has prompted the Indian government to develop various water diversion projects to support irrigation. Furthermore, the gradual shrinkage of the Hooghly River has impacted the shipping capacity of the Port of Calcutta. In response to this issue, the government of India announced plans to construct the Farakka Dam in 1961, which was completed in 1975. During the rainy season, when the floodgates are open, the dam does not impede the flow of the river. However, during the dry season, the dam diverts almost the entire flow of the Ganges River through a canal to the Bhagirathi–Hooghly River, which ultimately flows into the Bay of Bengal [23]. Following the completion of the Farakka Dam in India, there was a significant reduction in the flow of water during the dry season. Moreover, since 1975, there has been a marked decline in the volume of water reaching the bridge. [23].

Initially, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was reluctant to initiate the operation of the Farakka Dam without the prior approval of Bangladesh. However, this situation did not persist following the assassination and death of Bangladesh's President, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Subsequently, India withdrew from bilateral relations regarding water distribution during the presidency of Ziaur Rahman in 1976. The government of India initiated a series of unilateral actions by constructing several dams on transboundary rivers between India and Bangladesh. These include the Teesta, Gumti, Khowai, Dharla, and Dudhkumar rivers, among others. This has led to the restriction of the flow of 48 out of 54 rivers

that flow into Bangladesh. This caused losses for Bangladesh, and President Ziaur Rahman initiated an approach to India for more relevant negotiations in the interest of Bangladesh [17].

On November 5, 1977, an agreement was signed between India and Bangladesh stipulating that India would release water to Bangladesh during the dry season, which extends from January to May. Should the flow deviate — either excess or deficiency — the water would be divided equally. The agreement guaranteed that if the flow received by Bangladesh fell below 80% of the scheduled amount, the country would still receive a minimum of 80%. Consequently, a Joint Committee was established to oversee the water flow at the Farakka Dam. The initial agreement was designed to span five years; however, it was subject to a review in the third year of its implementation. The review indicated that Bangladesh's water allocation has decreased since the construction of the Farakka Dam. Thereafter, the collaborative efforts aimed at ensuring equitable water distribution between the two nations encountered a period of stagnation. In 1982 and 1985, the two countries resumed cooperation through the establishment of a memorandum of understanding. However, the agreement encountered further impediments in 1988. However, the agreement was again disrupted in 1988. It was not until 1996 that the Water Sharing Agreement between the two countries was agreed upon for 30 years, signed on December 12, 1996 [21].

A significant impact following the construction of the Farakka Dam was the reduction in the flow of water in the Ganges River, which is under Indian control. The operation of the Farakka Dam since 1976 has caused water shortages for the agricultural sector in Bangladesh. This situation is attributable to the excessive extraction of groundwater, leading to recurrent water shortages for agricultural irrigation, particularly in the Kobadak irrigation canal, which has experienced a complete drying up [22]. Meanwhile, the agricultural sector contributes 23.5% to Bangladesh's national income per capita and supports the livelihoods of 60% of the country's rural population [12]. However, the Farakka Dam's operation has been associated with adverse consequences, including frequent floods and water shortages in agricultural regions. These developments have resulted in significant economic losses for farmers and rural communities in Bangladesh, primarily due to crop failures.

The regulation of the Ganges River has significant economic and political implications, serving as a means of exerting power over Bangladesh by India. India has prepared mega projects and exercised control over the Ganges River and international rivers in the South Asian region [20]. Meanwhile, as referenced in Saklani et al. (2020) [20], India plays a hegemonic role in the regional arena through the use of material resources (such as its geographical position, economic growth, and military strength) and ideological tools (such as internal security, securitization narratives, and domestic hydroelectric power conflicts). India does this as an effort to maintain the status quo with Bangladesh in the distribution of water in transboundary rivers. Concrete actions in water distribution are supported by India's influence and will in setting the agenda, dialogue, and implementation of bilateral water agreements and treaties.

#### B. The Dynamics of Water Management Negotiations of the Teesta River

The Teesta River is one of the locations subject to a water-sharing agreement between India and Bangladesh, with a water allocation of 35% for Bangladesh and 39% for India in 1983. The two countries reached this agreement based on scientific studies conducted by the Joint Teesta Commission [17]. The Teesta River flows through five districts in Bangladesh: The districts of Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Kurigram, and Laramanirhat. A significant portion of this water distribution is allocated for food production, which provides sustenance to 7.3% of Bangladesh's population [16]. However, the conditions surrounding the Teesta River are experiencing sedimentation, which is contributing to land degradation in the northern region of Bangladesh. One such factor is the development of hydropower infrastructure along the Teesta River in the Indian state of Sikkim. A total of 26 river projects in Sikkim have been constructed by the state government for power generation [14]. The situation has become more complex due to the water sharing between the two countries, leading to escalating water disputes,

particularly due to increasing urbanization in India and Bangladesh, which has resulted in rising demand for water for domestic, industrial, and agricultural purposes amid dwindling water resources [16]. On the one hand, the nation of Bangladesh is dependent on electricity from power plants in India, with its electricity supply originating from the Indian regions of Baharampur, Katihar, and Bornagar [1].

The issue of the sharing of the Teesta River remains unresolved despite the 1996 Ganges River Agreement. In 1996, the Ganges River Water Sharing Agreement was signed by the Indian Prime Minister, Deve Gowda, and the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina. The agreement was valid for a period of 30 years. The agreement stipulated a 50:50 water sharing ratio from the Farakka Dam [12]. The leadership of Sheikh Hasina's Bangladesh, which is dominated by the Awami League, sought to exert influence over India for domestic political popularity in Bangladesh. To achieve this influence, Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League established closer ties with India in 1996 and took oppressive actions against the opposition in Bangladesh [17].

The agreement on the sharing of water from the Teesta River was made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in September 2011, with the signing of an agreement on equal sharing between the two countries. Furthermore, the government of Manmohan Singh intended to improve bilateral relations with Bangladesh by visiting Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and offering joint hydroelectric development in northeastern India [17]. However, the agreement was rejected by the West Bengal state government led by Mamata Banerjee [24]. The Teesta River traverses eastern India, Sikkim, and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, where 21 million Bangladeshis are dependent on the Teesta River. The negotiations concerning the Teesta River are significantly influenced by domestic political factors in India and by the complex interplay between the central government and the state governments. The agreement on the Teesta River water sharing negotiations between the central governments of India and Bangladesh was rejected by the West Bengal state government [17]. Meanwhile, the West Bengal government is constructing dams, further exacerbating the water shortages faced by Bangladeshi residents. At the same time, the Indian central government has signaled a lack of interest in continuing the Teesta River water sharing negotiations.

In 2016, Mamata Banerjee was re-elected as the leader of West Bengal. However, in contrast to 2011, Mamata opted to pursue reconciliation by inviting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Kolkata to initiate negotiations on the Teesta River issue [14]. In 2015, following Mamata's visit to Bangladesh to initiate negotiations. However, according to Gowher Rizvi, Hasina's foreign policy advisor, the signing of the agreement between the two countries could not be realized due to political issues in India. On April 6, 2017, Sheikh Hasina and Mamata Banerjee met in New Delhi to reach an agreement on the Teesta River water arrangement, which was intended to address drinking water problems and increase irrigation capacity [9]. Meanwhile, in the context of domestic politics in Bangladesh, Hasina's political opponents, BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and Jamaat E Islami, strategically leveraged the water issue as a political instrument to express resistance to India and Hasina's government. On October 11, 2018, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka published an article on India-Bangladesh relations, yet omitted any discussion of the Teesta River water sharing, indicating that this issue is not considered significant by India [9]. Notably, even Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in 2019 for the Teesta River negotiations did not result in an agreement.

The current situation regarding water distribution in the Teesta River during the administration of Narendra Modi has yet to reach a consensus. Even during Modi's administration, India appears to prefer a hegemonic role in the South Asian region by emphasizing its role and function in the political, economic, and geographical sectors in the region. India's dominance over neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, is influenced by India's unilateral policy, namely the Gujral Doctrine [14]. The Gujral Doctrine sets forth a series of principles that govern the building of relations with neighbours in the absence of reciprocity, the non-use of territory that causes harm to other parties, non-intervention in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, respect for territorial integrity, and the undertaking of

efforts toward peace. The Gujral Doctrine essentially builds India's power by improving regional relations. This doctrine portrays India as possessing positive power at the global level, and it serves as the foundation for India's actions in initiating water sharing agreements with Bangladesh on the Ganges River, particularly at the Farakka Dam in 1996 [13].

### C. The Challenges of Water Management between India and Bangladesh

The challenge that lies ahead is to determine how water sharing cooperation on the Ganges River between India and Bangladesh can be maintained until 2026 in accordance with the established agreement. Furthermore, it is important to consider the challenges that will arise after the 2026 agreement ends [11]. The challenge faced by both countries is conflicting national interests regarding transboundary river management, as both countries are ecologically and geographically dependent on the river. If we look back at the beginning of the conflict, India's decision to build the Farakka Dam to protect the wealth of the Port of Calcutta can be seen as a strategic move to maximize its relative power. India's actions aimed to regulate the water flow across the border and consequently impact Bangladesh's water supply, signifying a strategic resource control measure. Given its strategic location upstream and its superior military strength, India has exploited its advantageous position to create a structural dependency on Bangladesh [17]. In the framework of offensive realism, this principle of relative gain is reflected, in which a country seeks not only absolute advantage but also greater advantage than other nations, particularly regional competitors or neighbors. During the dry season, India restricts the flow of the Teesta River, leading to a significant decrease in the flow directed towards Bangladesh, with a reduction to less than 1,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) at its peak, compared to the average flow of approximately 5,000 cfs [19]. The impact is a water crisis for irrigation, saltwater intrusion in southwestern Bangladesh, and the internal climate migration of millions of people, as mentioned in the World Bank report [10]. Another challenge from India is that domestic politics further complicates this issue, with West Bengal always being an obstacle in water diplomacy between India and Bangladesh [17]. The West Bengal state government frequently exercises its autonomy by disregarding bilateral diplomatic decisions made by the central governments of India and Bangladesh.

India's policy of diverting the Brahmaputra River to the Ganges River through a cross-river canal project, coupled with the construction of the Tipaimukh Dam on the Barak River, reveals a pattern of behavior typical of a country that aspires to become a hegemonic power. In an international system considered anarchic and lacking a supreme authority, India's dominance over most of the rivers flowing from India to Bangladesh—48 out of a total of 54 rivers have been redirected—reflects a strategy of subjugation toward its neighboring country. According to offensive realism, major powers tend to weaken the potential of regional competitors to prevent them from emerging as challengers to their dominance. Therefore, India's control over river flows is not merely about water interests for domestic needs; it is also a systematic effort to weaken Bangladesh's economic foundations, including in the agricultural, fisheries, and renewable energy sectors. Thus, through the lens of Mearsheimer's offensive realism theory and supported by empirical facts, it can be concluded that India's approach to transboundary water issues is not merely a development project but part of a strategic calculation to maintain its dominance in the region. In an international system characterized by uncertainty and competition, nations such as India will persist in implementing assertive measures to augment their influence and safeguard their interests [17].

## 6. CONCLUSION

The management of transboundary water resources between India and Bangladesh reflects the complexity of bilateral relations, which are determined not only by technical aspects but also by political calculations and the strategic interests of these countries. From the perspective of offensive realism,

India's actions as a hegemonic state have been to maximize its position as an upstream country, thereby maintaining its relative power over Bangladesh. India's dominance over the Ganges and Teesta rivers demonstrates that the control over water resources is employed as an instrument to maintain a superior position in the South Asian region. On the other hand, Bangladesh, as a downstream country, has been in a structurally and politically vulnerable position and has faced major challenges in ensuring its water resource sovereignty. Dependence on Indian policy has not only resulted in ecological and economic crises but also has implications for social stability, including increased migration due to environmental degradation. Temporary water-sharing agreements, such as the 1996 Ganges Agreement, which will expire in 2026, and the lack of concrete agreements on the Teesta River issue also indicate that transboundary water negotiations in this region remain clouded by power imbalances and domestic interests. Therefore, the future of water cooperation between India and Bangladesh will be largely determined by the ability of both countries to formulate new mechanisms that are fair, transparent, and adaptive to climate change and politics.

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