



**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies**  
1/46 Old Elephant Road, Eskaton, Dhaka-1000

**Panel Discussion**

on

**“Management of Water Resources and Water Security: The Case of the Ganges-  
Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) River Basins”**

Tuesday, 15 June 2010, 1100-1300 hrs

**Welcome Address**

**Major General Golam Mohammad, nwc, psc**  
Director-General, BISS

*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*

Chair of today’s Panel Discussion, **Major General Muhammed Firdaus Mian, psc,**  
and **Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS,**

Honourable Chief Guest, **Mohamed Mijarul Quayes, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh,**

Distinguished Panellists, Learned Participants, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

*Assalamu Alaikum* and a very good morning.

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to welcome you all to the Panel Discussion on  
“**Management of Water Resources and Water Security: The Case of the Ganges-  
Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) River Basins**”, organized by the Bangladesh Institute  
of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) today.

**Distinguished Guests**

Once upon a time, the GBM river basin areas had abundance of water for all types of  
human use. But today, these areas have started facing scarcity of water. The current  
trend shows that scarcity of water is on the increase, and in the distant future scarcity  
would take a grievous form. Reasons are many and known to us.

Himalayan glaciers are shrinking fast – at the rate of about 15% a decade.  
Consequently, water-flows in the rivers are on the decline. Various scientific reports tell

us that in 50 years time from now, Himalayan glaciers will reduce significantly; rivers will dry up substantially. For example, in China, the Yellow River is almost a dead river now.

In Asia, the availability of per capita water has declined by 40-60% between 1955 and 1990. It is estimated that over the next 40 years, the world population will need to double its food production to meet the growing population – set to increase by around 50% in next 50 years. The South Asian region, which houses 40% of world population, will experience greater need of water than what it is today.

Today, in the realm of security – that is, human security – the water issue has figured out prominently. Water is central to the world’s developmental challenges. Whether it is food, energy, health, climate change, pollution and socio-economic development – water is the nexus. Progression in development means advancing towards a water secure world.

### **Learned Participants**

The three river basins—the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna—stretch across 16 states of India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Tibetan region. While India and Bangladesh share all the three river basins, Nepal shares only the Ganges, and Bhutan and China only the Brahmaputra. This densely populated region is poised to face heightened crisis owing to scarcity of water in future. The countries face risk of serious conflict over transboundary waters, if cooperative and collaborative efforts are not taken in time. As far as renewable supply of water is concerned, this region experiences huge precipitation in many parts of its areas during monsoon for four to six months. Statistics show that, if divided equally, the 10% of total precipitation would be more than sufficient to satisfy the needs of the region.

Therefore, better water management in the GBM basin is the way to achieve a water secure region. Unfortunately, though bilateral talks and efforts were on between Nepal, India and Bangladesh, nothing meaningful multilateral had been done so far on shared rivers. It is now a common understanding that an integrated water resource management initiative demands involvement of all the five countries of the region – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Bhutan and China.

In fact, there is no alternative to cooperation in view of the retreat of glaciers, resulting decline in the river flows. Countries, sharing basins of rivers flowing across boundaries, need to negotiate in new forms of cooperation which must involve compromise of traditional concept of security, or risk conflicts in future.

Against this setting, the main objectives of today’s Panel Discussion are to address the following questions:

- a. What are the factors that give rise to problems of water resources management among countries of the GMB basins, creating security concern?

- b. Do the factors give rise to intra- and inter- state tensions and conflicts?
- c. Is water essentially an issue of availability or is it essentially an issue of access?
- d. What is the nature and extent of the current level of cooperation of water sharing among the countries of GMB basins?
- e. How best to apply multilevel diplomatic and non-diplomatic channels to harness waters in the GBM region?

Two papers will be presented by two very distinguished water experts before the audience of today's august gathering. The Session's Chair will introduce them shortly.

**Ladies and gentlemen**

Without further ado, I thank and welcome you all once again for sparing your valuable time for joining us in our today's Panel Discussion.

Thank you.