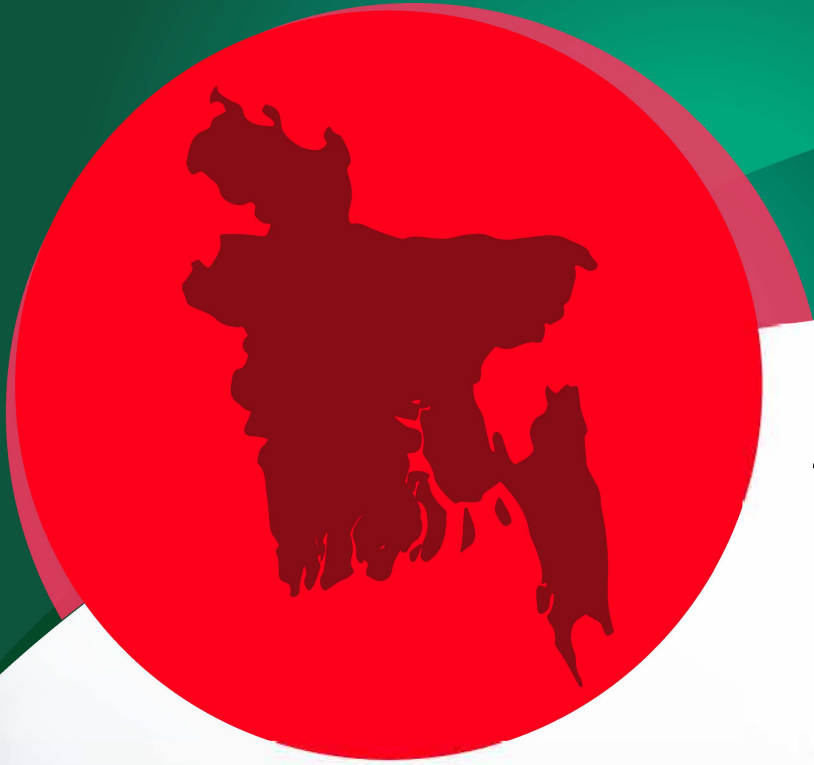


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# The Looming Non-Traditional Challenges to Security in South Asia: Restoring Ecological Integrity and Security

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## Abstract

Since the end of World War II, the question of security was viewed dominantly through the prism of military threats posed by nations against each other. In recent times, however, non-traditional security challenges such as looming food and water crises, and devastating environmental impacts from climate change such as natural disasters and the threat of pandemic diseases, has loomed ever larger. As the global population inexorably increased, exponentially, it spawned different forms of contestations among peoples and nations for selfish appropriation of natural resources causing environmental degradation.

Fresh water, whether underground, on the surface, in rivers or in mountain glaciers, is at the heart of any ecosystem. It is also very unevenly distributed globally. The steadily expanding gap between available fresh water on the one hand, and the exploding populations particularly in the global South on the other, is at the heart of ecological disequilibrium that, if not properly managed, will likely aggravate the situation further, possibly triggering a “domino effect” ecologically that could pose an existential threat to human survival. An appropriate governance structure to manage these precious commons, equitably and optimally, is most urgently needed now to prevent further human conflict from intensification of the contestation between competing groups and interests, increasing the chances of domestic and inter-state conflicts and jeopardizing human security.

## 1 Introduction

Ecological and non-traditional security may be defined as maintaining a dynamic equilibrium among human societies but equally, if not far more importantly, between humans and nature, humans and other species, and humans and pathogens. Any disruption to this dynamic equilibrium between any two or more component sets of actors integral to this equilibrium would translate into a disturbing, risk-fraught disequilibrium, endangering all. Man, as the dominant species with a steadily burgeoning population, has greater ability today than ever to affect how this equilibrium is maintained. Changes in the complex intertwined relationship between man, nature and other species can be destabilized by changes in nature or in human behaviour.

As resources needed by man for sustenance and development steadily dwindle, fierce competition has increased among peoples for control over these resources. In this struggle, non-state actors have increasingly emerged, posing by far a greater threat to societal security than conventional military threats. Maintaining ecological equilibrium in any given geospace has, therefore, emerged as increasingly integral to not only ensuring the overall wellbeing of the peoples who inhabit that space, but to ensuring their continuing security, traditional and non-traditional.

At the very core of the entire ecosystem is the location and availability of fresh water from which all life has evolved and on which lives and livelihood are fundamentally dependent. However, there is an acute imbalance in the ratio of fresh water available to humans and other species who need and compete for it. As long as human population was relatively small, this equilibrium was not discernibly disturbed. That situation has changed drastically in recent times. One school of thought envisages future wars being fought over steadily depleting water resources required by humans, other species and vegetation.

To prevent this situation from deteriorating further to the point that it could become an existential threat for man’s survival (and posing threats to other similarly inhabited environs), this paper advocates collaborative management of the shared ecological space and resources, particularly fresh water resources that are critically taxed and in a state of depletion today.

Towards that end, this paper proposes the setting up of a much-needed collaborative water governance structure that would serve to sustain human growth and development while at the same time restore a modicum of ecological integrity through re-establishing equilibrium.

## 2 Exploding population, scarce resources, environmental degradation and human conflict – a possible South Asian scenario?

Homer-Dixon (2001), the Canadian political scientist and environmental expert, in a seminal study on environmental degradation and scarcity, and their relation to societal violence, had posited that:

- As human population grows, global economic output may also grow exponentially, but renewable resources will decrease sharply
- There would be depletion of aquifers, rivers and other water resources, significant climate change and decline of food production and fisheries
- Environmental scarcities were already contributing to conflict situations
- Continuing scarcities and pressures will increase demands on states and their institutions, rendering adversely affected states fragile and causing them to circle the wagons
- States will likely fight more over renewable (water, forestry, agrarian) than non-renewable resources in the future
- Intra-state conflicts are likely to expand into inter-state conflicts

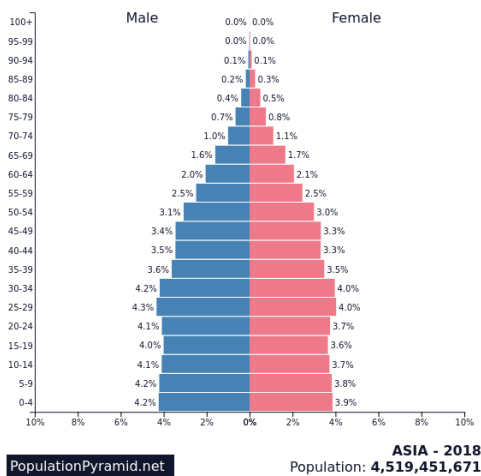
The above factors, if left unaddressed, in some combination, could adversely affect the eastern sub-region of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), comprising what the author had first described as the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) sub-region (Karim, 2009 a), which could well become one where a disaster was waiting to happen. The environmental degradation that was already well underway in combination with sociological and political factors intersecting, like densely crammed but substantially large populations, rampant poverty and widespread under-development, buffeted by very frequent natural and environmental disasters, had already scarred this region by festering insurgencies and extremist militant movements. A resurgence of that could trigger larger regional instability and insecurity, with wider implications (Karim, 2009 b).

Existing research on the deleterious effects of climate change have already demonstrated clearly the surge in extreme wildcard events impacting the globe: major storms, unseasonal and unpredictable rainfall deviations from historical patterns on which farmers rely, and similar uncertain patterns of flood and drought. All of these can have profoundly adverse repercussions for societies, “from sudden economic disruptions to a longer-term decline in living standards” through diverse

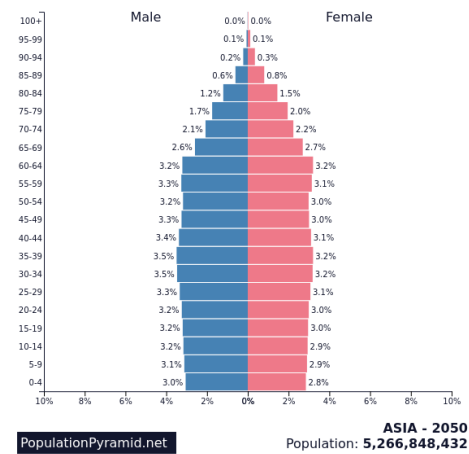
pathways (Mani, et al., 2018). A recent World Bank report (2018) asserts that “average temperatures have risen over the past six decades and will continue to rise” (Mani, et al., 2018). It predicts more warming inland and less warming in coastal areas over the 2050 horizon, with changes in precipitation patterns continuing to be more mixed and persisting in the near future, with resultant decreases in living standards in most countries of the South Asian region. Notably, the report (2018) lists several South Asian megacities – Chennai, Dhaka, Kolkata, Karachi and Mumbai – as climate hotspots, vulnerable to extreme events and sea level rise. In Bangladesh, “Chittagong Division is the most vulnerable to changes in average weather, followed by Barisal and Dhaka divisions” (Mani, et al., 2018). The report (2018) also deduces that “there is some kind of correlation between climate hotspots and water stressed areas”. (Mani, et al., 2018).

With a distressingly long history of ecological insecurity, Bangladesh has been notoriously labelled as “nature’s laboratory for natural disasters” (Inman, 2007a). Steady growth of population in South Asia has made this region one of the most densely populated, with very large numbers subsisting on marginal land. Storms, floods and drought have already repeatedly forced large numbers of people to abandon their homes. Crop failures, famines and outbreaks of infectious diseases have occurred frequently in the region and have almost become commonplace. Demographic trends are fairly reliable predictors of future security challenges since fertility and mortality patterns normally change very slowly over time. The size and shape of the SAARC region’s population in 2050 can be projected with a high degree of certainty. The area’s changing demographic profile may be taken as a given by policy makers as a significantly big factor that will drive non-traditional security challenges over the next couple of decades or more.

Total global population, now a little over 7.3 billion, is expected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, top 9.7 billion by 2050 and shoot to over 11 billion by 2100 (UN ECOSOC 2015). Significantly, South Asia (that is the region comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) has (in 2015) a combined aggregate total of over 1.743 billion, registering a staggering 336% increase over a mere 476 million in 1950. It will almost double its present numbers by 2050. The burgeoning demographic “youth bulge” is a factor of critical importance. The World Development Report of the World Bank, (2007) had predicted that the number of young people aged 12-24 would continue to rise inexorably over the next twenty years. Numbered at 385 million in 2007, it was predicted to increase to around 435 million in 2030 (World Bank 2007).



The Population Pyramids: 2018 and 2050



PopulationPyramid.net

South Asia’s average percentage of population between ages 15-59 in 2015 was 60.75; in 2050, this average is projected to be 60.88 (ECOSOC 2015). The same projected that the population under 15 for the region in 2015 averaged at 31.11%; in 2050 it is projected to average at 19.15%. On top of this, with an average of around 1.2 million joining the job market annually, South Asia is “home to the largest proportion of unemployed and inactive youth in the developing world” with around 31% of its total population in this category (Kabir 2013). Taking these trends together, exacerbated by the factors identified by Homer-Dixon in his thesis, a picture of political instability across the region may be reasonably expected.

As one observer has stated: “South Asia today possesses all the ingredients for a geopolitical nightmare. State failure in any one of the region’s most vulnerable countries could prove potentially devastating for stability on the subcontinent as a whole” (Karim, a 2011). While traditional security concerns relating to the South Asian scenario (particularly in the Afghanistan-India-China-Pakistan context) continue to worry many in the world, there are emerging non-traditional security concerns that should be of common concern to everyone across the region. “The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is wrought with ‘non-traditional’ challenges such as looming food and water resources crises, the often devastating environmental impacts of climate change, and the threat of pandemic diseases that cut across geographic boundaries. All these challenges ... have an immediate human impact, with implications for both domestic and regional stability...” (Karim, b 2011). Dennis Pirages, Dean’s Professor of Government in the Department of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, convincingly argues, “non-traditional security or ecological crises have been responsible for killing and injuring substantially larger numbers of people over time than

conventional military threats, and therefore represent a parallel and arguably more important source of insecurity” (Pirages 2011). He contends that ecological and non-traditional security depend on maintaining not only a dynamic equilibrium among human societies, but far more importantly between humans and nature, humans and other species and humans and pathogens. Demographic changes, particularly population growth can be the most destabilising factors when rapidly growing societies pose unsustainable demands on the existing capabilities of nature’s resources. Global warming, he predicted, will have a major impact on all four intertwined relationships that define ecological security: coastal areas will be at greater risk of flooding, while warming will permit pests and pathogens to move beyond their traditional regions. Disruption of the fragile equilibrium could increase societal conflicts. Events have since vindicated Pirages’ forebodings in West Asia and Africa; South Asians need to take heed to safeguard their own future.

The peoples and governments of the region, together, therefore need to engage in anticipatory thinking, shun procrastination and collaborate meaningfully, addressing the challenges looming ahead--now, not later. Projecting forward to 2050, the demographic situation in the region will very likely provide the impetus for significant increases in non-traditional security challenges in an area already coping with various kinds of ecological insecurity. The trend of population growth, unless reversed or brought to a halt, will surely add pressure on already tight food and water supplies. Fulfilling Cornucopian expectations, human scientific endeavours and ingenuity have indeed made tremendous advances in coping with some of the damaging effects of global warming on food production. Bangladesh, which must increase food production by at least 40% by mid-century, has already made praiseworthy advancements in

developing rice varieties that can survive high salt levels, lack of standing water (a *sine qua non* in traditional rice farming), or even when paddy fields are covered for longer than normal period by flood water, submerging the crops. However, scientists worry that the main threat could be posed, with devastating consequences, if temperatures soar to over 35 degrees Celsius and sustain over eight hours at a stretch of time because this would render the plants' spikelets sterile (Inman, 2007 b). As recent temperature trends of current and last few summers tend to indicate, summer peak temperature ranges are higher than historical normal, extending as well for longer stretches of time. Compounding this, monsoon patterns are also displaying wild variations. If temperatures rise above 35 degrees Celsius by 2100, as widely expected, monsoons "will rev up 2 weeks later than they do now, and rain will come in less frequent but more intense bursts" (Inman, 2007 c). The monsoon rainfall behaviour of the last few years bear testimony to the prescience of this forecast.

### 3 The critical importance of fresh water – a compromised commons

For a deltaic region like Bangladesh, which is the natural drainage for most of the Eastern Himalayan rivers, a double-whammy effect is already in progress: on the one hand, increasingly less volumes of water is pushing down to the sea on account of retreating glaciers, depleting snow melt and protean rainfall patterns; on the other, with sea level rise already a reality and increasing higher and stronger tidal surges pushing inland from the sea, the delicate equilibrium between fresh water pushing out into the Bay of Bengal and salt water pushing inwards, is increasingly threatened. In 2011, while projecting a future scenario likely to affect Bangladesh, I had stated: "A gradual but inexorable process of inward creeping annexation of sweet water territories by encroaching salt water is already changing the PH factor of the formerly rich agricultural land, rendering it useless for traditional agriculture, while the decline of keystone species appears to be in progress. This complex and intertwined phenomenon is already triggering mass scale internal migrations, as well as external migration. Similar tendencies are being observed in drainage of the western Himalayan rivers to a somewhat lesser extent, but the phenomenon in the eastern sector is a harbinger for what could also happen in the western sector" (Karim, 2013 a). Seven years later, the above appears to be all too real and present.

The increasingly progressive inward-creeping salinity of rivers is already proving disastrous with key species being eradicated, snatching away livelihood from increasingly larger numbers of the population. Large numbers of restive young people in youth bulges

described earlier will be looking for employment in what are likely to be increasingly limited job markets, thus increasing the potential for civil strife. Growing population pressures are already increasing migration to cities as well as to marginal land, putting pressure on these areas unbearably. These future migrants are likely to experience worsening environmental conditions since the areas to which many of them may migrate will likely experience stronger storms and flooding. Early manifestations of global warming could well turn these migrants and other occupants of these marginal areas into "environmental refugees" in search of emergency shelters.

The sheer increase in population and the cumulative effects of glacier melts in the Himalayas and depleted ground water aquifers is already significantly tightening availability of fresh water supplies. Himalayan glaciers have shrunk from 500,000 square kms coverage to 160,000 square kilometres. The fallout is that Bangladesh finds itself in an extremely vulnerable situation in respect of water security, despite being a land of rivers, with three river basins, over a hundred rivers including four major rivers, of which 54 rivers are shared with India, its immediate upper riparian. An incompletely executed bilateral treaty exists on only one of the shared rivers (The Ganges), while an agreed draft on another remains frozen in a state of suspended animation. Taking a river-by-river approach would leave Bangladesh very vulnerable to the vagaries of nature and the unpredictability of geopolitics. The narrative of sharing is evocative of the *partitioning* of waters which leads into the realm of contestation. In fact, most of the problems contributing to this situation of increasing water distress may be squarely attributed to The Partition Syndrome of 1947. At that point of time, when the old Colonial order was disintegrating, it was replaced by a new post-Colonial Westphalian "disorder". The new states formed were from a recently gained sense of separate identities that had lain latent and somnolent for millennia but had been prodded awake by the colonial policy of "divide and rule". They came into existence from a partitioning, into three segments.

While segmenting land and territories on terra firma is entirely feasible and achievable, what was forgotten in the highly emotionally charged moment then was that the principles of partitioning land cannot be applied to the hydrosphere, atmosphere and ecosphere. So, the rivers that essentially had flown seamlessly from the headwaters to the mouth since their formation were overnight conceived as "belonging" within the confines of the new national boundaries drawn on the map. In my view, this fallacious thinking was reflected in the formulation of the Constitution of the new Indian Union of 1947, in which sovereignty of the rivers were accorded to the respective states of the Union through which those rivers traversed. This is at the heart of the

myriad problems of water sharing that India has struggled with over almost all its rivers, whether within its domestic sphere or with the new transnational configuration of the rivers. The bitter squabbling between states over their respective share of rivers defied all mediation by several river commissions within India and even the *dictat* of the Central Government in Delhi, forcing the Supreme Court of India to arbitrate. The state of mind of the Partition Syndrome, so to say, also governed the Indus River Treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank in 1952 – it essentially “partitioned” a mighty and large river basin, holistically comprising six rivers, by allocating three each to the two antagonists fighting over the one bride. It is, in my view, the same syndrome that has done such serious damage to the Eastern Himalayan River Basins region with tragic consequences for all. This region that had been historically defined by its mighty rivers was water linked seamlessly and was known as the Bengal Presidency during the Colonial British era, the most prosperous administrative unit and the “Kohinoor” of the multi-jewelled imperial crown of Great Britain for two centuries of British rule. This contiguity became disjointed, land-locked and impoverished in less than half a century since Partition.

The conditions described above pose several challenges today for the entire region. Governments must now cater to overall ecological and environmental security that inherently embraces food security, water security, energy security, employment security, and health security. Additionally, governments also must prepare for unexpected disasters (wildcard events) from natural phenomena or threat of disease pandemics. Ensuring water security and integrity is perhaps the most important, water being vital for agriculture, industrial use, fisheries, human consumption, health and sanitation; but addressing this will also pose formidable challenges. Towards this end, all governments now really have no alternative but to collectively address and treat rivers as Commons. They must shift the narrative away from “sharing” (or dividing the spoils) to “managing” collectively, and putting in place an authoritative regional mechanism for meeting these challenges and effectively governing these commons. Our waters are, essentially, at the very heart of our common eco-system that we so heartlessly sought to carve into finite “nationally or sub-nationally owned” segments. In the heat and passion of our nationalist lust, we forgot the essential and inescapable truth: that the ecosphere and hydrosphere are a law unto themselves, governed by the immutable laws of nature, and care naught for the laws of man. It must be man that must adjust to nature’s writ, not nature to man’s. Therefore, to move towards putting in place a viable governance structure for collectively and jointly managing their common waters, South Asians must put in place a

governance structure to reasonably manage their ecology and environment.

## 4 Towards a new governance structure for ensuring ecological integrity and security – A Proposal

Eight years ago, in 2010, participating in a futures exercise contemplating what South Asia’s response would be to the non-traditional scenario likely to buffet the region in 2025 (extrapolating from then existing and known facts and situation on the ground), I had espoused the formation of a comprehensive, multi-bodied architecture of cooperative mechanisms that South Asians would have the common sense to have moved towards, chastened by an angered Mother Nature and an enraged environment (Karim, 2013 b). Today, I repeat that call here, with a greater sense of urgency than ever felt before, for collective consideration by all South Asians to come together to put in place at least two, to begin with, of those several bodies that I had envisaged earlier. Summarized below, with slight amendments and modifications, are the two bodies that I feel are of immediate and critical importance.

### 4.1 Establishing a South Asian Regional Ecological & Environmental Security Authority (SAREESA)

Recognizing that all these inter-related phenomena must be addressed holistically, let us establish an umbrella body with supra-national jurisdiction called the South Asian Regional Ecological & Environmental Security Authority (SAREESA), with states pooling, not ceding, sovereignty. If there is one lesson South Asians should have learnt from the inbuilt weaknesses of their earlier attempt at regional cooperation within the ambit of the South Asian Association of Regional (SAARC), it should be that such a body could only be what its nomenclature asserted: a mere “association” with perhaps a plethora of rosy pie-in-the-sky aspirations but no clearly defined common purpose or determination, no real governance structure, and no authoritative writ over even many of the things that they set in place. South Asian countries, considering the over-riding importance for ensuring ecological security, need now a governance structure that would possess the mandate and authority, pooled and devolved to it by the member states, to enforce adherence to its collective decisions. This body will take decisions by simple majority that are binding on everyone; no one state would be able to exercise veto power. Recognizing the extreme vulnerability of its

smallest and environmentally most endangered member, Maldives, let Male be chosen for locating the permanent secretariat of this new authority with supra-national jurisdiction.

The SAREESA should have six sectoral cells to deal with water security, food security, energy security, employment security, health security, and security from natural disasters, respectively (but in this paper, I shall emphasize the urgency of addressing one sector only). Each cell should be headed by an officer with the rank of Principal Secretary to the head of State or government (thus giving him a higher status and over-riding clout over the bureaucratic heads of permanent ministries in member-nations' bureaucratic hierarchy).

A minister-level governing body, the Governing Council, comprising full cabinet-rank ministers from each member country, will oversee the work, activities and programmes of the SAREESA. The Governing Council should meet once every three months, by rotation, in each member-country's capital. It should be chaired by the Head of Government of the country where the meeting is held. Decisions are to be arrived at by a simple-majority consensus. Decisions once taken are binding on every member state. The Governing Body will look at ecological security issues holistically while evaluating the work of each of its component cells, and its decisions will reflect this holistic perception of the ecological landscape to which the region belongs. Its decisions will be like laws passed by the national parliaments, but where the SAREESA decisions conflict with prior existing national laws, they over-ride the latter. Possessing this privileged position vis-a-vis national bodies, it will be authorized to initiate and ensure real-time information-exchange between all related national bodies in the sectoral areas of its jurisdiction.

The funding of SAREESA will be through mandatory contributions from each of its member states, the amount proportional to their population and weighted by their GDP. There must be complete transparency in SAREESA's governance process. At the same time, this institution must have an interactive and proactive public outreach program, that will include among other tools, creating mass awareness and mass education programs on various aspects related to its mandated work and jurisdiction that affect the public good and well-being overall.

## 4.2 Setting up The South Asian Water Security Authority (SAWSA) – the water security cell of SAREESA

SAWSA's water security mandate should exercise overall jurisdiction over all types of water bodies, viz.

ground water, surface water, rainwater and even sea water. It should be tasked with monitoring and managing all water resources in the region in a holistic manner, to regulate conservation of these resources as well as to prevent abuse or wastage. To execute its mandate, SAWSA will draw up meticulously formulated rules and regulations. National laws and regulations shall be required to be brought into conformity with SAWSA rules and regulations, but where they are not, SAWSA writ will prevail. The focus of SAWSA will be on:

### 4.2.1 Managing Ground Water Resources

Decades of unplanned and profligate use of groundwater aquifers has not only depleted many of these aquifers but also triggered unintended consequences, like arsenic leaching, and salinity infestation, spreading to ever widening areas. Since ground water recharging needs a long time, with the approval of SAREESA, SAWSA will impose very strict and stringent restrictions on sinking new tube wells of any type (whether deep or shallow). At the same time, continuing use of existing tube wells will be very strictly regulated and monitored. SAWSA will regularly map existing ground water reservoirs/aquifers using sophisticated technology globally available for the purpose. Where it finds that such reservoirs are in precarious condition, it will order removal of all tube wells drawing water from that reservoir and ban further extraction until such time as it determines the reservoir's health has been sufficiently restored and it is sufficiently viable for water extraction once again.

### 4.2.2 Managing Surface Water Resources

To manage surface water resources, SAWSA will need to establish three subsidiary bodies, namely:

- The Eastern Himalayan River Basins Management Body – to deal with the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Meghna and related basins;
- The Western Himalayan River Basins Management Body – to deal with the Indus and related basins; and
- The Central-Southern River Basins Management Body – to deal with the Narmada-Cauvery and related basins.

Considering that each sub-region has its own distinctive morphology, these bodies shall undertake river training and management on sub-regional basis. Each body will undertake to train the entire course of each river, including its tributaries and distributaries, through building embankments, dredging, creating small to medium sized pondage areas to serve not only as reservoirs but also for hydroelectricity generating projects. Where necessary, flood drainage canals will also be excavated to distribute/disperse sudden/seasonal



surges of flood waters evenly. The electricity produced may be fed into the local/national/sub-regional grid as may apply. Service roads should be constructed along one or both banks along the entire course of the river to the extent possible. Also, each bank should be lined with a belt of several rows of indigenous trees that serve to enhance carbon sequestration areas. Maintenance of these will be done throughout the year on a continuing basis, involving the local population along the course of the river, who will act as guardians of the rivers. This will create a constant bank of employment for the local people, integrate with the rural employment schemes that are gender blind, be more labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive, generating local wealth, as well as giving a sense of local ownership of the commons besides ensuring continuous maintenance. As guardians of these rivers, the local communities will comprise an early warning system alerting concerned authorities of impending risk or dangers to the river and its environ.

Simultaneously, local filtration plants need to be established that draw surface waters, treat it for human consumption and then feed it to defined areas along the entire river course. This may augment or completely replace dependence on ground water extraction and usage.

#### 4.2.3 Rainwater Harvesting and Management, & Seawater desalination

Rainwater harvesting and management will be under direct mandate of SAWSA. All new buildings/property development projects, whether personal, commercial or public, in urban, peri-urban/suburban and rural areas will be required by SAWSA regulations to incorporate rainwater harvesting as an integral component. Older structures must also make suitable conversions for including this process, for which they may be eligible for some subsidies and tax breaks to undertake the modification. New projects that fail to comply within a stipulated time, however, should be made liable to heavy penalties as well as mandatory amendments to layout plans; otherwise they would risk complete demolition without compensation.

Rainwater harvesting may be done either by the entire rainwater harvested being allowed to directly recharge the groundwater, or being channelled into storage schemes for local, communal and individual households, wells and ponds, and agro irrigation channels and reservoirs to serve industries. Depending on the morphology of the terrain, SAWSA will decide which component, or what mix serves a given area's needs best.

SAWSA will also undertake small or medium sized sea water desalination plants, where considered feasible, after locating suitable technology that may be available

at reasonable prices and after having done a cost-benefit evaluation to justify such ventures. Considerable R&D work has been taking place to try and make this process of extracting potable water from saline water efficient and relatively inexpensive; one hopes a competitive market will also appear globally.

## 5 Conclusion

South Asians need to come together, for the sake of self-preservation at least if nothing else, to pacify Nature, arrest and start rolling back the grievous damage that they have thoughtlessly inflicted on the common ecosphere, and to collectively manage, conserve, and restore the health of their shared river basins for optimum use of their steadily diminishing water resources. We must do it now, not later. Procrastinating on collaboratively addressing an existential challenge can never be an option for this region ready to burst at its seams.

The appeal above is no idle, wishful thinking. It is deadly serious. While I want Bangladesh to prosper and surge forward, I am an equally proud legatee of the collective heritage of a larger South Asia in which my nation-state is nested. We shall not survive unless we tend to this nest, collectively. If the bell tolls, it will toll for all South Asians.

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