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Water Dispute between India and Bangladesh: A Case Study from Tripura

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ABSTRACT

India and Bangladesh are two countries in South Asia which share 4156 km. international border. Both these countries are riverine and sometimes connected by the rivers. They have many transboundary rivers. Muhari is one of them. The Muhari River from Tripura has its origin in Lushai hills. The river enters into Bangladesh through Feni district and after dividing Feni and Chittagong district, it merged with the Bay of Bengal. Now it has become a zone of tension which has boiled the relations between India and Bangladesh. Muhari is a riverine border between India and Bangladesh. But due to a natural change in the course of the river, it created a char'(islet) or surfaced area. A large portion of this char landfall in Indian side but Bangladesh has a claim over this land. It has created conflict between two countries. Through the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) 2015, Indian government tried to solve the disputed issues between two countries. Under this agreement, the enclaves from both sides are exchanged. But Muhari char remains unsolved. The folks from Belonia, bordering Bangladesh find it problematic as they have firming lands in Muhari char. And it is uncertain to get right over those lands. The lack of consentient between the local, State government and the Central government created a hassle in the successful implementation of exchange of enclaves. Eventually, Muhari River has inscribed itself in international water dispute. This paper will throw light on the adverse position of the river. And also describe the role of community in foreign policymaking.

KEYWORDS: Riverine border, Muhari Char, Adverse position, Enclaves, Land boundary agreement.

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INTRODUCTION

The axis of International Relation revolves around a number of factors. Various elements constitute the edifice of the discipline. The discourse of International relations is centred on the controversy of ‘absolute gainⁱ’ and ‘relativeⁱⁱ gain’. The leading schools like Structural Realism and Liberal Institutionalism are in a great debate which policy should be pursued by a state to protect its national interest. The ever prominent realism is in favour of relative gain and argued that the very nature of power is relative hence the state should prefer relative gain as the pre-eminent condition of their foreign policy. On the contrary, the liberal institutionalism says that a number of factors are to be considered before framing foreign policy. With an inclination to the absolute gain, they viewed the foreign policy of a nation not solely a power seeking manifesto and hence protecting self-interest but also an instrument which considers economic and cultural issues. Social constructivism is another dominant theory of International relations, which develops recently. The constructivists have favoured absolute gain concept. Without discarding the realist’s notion of relative gain they just preferred the absolute gain over the relative one. The theory of social constructivism prefers the play and counter play of socio-cultural factors in International relations. A number of social, economic and cultural factors are there which help in framing a foreign policy of a country. In this era of mutual deterrence, the socio-cultural linkages are profitable for both the defender and protégé than engaging in direct confrontations. Though the realists strongly defended relative gain and augmented its importance by saying that the state should accumulate power for securing its national interest. But the post-cold war international politics emphasises the importance of culture and socio-economic linkages in formulating foreign policy. By doing so the state is not hampering its national interest but it is taking an alternative approach to promote its self-interest. In India-Bangladesh relations the absolute gain concept is handy.

The national interest of a country is the agglomeration of the external milieu and its domestic policies. The former one is needed for the sheer survival and security of a nation whereas the latter one is concerned about the development and stability of a nation. The extraneous factors guide a country to frame its external policy. India needs a supportive Bangladesh to check China's ascendancy in South Asia. Bangladesh's well-developed port can be accessed by India to open trade-gate for its North East. Both China and India are hoping to access the seaport of Bangladesh. China is planning to access Bangladesh's Sonodia Island and to make it a deep sea port and also want an access to Chittagong port, although in the last visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Dhaka ensured India's access to Chittagong port and Mongla port of Bangladesh³. In this context, it is necessary for India to mould its relations with Bangladesh. Apart from this, connectivity,

development, regional cooperation is the top priority sectors which influence the foreign policy making of a nation. In South Asia, India is an emerging power whereas Bangladesh is embryonic which is not even comparable to India. But the very geographical location of the country made it an important player in South Asian politics as Bangladesh is almost surrounded by the superpowers of the region – China, India and Pakistan. So in case of the relation between India and Bangladesh, a number of issues emerge. This cannot be discarded that both the nations are devoted to protecting their national interest. Nevertheless historical bonding, cultural connectivity constitutes a vital part of their foreign policymaking.

The concept of national interest itself is diversified and manipulated. The national interest of a country is the fulfilment of its domestic requirements. In fact, it is the conglomeration of diversified national issues. Based on the requirements of those domiciliary agendas, a state formulates its foreign policy. For example, Tamil community and related politics are one of the determinant factors in India-Srilanka relations. Arunachal Pradesh is controversial in India-China relations. Northeast India is connected with mainland only by narrow 22 km Siliguri corridor which is considered to be inadequate by Indian defence experts. This narrow strip of land is threatened. If Bangladesh permits, a strategic corridor can be set up and this will secure North East from any external aggression and can also ensure cost-effective transit facilities. A strong military base can be set up there to fight with insurgent groups from North East. So due to the heterogeneous nature of its domestic politics, India, like any other nations, pursued different foreign policies in neighbourhood which will not only meet India's own infrastructural development but will solve its domestic problems. Muhari char is one of such issues which are important for the security of Tripura. The adverse position of river Muhari created polemic between India and its counterpart Bangladesh. The anonymous Muhari River is the beholder of the common history of Tripura and Bangladesh. It not only involves two nations of South Asia but also highlighted the role of community in foreign policymaking. It portrays the interest of the community in the foreign policy-making of India and Bangladesh.

Conflict over Riverine Borders between India and Bangladesh:

States are the most dominant political institution. Being the supreme political organisation, it is allowed to have a specific spatial demarcation marked by borders. Subject to the anarchic nature of the international relations, states are considered as prime and independent actors in the domain of international politics which are authorised to frame their very own foreign policy. The foreign policy of a state is the manifestation of its national interest. On the other hand, to conduct stately affairs, the

sovereign state needs a solemn authority which is exercising its power over the autochthon. The community itself is a basal element in the formation of a state. It also demands a wider role in a country's foreign policy analysis. The critical role of a community cannot be ignored while framing a foreign policy of a country. In the widespread pedagogy of international relations, the nation states, a society of states and community of humankind are three fundamental elements which demand primacy over each other⁴. A number of factors interact in the widened field of foreign policy. A community is one of such factors. The relationship between the state and its citizens gives a reciprocal response to each other. Community plays a colossal role in knitting the foreign policy. At the same time, the neighbourhood policy of country demands a greater place for the interest of the community. Sometimes the nation states, in order to maintain their standard or the acclaimed position in the international society, consider the importance of community. Suppose the Rohingya issue has become one of the venerable issues between Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. The interest of this community has been felt by all these three nations. These nations tried hard to compel each other to shoulder the responsibility of Rohingya. An attempt had been made by the concerned nations to inculcate each other in order to maintain the prestige in global society. But they concluded with no productive decision. India has a very affable relation with both Myanmar and Bangladesh. Nonetheless, India fought shy of making any decision on Rohingya issue.

The vital role of the community cannot be discarded in the practically broadened field of foreign policy. The prevalence of community interest is a significant study in the changing nature of international relations. The discussion of Muhari char involves the interest of a particular community in the policy-making of both India and Bangladesh and the role of the State Governments is not negligible in the foreign policy-making of a country. In India, the present Government has necessitated the crucial role of the states who share international border especially through the 'Make in India Policy'. Tripura is one of such states which shares almost 856 Sq. Kilometres long border with Bangladesh. The Indian government, in order to frame any policy for Bangladesh, has to consider the importance of Tripura. Muhari char is an important factor for the local politics of Tripura.

This assertion fits accurately for the natives of Belonia⁵ (Tripura) who are claiming for their right to the 'char' islet of the riverine border Muhari. The human civilisation depends upon the flow of the river. River develops and flourishes human life. The necessity of a river is neither limited to the construction of dams nor a sine qua non of agriculture. A river is sometimes a border which demarcates two political entities. Never bounded within the domestic level, it's found as an essential determining factor in a country's foreign policymaking. A river has always been a source of

cooperation and connectivity between India and Bangladesh as both these South Asian countries have 54 trans-boundary rivers between them.

Border not only demarcates two sovereign entities, it assimilates two socially, culturally and historically connected societies. It has an economic aspect too. Muhari is a trans-boundary river between India and Bangladesh. Out of 54 officially recognised transboundary rivers between India and Bangladesh, Muhari is one along with Feni, Howrah, Gomati and Manu. In 1982 Bangladesh Government raised the issue of giving the status of Transboundary River to Muhari. It connects India and Bangladesh by passing through Tripura. It originated in Lushai hills and through Belonia (Tripura) and Feni district of Bangladesh; it has been poured into the Bay of Bengal. The river Muhari is one of the controversial issues which affect India – Bangladesh relations. Having originated from remote Northeast, the river is mostly anonymous and secluded. But the location of the river itself is of utmost importance. But the river has always been a part of the bilateral talk between two countries. The adverse position of this river between India and Bangladesh made it controversial.

Tripura is a tiny state from Northeast India. The state is surrounded by Bangladesh from three sides and connected to mainland India only through Mizoram. The tiny state Tripura shares not only international border with Bangladesh but also shares culture, history and tradition. The Make in India Programme of Central Government stressed the need for giving more importance to the states which are sharing the international border. Five Indian states Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, West Bengal and Tripura share border with Bangladesh. Among these, Tripura can be the important player due to its historical role in Bangladesh liberation.

A river has always been a source of politics especially when it demarcates two political entities. Muhari is also serving the same purpose as it is levelled as Transboundary River between India and Bangladesh. Muhari had two tributaries Selonia and Gutiya. Muhari isolated the estates (Zamindari) of the Maharajas in Hill Tripura from other Zamindari estates. It was a navigable river as it receives water from the hills⁶. After the partition, the river which flows in the plain part of Tripura fell in erstwhile East Pakistan side and eventually has become the riverine border between India and Bangladesh. Till 1965 Belonia was one of the nerve centres of trade. The railway between Belonia and Feni was the lifeline as the Tribal economy of the state was dependent on it. Jute and Mesta were the main products which were transported from Tripura to Kolkata by using Belonia – Feni railway. From Chittagong port, these commercial products were sent to Kolkata. But after 1965, the route had been stopped due to the regular skirmishes between the arm forces of India and erstwhile East Pakistan. Muhari has become a line of demarcation when it crosses Belonia and enters into Feni district of Bangladesh. River Muhari has changed its course. Hence the river bed has been

shifted towards Bangladesh side thereby created the char land (surface) to the Indian side. That char land is arable and it is used by the natives of both Bangladesh and India for cultivation. Now the folks are claiming for their rights over the surface of Muhari. The issue of cultivation in Muhari char has been instigating numerous problems in the local areas and hence affecting the relationship between two countries.

The dispute over Muhari char is identified as an international water dispute. The river flows between India and Bangladesh hence the Transboundary River Muhari is a part of the bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh. A number of eminent scholars have contributed to this talking point of international water dispute. Followings are the most notable one -

The Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers (1967) considered the hydrology⁷ of the basin as one of the determining factors in making foreign policy between the basin states⁸. Article IV and V of the same convention highlighted that the socio-economic needs of the basin states should be considered. The past utilisation of the basin was also firmly addressed.

The Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of Watercourse (1997)

Stressed using the water of Transboundary Rivers. Article 6 of the same convention says that the utilisation of watercourse must consider the interest of the population leaving nearby and hence dependent on it. It should also consider the socio-economic condition of the concerned state. The folks of a particular place nearby a river depend upon it. Any sort of change either in the course of a river or the decision making of the respective state can hamper the source of livelihood of the natives. So the respective states, while taking any decision regarding the Transboundary River will have to consider the interest of the folks who are dependent on the river otherwise it would destabilize the socio-economic and political structure.

Conflict and cooperation concerning Transboundary Rivers are very common all over the world. Most of the conventions- national and international level is concerned mostly with the water sharing, quantity of shared water, dam construction. But Muhari has a unique tale to narrate. The conflict over river Muhari is not like the others. In 1973 Muhari was declared as 'disputed land'. It may not give the profitable outcome to both India and Bangladesh relations. But the dispute concerning Muhari must be solved as it depicts the importance of community regime in foreign policy. Muhari being a transboundary river, not only involved India and Bangladesh, the dissention between Muhari has also included the citizens of both the nations. At the same time, there was a divergence between the Government of India and citizens regarding the land issue which is to be swiped with Bangladesh. So the case of Muhari char is global, local and political. It is global as it is

enlisted as an international water dispute. It is a river which due to its adverse position has connected India and Bangladesh. The river Muhari involves two important nations of South Asia hence it is political in nature.

Dispute over Muhari Char

Muhari is Trans-boundary River between India and Bangladesh but the conflict which is stated here discusses the issue concerning the conflict between the Government of India i.e., both the Central Government and the State Government and the citizen who are economically dependent on Muhari. The Muhari char was actually hereditament of the residents of Belonia. According to the local people of Belonia, slowly and gradually populace started coming closer to the town as the river was fierce sometimes. The more the river expands its edge, the less the community found nearby the river. Now the river has changed its course and it has shifted to Bangladesh side by creating a surface to the Indian side. Now the folks of Belonia are claiming to fix this issue. Muhari has two parts – Northern Muhari and Western Muhari. The western part has already been embanked. The case of Muhari shows how the adverse saturation of a river raises contradictions between India and Bangladesh, on the one hand, and the state India and its citizens on the other hand.

Politics of Muhari in India- Bangladesh Relations:

Tripura is always a vital player in India Bangladesh relations. The local politics of the state is often affected by the decisions taken between India and Bangladesh. The main dispute between India –Bangladesh concerning Muhari is mainly centred on the fact that Bangladesh wanted to settle the problem of demarcation on the basis of Chakla Roshnabad⁹ Map of 1893. But India stressed on the map of 1854 and 1892 as well for the amicable solution of the boundary issue. But neither erstwhile Pakistan nor independent Bangladesh accepted this. As a result, the demarcation was stopped. According to Agreement between Governments of India and Pakistan Regarding Procedure to End Disputes and Incidents along the Indo-East Pakistan Border Areas(1959)both the parties took initiatives to stop the border disputes. For that, the parties i.e., representatives of both India and Bangladesh agreed to meet frequently. This agreement opened a place for firing also. It is said in the same agreement

‘Where the boundary in the riverine area is criss-cross and portion of land on the home side of the river are owned by the other country, fire is opened when these lands are cultivated or attempts are made to dispose of their rightful owners’.

It also stated,

'When a char land is formed after the floods, whether in the bed of the river or as an accretion of the mainland, an attempt is made by nationals of both countries to seize the newly formed char lands. This leads to claims and counter-claims as to which side owns the char lands. Firing is resorted to supporting claims of the respective sides'.

After the agreement of 1974, river eventually changed its course. India is in favour of following the new course whereas Bangladesh stuck to its argument of going with the old course. If Indian government follows it, a major portion of the char land will fall in Bangladesh's side which will hamper the interest of Indian cultivators who have their cultivated land there in disputed Muhari char. This agreement marks the gross violation of human rights of those people who have their cultivated land there in disputed Muhari char. They are using this land for years. Now folks of both the sides are restricted to cultivate even. Hence any cultivation or harvesting was stopped for both the sides to this disputed land. The populace is also denied of their livelihood. But nationals from both the sides did not stop farming. The incidents of firing afterwards proved the callousness of this agreement.

Muhari char is a disputed land. Before 1971 the place was found to have skirmishes. The awful incident of firing can be identified in 1964 when a number of farmers went to their tenancy and the armed forces of Erstwhile East Pakistan fired upon them¹⁰. According to the report of a local, in 1996 when the farmers went to their land for farming, they were confronted by BDR. But the farmers refused and continued their farming. As a result, the BDR started firing on those Indian farmers¹¹. Very recently, in 2005 there was an open confrontation between both the sides on the issue of cremating a local at Belonia crematory. The BDR confronted the locals and the BSF as the crematory was controversial and falls on Muhari char. The river shifted its course several times. The gradual siltation and erosion of the river mounted the grievances of the nations of both sides. As due to this shift their interests have been jeopardized.

Muhari itself is one of the important factors in India – Bangladesh relations. The Fulgazi subdivision under Feni district of Bangladesh is next to Muhari. It is the residential area of Khaleda Zia. Moreover, the area of Muhari char land is the constituent assembly of Khaleda Zia. This is the place from where she gets elected. During her reign, she did not initiate for Muhari. Now in the reign of Hasina Government, this Muhari char land is one of the determining factors for increasing the vote bank in favour of Hasina from this area. And Government of India will definitely take an acquiescing policy for the preferred Hasina Government.

In the edifice of foreign policy making of a country, a number of issues arise. In making a country's foreign policy the interest of a specific community must be taken into account. At the same time, the domestic states which share an international border give a legitimate and strong claim for

their own interest. In this regard, the case of West Bengal can be raised. Mamta Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal denied any sort of agreement with Bangladesh regarding the water sharing of river Teesta in 2011. In spite of an overwhelming approach of the Central Government towards Hasina Government, West Bengal has become the elemental figure. In the foreign policy making of a country, vie is between the nation-state, domestic states and the community. The decision makers while considering the role of these three elements must specify the order of preference. Three players are involved here in India's decision making towards Bangladesh, –the nation-state i.e., India, Government of Tripura and the specific community involved in cultivation in the char land. The bargain is between the state and its citizens.

In 1973 when this islet was declared disputed, the people were thrown into an acute crisis. It was very uncertain for the poor farmers as that land was a source of earning to them. It was their ancestral land too. For a long period, they were settled alongside Muhari. Now the possessors of the land were asked to leave their entitlement as this char land is to be substituted with Bangladesh. The people from Indian side want an amicable solution to this problem as they full-heartedly supported the Land Boundary Agreement of 2015 but they don't want to swipe their land which will fall in Bangladesh side. They need proper compensation from Government for the lands falls in Muhari char. Before partition, Muhari had been used as a means of transport and communication between the integrated Tripura. The local also claim that the kingdom of Tripura had covered the present Muhari char. Moreover, 2 kilometres of land towards Bangladesh after crossing Muhari, was within the territorial purview of Tripura. But the Maharaja donated these 2kilometres of land to a Zamindar of Kalikapur. The locals still pay tax to the State government for this specific char land. The problem of 65 acres areas of char land is to be solved. Out of the total land 41 acres are Khas (fallow) which fall in the northern part of Muhari and rest 25 acres (approximately) are jote land (tillage). Now the locals are blaming the State Government for not taking any concrete initiatives for saving their inherent land. The locals who are mostly farmers using the char land for cultivation accused the State Government of increasing the value of that land. The locals who are having their land to this Muhari char are not even consulted or asked by the Central Government and the Government of Tripura before pillaring. The local accused that the former Left Government has raised the rate of the land which falls in Indian side i.e., before the dam. But the same government has reduced the rate of the land which is to be substituted with Bangladesh. They first raised question against pillaring in 2013 when the Joint Survey team came for inspection to Muhari char.

Before the Land Agreement Act 2015, a joint survey team came at Muhari char to demarcate the border. When the delegation from Bangladesh came to visit the place of Muhari, the folks raised questions. People raised a protest against the demarcation. That protest was widespread. The locals

highlighted that such demarcation is unjust. Because it will give major portions of the fertile Muhari to Bangladesh and the local farmers who are having their cultivated land in the char area, will get almost nothing. The farmers also accused their government as the Central Government and the state government didn't consult with the farmers whereas they have an entitlement to the jote land in Muhari char.

Article 1 clause 5 of India – Bangladesh Land Border Agreement, 1974 clearly states that the border in this area will run along the mid-stream of the Muhari River. Both the parties agreed to accept it as a permanent border. But neither India nor Bangladesh could conceptualise the agreement. Hence it could not stop the dispute over Muhari.

A protocol was signed between Smt Sheikh Hasina and former Prime Minister on 2011 on the settlement of enclavesⁱⁱⁱ. PM Modi after coming to power rushed to Bangladesh and both the countries came to this conclusion to solve this long stretching problem of demarcation. It has been stated in LBA 2015 that while initialising the Protocol 2011, the ground reality and the consent of the local people will be considered. But in actual the demands of the local people are grossly violated. Under Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) 2015, 111 Indian enclaves to Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves were decided to be exchanged. Till 2018, all the Bangladeshi enclaves were settled down along with another disputed area- Chandannagar on Sonaicherrariver from Dhalai district of Tripura. But Muhari is still pending and both the governments remain silent on this topic.

Tripura, the tiny state of Northeastern India, is increasingly coming into the foreign policy-making of India towards Bangladesh. Before 2011 when the Protocol was signed between Sheikh Hasina and Manmohan Singh, the Government of Tripura tried to take a concrete decision on Muhari. The Left Government called up a meeting with the leader of the opposition and the leaders of other political parties to reach into an amiable solution to the long-running demarcation of Muhari. The main concern was to secure Belonia in particular and Tripura in general. Such demarcation may be harmful to Belonia as a whole. So the security of Belonia was the main agenda of the concerned State Government. Belonia town is very close to Bangladesh and almost at the verge of Bangladesh border. The Government of Tripura refused to follow the Chakla Roshnabad Estate Map, 1893. A unanimous decision was made to compensate the locals who have their land in Muhari char. Badal Chaudhury, the former Revenue Minister of Tripura says when the joint Survey Team visited Muhari Char, and they started border demarcation by placing pillars¹². This has mounted dissatisfaction among the farmers, locals and the concerned State Government. Based on the demand of Bangladesh; India agreed to give the coveted char land to Bangladesh. Under this proposed bill, the crematorium will also come. It has raised a great resentment among the people of Belonia. This step

was opposed by the State Government as this decision of both the Indian government and Bangladesh government will not only spread indignation but also bring Belonia under threat.

The Muhari is a debated land. For last few decades, it has become one of the major concerns between India Bangladesh relations. In spite of many bilateral talks and agreements, Muhari issue has not been solved and it has been penetrating the relations. If the present demarcation which is to be done under LBA 2015, is biased or if it does not fulfil the aspiration of both the nationals, the eventual outcome will be harmful to both the countries. Border crimes will be proliferated. In addition to that, the scimmages between the arm forces will mushroom. A secured Muhari is of utmost importance for Tripura as a whole. Because Tripura is more exposed to Bangladesh than to its own India as it is bordered by Bangladesh from three sides. So an amicable and neighbourly solution to this problem of Muhari char is expected.

CONCLUSION:

River Muhari is known for its adverse situation. It is a riverine border and any permanent solution to this problem cannot be expected as a river changes its course anytime. Muhari River is a liaison between India and Bangladesh. It had economic aspect too. But whenever it is declared disputed, it engendered a great uncertainty to the folks. The fate of the people is unsettled yet. This is because both India and Bangladesh are not giving any serious effort to resolve the issue. The Indian government is willing to give the char land as Bangladesh is craving for this. But they could not find a unanimous demarcation policy. Due to the lackadaisical move of India and Bangladesh on the decision making on Muhari has resulted in bloodshed. The politics among two important nations of South Asia have involved the local politics of Tripura. Due to the tedious proceedings, people are suffering. LBA 2015 is willingly surrendering the projected lands to Bangladesh but it sets a great dissention among the local people. The locals are demanding high compensation. The State Government is in quandary as in spite of its direct involvement into this issue, it is heeding the Central Government. The dissention between India and Bangladesh on one hand and the people of Belonia and The Government of India, on the other hand, is impeding the possibility of this settlement. A peaceful settlement of this dispute is anticipated by both sides. But due to the lack of initiatives, the issue is yet not solved. The peaceful settlement of this issue of Muhari char will not only stop border conflict and thereby ensuring a viable relation between India and Bangladesh, it will also accentuate greater connectivity between India and Bangladesh. The Belonia (Bangladesh) – Feni railway is only 3km far from Belonia (India). If it is recommencing again, the trade will get a further spur as the Chittagong port is 3 km (approx.) away from Feni district of Bangladesh. The trade of

Indian Northeast will boost up as the route provides an alternative fortuity to development of this region. The dispute over Muhari char is a long-lasting issue. Both the country should solve this issue by following ethical hedonism¹³. Hedonism is a value to be pursued in the pragmatic foreign policy. Under the hedonism, all the elements or constituent aspect of the bilateral relations between two countries are to be considered. Muhari char is a unique tale of local politics which involves two important nations of South Asia – India and Bangladesh.

India and Bangladesh are the members of many regional and sub-regional groupings. SAARC is one of the important regional initiatives. India and Bangladesh, both are two founding members of SSARC. The main thrust of this organisation is to ensure regional cooperation through mutual assistance. Regional peace and stability are also high-priority agendas of SSARC. The SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters was signed at the Fifteenth Summit¹⁴ which stressed on such criminal activities affecting the peace of the region. The long-running Muhari char issue is disturbing the peace in Tripura- Bangladesh border. The respective sides of each border side are under threat. The disputed area of Muhari char is susceptible to border crimes like human trafficking and drug trafficking as well. So the issue must be solved as soon as possible. Apart from SAARC, the other sub-regional groupings like BBIN and SASEC are also established for ensuring economic development and political stability through cooperation. BBIN has stressed people to people contact as indispensable for regional development. The Muhari char is not only a transboundary river and disputed issue between India and Bangladesh, but it has some hereditary connectivity and cultural bonding as river Muhari was used as a riverine route in integrated Tripura. If all of these links are to be connected, the transboundary river Muhari can emerge as a harbinger of regional cooperation. It may contribute towards attaining a peaceful neighbourhood thereby ensuring regional development.

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