Recent talks of optimism over the Teesta accord by Indian Foreign Secretary, Ranjan Mathai and Minister of External Affairs, Salman Khurshid have defused a striking political assertion of bringing a cut to the impending decade-long water deal between both countries. With the cross-border exchange of premier visits nearing this year, a greater expectation garners public attention and raises the question of the underlying profound inadequacies. As technical data on the Dalia and Gazaldoba barrages on the Teesta River is presently examined in Kolkata, this article highlights the palpable expectations of both countries in regard to the Teesta water sharing arrangement. It simultaneously draws attention to the propelling shortfalls that surface as major bottlenecks in addressing these concerns given the histological accounts. What do the Indo-Bangla governments anticipate from each other in terms of sanctioning the Teesta river agreement? What are the impelling factors that provide rationale to their core essential position on the issue?

Expectations
In view of boosting its agricultural production and providing protection to the 21 million people who live along the river basin, Bangladesh expects an equitable 50 percent distribution of the remainder 25 percent portion with India over the Teesta River. Failing to fulfil this proportionate requirement, the recipients along the river basin will be worse affected. More so, the Dalia barrage that was constructed along the Teesta River, in an attempt to revive cultivable land during the dry season, has been adversely impinged upon. This is due to the erroneous construction of the Gazaldoba barrage by the upper riparian state on its part of the Teesta River. Ever since the Dalia barrage project has come to a point of closure, Bangladesh anticipates remedy as against the acute water shortage it faces in the downstream areas during the dry season, primarily the northwest. Amounting to a severe concern as it is amongst the utmost drought prone regions of Bangladesh during the lean season (January-February), the Teesta Barrage Project (TBP) case study suggests that the present flow in the Teesta River is extremely scarce to meet the present irrigation demands, as fluctuations in the river flow affect the provision of water in the TBP area.

Hard Truths
India and Bangladesh share 57 transboundary rivers but only have an agreement for one. Since 1974, Bangladesh has perceived India as having failed to deliver and act upon the promising 'big brother' it presupposes in the region. India substantiated the standpoint by violating the clauses of the Ganges Water treaty and supplies excess water during floods and a reduced amount during the dry season, which ultimately triggers draughts. Disagreements over Tipai Mukh dam, Teesta River, and river-linking projects for trade and transit add to the already situated tensions between the two countries.

Post the UPA and All India Trinamool Congress fraction in 2012, a prospect to recover Indo-Bangla relations was sought by putting a wrap to the Teesta accord. The recent Indian parliamentary delegation to Bangladesh asserts the centre’s stance on the issue. On 10 February 2013, Indian Foreign Secretary, Ranjan Mathai pledged conclusive obligation over the Teesta ordeal, “We are unwavering in our commitment to reach a satisfactory conclusion within the shortest possible timeframe”. In addition, optimism was highlighted by the external affairs minister, Salman Khurshid, on sanctioning the deal, "the process was stalled post the prime minister’s visit to Dhaka in September 2011. But this time we are quite keen to sign the Teesta water sharing treaty with Bangladesh at the earliest."
As is evident, the centre propagates West Bengal’s consensus to instigate national directives. It is exigent to persuade the state government from giving in considering their reports and findings. According to the 2009 Kalyan Rudra report, the state of West Bengal receives less than 40 percent of the available utilisable surface water. More so, the reservoirs only meet 2.44 per cent of the total demand for water (i.e. 5380 X 107 cu.m) in the agricultural sector. West Bengal’s major grief is that the delta which was once described as an area of ‘excess’ water in the colonial document, now suffers from acute dearth of water during the lean months. From the regional point of view, West Bengal’s uncertainty is justified whether the proposed water sharing ratio will be able to meet the mounting demands of the region. In such a scenario, it is expected that both countries bend to the given situation and recognise that living with low flows in the region is an inevitable aspect.

The Road Ahead
Both Bangladesh and West Bengal recognise that dealing with their regional problems offhand is a significant impetus to allowing the water deal to kick off. West Bengal’s Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee made it clear at more than one occasion that her concerns hold in the greater interest of the state rather than admitting concern towards strengthening Indo-Bangladeshi ties. “National interests cannot paramount at the stake of West Bengal”, stated the Irrigation and Waterways Minister Rajib Banerjee of West Bengal.

In the wake of fraying Indo-Bangla relations, the signing of the extradition treaty and a liberalised visa agreement does mark an effort towards improving bilateral relations between the two countries. However, at this juncture, it is expedient that Bangladesh continues cooperation till India re-adopts water diplomacy and refrains from acting as the ‘stipulated’ big brother in the region.