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REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF A SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM IN THE AGENDA
OF THE THIRTY-FIRST SESSION

QUESTION OF UNILATERAL DIVERSION OF WATERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
RIVER GANGES, IN CONTRAVENTION OF ALL INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND
REGULATIONS AND TRADITIONAL USAGES AND IN VIOLATION OF SOLEMN
PLEDGES ON THE USE OF SUCH WATERS

Letter dated 26 August 1976 from the Permanent
Representative of Bangladesh to the United
Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Further to my letter of 21 August 1976 (A/31/195) regarding the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the thirty-first session of the General Assembly, I have the honour to transmit herewith the explanatory memorandum in accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure.

(Signed) Khwaja Mohammed KAISER
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

1. The rivers of Bangladesh constitute a major resource for the country. The economic well-being and, indeed, the very survival of the people of Bangladesh are inextricably linked with the life-giving waters of its rivers.
2. The river Ganges in particular serves about 37 per cent (20,000 square miles) of the total area and one third of the population of Bangladesh, some 25 million people.
3. Bangladesh today is faced with a problem of crisis proportions. This has resulted from the construction, and actual operation from June 1975, by India of a barrage across the river Ganges at Farakka, 11 miles (17 kilometres) up-stream from its border with Bangladesh, diverting the flow of the river Ganges to the extent of three fourths of its dry season flow, into the river Hooghly in India. The ostensible purpose of this diversion of waters is to flush out deposits of silt in the river Hooghly to improve the navigability of the port of Calcutta.
4. The adverse consequences of the Indian withdrawals of Ganges water at Farakka on Bangladesh, the lower riparian, have been immediate. The impact has been devastating and will worsen with time.
5. Most of the water available to Bangladesh through surface water in the rivers and precipitation within its territory is concentrated in the monsoon period from June to October. The flows in the rivers are significantly low during the other months, when rainfall is also scarce. There is, therefore, the problem of floods during the monsoon period and scarcity of water during the remaining long dry period. Water supplies are particularly needed during this dry period from November to May for agriculture, domestic and industrial purposes, for maintaining river depths, for sustaining fishery and forestry and for keeping in check inland penetration of sea water from the Bay of Bengal. Major use of this water is needed for agriculture, which supports 80 per cent of the population. The overriding development priority is to maximize the production of food crops during this dry period by extending perennial irrigation facilities. Given Bangladesh's high density of population and current level of food production, insufficient to sustain even the very low per capita consumption of 14 ounces per day, the importance of these water supplies cannot be over-emphasized. With adequate water, the cropped area in this region could be more than doubled and, with proper irrigation facilities, diversification and rotation, the entire agricultural economy transformed to meet the needs of the people.
6. India's unilateral diversion of the Ganges waters has not only blocked this vital potential; it has had unprecedented ecological and economic consequences on Bangladesh with a built-in multiplier effect. In the dry seasons of 1976 the level and discharge of the Ganges River waters fell below the minimum ever observed and recorded during the dry season. Huge shoals have formed in the river, thereby

increasing flood hazards in the monsoon. Irrigation facilities, particularly by pumps and shallow and even deep tube-wells, have been hampered and pumps rendered inoperative. Some 400,000 acres of agricultural land have been affected owing to lack of water and soil moisture deficiency. Rice production fell by some 236,000 tons. River navigation was disrupted. Fishery, forestry and livestock resources have been severely depleted. The level of salinity has increased, particularly in the distributory rivers south-west of Bangladesh, seriously jeopardizing power and agricultural production. Shortage of potable water was acute in many districts. The drastic reduction in the dry season flow of the Ganges in Bangladesh and consequent increased coastal saline water encroachment has affected the whole environment and ecology of the region.

7. The adverse effects of the Farakka project on Bangladesh were anticipated as early as 1951, when India's plan to divert Ganges water was reported in the newspapers. A series of protracted negotiations at the official level between the two countries and an exchange of voluminous technical data followed with little result. In the meantime, India started construction of the barrage in 1961 and completed it in 1975.

8. The Government of Bangladesh took up the matter with the Government of India at the technical, official and ministerial levels. The Government of India at various times gave the solemn assurance that, before the Farakka Barrage was operated, a mutually satisfactory solution of the problem would be arrived at.

9. In April 1975, the Indian Government pointed out that, while discussions regarding allocation of water were continuing, it was essential to run the feeder canal of the Farakka Barrage during the remaining lean period of the year. In good faith and in a spirit of goodwill, Bangladesh agreed under an interim agreement dated 18 April 1975 to the request of the Government of India to test-run the Farakka feeder canal for the specified period from 21 April to 31 May 1975 with discharges varying from 11,000 to 16,000 cusecs. In this agreement, there was no provision for any withdrawal beyond 31 May 1975. However, India continued to operate the feeder canal even after this date to its full capacity of 40,000 cusecs without any consultation with or the concurrence of Bangladesh.

10. In spite of explicit agreements and ignoring repeated requests to settle the matter, India has continued unilaterally to withdraw a large volume of water from the river Ganges.

11. Bangladesh has made all possible efforts to solve the dispute with India in a spirit of friendship and good-neighbourly relations. Bilateral negotiations have spread over a quarter century. Voluminous correspondence has been exchanged. Numerous meetings at all levels have taken place, but the demand for more data and further studies by India continues to proliferate, adding to the burden of those already existing, and no agreed solution appears in sight.

12. Despite 25 years of discussion, the barrage became a fait accompli. It was commissioned. Notwithstanding all the meetings, all the studies, all the explicit

undertakings and expressed good intentions, the waters continue to be withdrawn to the grave detriment of the welfare of the people of Bangladesh.

13. Bangladesh has brought the issue of the Ganges water dispute to the attention of the General Assembly in consonance with Article 14 of the Charter of the United Nations. Such a situation directly threatens the economic sovereignty of Bangladesh. It has adversely affected friendly relations between India and Bangladesh and has a direct bearing on the economic welfare of millions of people in Bangladesh. Failure to resolve this issue expeditiously and satisfactorily carries with it the potential threat of conflict affecting peace and security in the area and the region as a whole.
