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Assessing The Environmental Outcomes of India's Neighborhood First Policy in the Teesta River Dispute

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ABSTRACT
India's "Neighborhood First" (NFP) policy, articulated since 2014, prioritizes constructive, non-reciprocal engagement with South Asian neighbors. Yet the Teesta River dispute with Bangladesh—centered on lean-season allocations, upstream hydropower and irrigation withdrawals, and downstream ecological stress—remains unresolved. This paper assesses the environmental outcomes associated with the NFP approach in the Teesta basin. It synthesizes evidence on changing cryospheric conditions in Sikkim and Darjeeling, hydrological variability and low-flow stress in northern Bangladesh, and risk highlighted by the October 2023 South Lhonak glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) that cascaded down the Teesta valley. It also evaluates recent geo-economic developments, including Bangladesh's pursuit of a China-financed Teesta Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project, in light of NFP's cooperative aims. While NFP has broadened India–Bangladesh connectivity and expanded problem-solving channels, the absence of a signed Teesta sharing treaty—despite a widely reported 2011 draft formula—has limited environmental gains downstream. We find mixed outcomes: incremental cooperation on disaster response and hydromet information, but persistent dry-season ecological stress and mounting flood risks due to climate change and infrastructure exposure. The paper concludes with options compatible with NFP: time-bound treaty finalization with ecological flow guarantees, a transboundary Teesta Basin Council, joint GLOF-to-delta risk management, and blended finance for sediment, bank, and floodplain restoration—aimed at aligning diplomatic intent with measurable environmental recovery.
Keywords: *Teesta River, Neighborhood First Policy, transboundary water governance, ecological flows, climate risk, Bangladesh–India relations, GLOF, environmental diplomacy*

INTRODUCTION

India's Neighbourhood First policy, announced in 2014, aims to foster closer political, economic, and cultural engagement with South Asian neighbours—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—through non-reciprocal cooperation and shared resource management. Among these relationships, water diplomacy between India and Bangladesh has emerged as a critical test case. The Teesta River dispute, second in importance only to the Ganges, provides an instructive lens to examine whether this policy has generated measurable environmental benefits alongside strategic outreach.

The Teesta originates in Sikkim, flows through West Bengal, and enters Bangladesh, supporting agriculture, wetlands, and livelihoods before joining the Brahmaputra. Its marked contrast between monsoon surges and lean-season scarcity has made dry-season allocation intensely contentious. Hydrological studies underscore this ecological vulnerability: Mullick, Babel, and Perret (2010) estimated that 90–120 m^3/s of minimum flow is needed in January–February to maintain river health; Mondal and Islam (2017) reported sharp declines in low flows at Kaunia and Dalia stations (1985–2006) due to upstream regulation at Gajoldoba Barrage; and Afroz and Rahman (2013) linked reduced discharges to sedimentation, habitat degradation, and livelihood stress in downstream Bangladesh. These findings highlight that any diplomatic arrangement must guarantee reliable environmental flows to prevent ecosystem collapse.

Negotiations since the 1980s have produced only temporary or stalled agreements. The 2011 draft interim accord proposed allocating 42.5 % of dry-season flow to India and 37.5 % to Bangladesh, with the remainder left unallocated. However, domestic opposition from West Bengal blocked its signing, revealing how India's federal structure—where water is a state subject—can constrain foreign-policy implementation. This subnational veto power is a recurring theme in scholarly analyses of Indo-Bangladesh hydro-diplomacy.

Recent research adds an environmental-economic perspective. Hydro-economic modelling indicates that providing Bangladesh with additional lean-season flows can yield basin-wide net gains once ecological services and agricultural productivity are factored against modest hydropower trade-offs upstream. Institutional studies recommend establishing a permanent joint river-basin framework with explicit

environmental flow provisions, moving beyond episodic negotiations to rules-based cooperation that can survive political shifts.

Developments since 2010 have intensified these concerns. Climate change is amplifying droughts, floods, and dam-safety risks across the Himalayan region. In the Teesta basin, extreme events have exposed weaknesses in infrastructure, early-warning systems, and coordinated sediment management—underscoring that stronger ecological governance could serve as a co-benefit of diplomatic stability. Meanwhile, Bangladesh's exploration of alternative financing for basin projects, including Chinese involvement, has introduced new geopolitical dynamics, increasing pressure on India to demonstrate the effectiveness of its Neighbourhood First policy through meaningful cooperation.

This study examines whether India's Neighbourhood First approach has improved environmental outcomes in the Teesta River dispute between 2010 and 2024. It focuses on three dimensions:

1. **Policy content** – the inclusion of environmental flows and ecological safeguards in official positions and draft agreements.
2. **Operational cooperation** – evidence of data sharing, coordinated dry-season releases, and joint flood-warning mechanisms.
3. **Livelihood impact** – whether ecological risk for riparian communities has been reduced in practice.

By integrating hydrological evidence (Mullick et al., 2010; Afroz & Rahman, 2013; Mondal & Islam, 2017), institutional research, and official policy records, the paper evaluates whether India's neighbourhood diplomacy has advanced ecological stewardship—or whether strategic rhetoric has outpaced concrete environmental progress. In doing so, the Teesta serves as a litmus test for aligning regional statecraft with sustainable transboundary river governance in a climate-stressed era.

TEESTA DISPUTE: HYDROPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Teesta River, rising in the eastern Himalayas and flowing through Sikkim, northern West Bengal, and into Bangladesh, is a vital source of irrigation, drinking water, and livelihoods for millions, yet no formal treaty governs its waters. The dispute traces back to the 1947 partition, when the river basin was divided between India and East Pakistan, and continued after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. While the 1996 Ganges Treaty showed that India and Bangladesh could cooperate on transboundary rivers, Teesta allocations have remained unresolved. An interim formula in the 1980s proposed 39 percent of dry-season flow for Bangladesh, 36 percent for India, and the rest left for ecological needs, but it was never formalized. A 2011 draft accord suggesting 42.5 percent for India and 37.5 percent for Bangladesh collapsed when West Bengal's state government opposed it, citing local irrigation demands, demonstrating how India's federal structure complicates foreign policy. The dispute is less about hydrology alone and more about strategic and political pressures. For New Delhi, managing ties with Dhaka is central to its Neighborhood First Policy, ensuring stability in the eastern frontier and countering Chinese influence. For Bangladesh, Teesta water is essential to support agriculture in the drought-prone Rangpur region and represents a symbol of equitable treatment. Domestic politics have repeatedly hindered resolution, as India faces pressure from West Bengal farmers while Bangladeshi governments face criticism from opposition parties for appearing too accommodating. In the absence of an agreement, environmental stress has intensified: dry-season withdrawals upstream sharply reduce flows downstream, limiting irrigation and groundwater recharge, while unregulated monsoon releases trigger flash floods, damaging crops, eroding riverbanks, and degrading wetland ecosystems. This hydropolitical deadlock undermines the cooperative and ecological aims of India's Neighborhood First Policy and creates openings for external actors, notably China, which has proposed infrastructure projects on the Teesta in Bangladesh, raising strategic concerns. Resolving the dispute requires moving beyond rigid volumetric divisions toward integrated river-basin governance that balances environmental flows, modernizes irrigation, establishes joint monitoring, and develops shared infrastructure. Such an approach would align India's regional policy with ecological responsibility, turning the Teesta from a source of friction into a model for sustainable transboundary water management and reinforcing India's credibility as a cooperative regional power.

NEIGHBORHOOD FIRST POLICY: OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY

India's Neighborhood First Policy represents a strategic foreign policy framework that prioritizes cordial relations with its immediate neighbors in South Asia. Since its formal articulation in 2014, the policy has

aimed to cultivate an environment of trust, stability, and prosperity in the region by strengthening diplomatic ties, deepening economic integration, and fostering sustainable development. While it is often viewed through geopolitical and economic lenses, this policy has significant implications for environmental diplomacy, especially where shared natural resources demand cooperative management. The Teesta River dispute between India and Bangladesh provides a clear example of how environmental considerations intersect with foreign policy objectives.

The primary purpose of the Neighborhood First Policy is to reinforce political and strategic relationships with neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. India's approach emphasizes consistent high-level engagement, dialogue to resolve conflicts, and mutual respect for sovereignty. By maintaining strong regional bonds, India seeks to prevent external powers from exploiting local tensions and to ensure that South Asia evolves as a cohesive and peaceful neighborhood. Alongside political outreach, the policy promotes economic integration through trade facilitation, cross-border infrastructure projects, and regional energy cooperation. Transport corridors, power grid linkages, and digital networks are intended to create economic interdependence, which in turn stabilizes political relations. Moreover, the policy extends India's developmental support in the form of concessional credit, technical expertise, and capacity building. These efforts are not limited to economic growth alone; they include collaboration in renewable energy, agricultural modernization, disaster management, and environmental sustainability, highlighting that neighborhood diplomacy increasingly incorporates ecological dimensions.

Environmental diplomacy has become a vital component of this policy because South Asia faces shared climate vulnerabilities such as glacial melting, erratic monsoons, and recurring floods. India's initiatives under the Neighborhood First Policy now include joint management of transboundary water resources, early-warning systems for disasters, and cooperative projects in clean energy. These actions help foster regional stability, prevent environmental disputes from escalating into political confrontations, and project India as a responsible regional leader. The management of shared rivers is one area where this policy is particularly relevant. Rivers such as the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Teesta are critical to the livelihoods of millions, and coordinated management is essential to guarantee water security, equitable distribution, and ecological preservation. India's ongoing dialogue with Bangladesh over the Teesta River, despite the absence of a final agreement, reflects a commitment to sustained communication and avoidance of conflict under this policy framework.

By aligning its diplomatic outreach with global commitments like the Paris Climate Agreement and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, India has also embedded sustainability into its regional agenda. Assistance to neighbors in renewable energy adoption, afforestation programs, and climate-resilient agriculture supports international goals such as clean water access, climate action, and preservation of terrestrial ecosystems. Furthermore, the Neighborhood First Policy promotes the creation of regional disaster-management mechanisms, including flood forecasting, glacial lake monitoring, and coordinated cyclone response systems. These initiatives are particularly important in the context of river disputes, where sudden water diversions or discharges can have devastating downstream consequences.

The Teesta River dispute illustrates how this policy can serve as a platform for environmental cooperation rather than confrontation. The river, which originates in Sikkim and flows into Bangladesh, sustains agriculture, fisheries, and livelihoods on both sides of the border. Instead of framing the issue as a zero-sum contest, India's Neighborhood First Policy provides opportunities for collaborative solutions. Through basin-wide data sharing, joint hydrological studies, and climate-resilient irrigation strategies, the policy encourages negotiations informed by science and development priorities rather than purely political bargaining. By focusing on sustainability, India's approach resonates with Bangladesh's own climate adaptation goals, reducing mistrust and creating space for consensus. If effectively implemented, these measures could transform water-sharing arrangements into a model for regional environmental governance, showing that diplomatic engagement grounded in ecological responsibility can deliver mutual benefits and long-term stability.

ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINES AND EMERGING STRESSORS

Assessing the environmental outcomes of India's Neighborhood First policy in the context of the Teesta River dispute requires establishing a clear and comprehensive environmental baseline. Such a baseline must capture the physical, ecological, and social dimensions of the basin. Hydrological information — including multi-year records of seasonal and daily river discharge, groundwater levels, and historical dry-

season allocations — provides the foundation for understanding how water-sharing arrangements translate into measurable impacts. Equally important are sediment budgets and channel morphology. The Teesta carries one of the highest suspended-sediment yields in the eastern Himalaya, influencing flood risk, channel migration, and deltaic deposition downstream. These factors determine how upstream interventions or policy shifts can affect both the environment and the livelihoods dependent on it.

Ecological baselines are essential for documenting riparian habitats, wetland systems, fish and invertebrate assemblages, and critical breeding grounds that sustain local fisheries. Remote sensing of land-use and land-cover trends can reveal the expansion of irrigated areas, deforestation, and changes in terrace farming, all of which alter how the river responds to management and climatic events. Social baselines provide another crucial layer, capturing household water use, irrigation schedules, crop calendars, and livelihood dependence on seasonal flows. Together, these physical, ecological, and socio-economic datasets create a benchmark against which any policy-driven environmental outcomes can be assessed.

In parallel with establishing baselines, it is necessary to identify emerging stressors that can disrupt river systems and confound the impacts of diplomatic initiatives. Climate change is a major factor, accelerating glacial retreat and increasing the frequency of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). These sudden, high-magnitude flow events can drastically alter sediment loads, damage infrastructure such as barrages and hydropower intakes, and reshape downstream floodplains, undermining the predictability of water-sharing arrangements. The devastating floods witnessed in the upper Teesta basin in recent years highlight how quickly environmental conditions can shift.

Anthropogenic stressors add further complexity. Hydropower development, upstream diversions, river-training works, and large irrigation schemes modify the timing and quantity of flows. These interventions can trap or redistribute sediment in ways that destabilize channels and degrade downstream ecosystems. Rapidly evolving infrastructure proposals, such as the proposed Teesta Mega Project, carry both opportunities for cooperative basin management and risks of localized ecological harm if environmental safeguards are insufficient. At the same time, changing geopolitical dynamics, including third-party financing of projects in the basin, can accelerate development works without adequate environmental assessment, altering the very framework within which bilateral negotiations occur.

These natural and human-driven stressors interact in non-linear ways. Sediment dynamics, channel instability, and social vulnerability can combine to create threshold effects, where a single GLOF or poorly timed diversion triggers severe bank erosion, crop loss, and community displacement. To capture such interactions, assessments must go beyond static indicators and incorporate high-frequency monitoring using hydrometeorological gauges, sediment samplers, and satellite imagery. Coupled models that integrate hydrology, sediment transport, and socio-economic exposure can help predict how specific policy decisions will play out under different scenarios.

Finally, institutional factors must also be included as part of the baseline. Transboundary information-sharing, joint monitoring mechanisms, and environmental impact safeguards built into bilateral agreements are governance indicators that determine whether diplomatic initiatives produce sustainable results. A policy may succeed in easing political tensions but still fail environmentally if it neglects ecological thresholds and local livelihood needs.

In sum, evaluating the Neighborhood First policy in the Teesta dispute demands robust, multi-year baselines across hydrological, sedimentary, ecological, land-use, and socio-economic dimensions, combined with careful tracking of emerging stressors such as climate extremes, rapid infrastructure expansion, and shifting geopolitical incentives. Only a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach can reveal whether diplomatic engagement translates into equitable and environmentally resilient outcomes for communities on both sides of the border.

ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES UNDER NFP

India's **Neighborhood First Policy (NFP)** is intended to deepen ties with neighboring countries through cooperative diplomacy, economic engagement, and regional integration. One of the most complex challenges under this policy is the **Teesta River dispute with Bangladesh**, where environmental sustainability, equitable water allocation, and political negotiation intersect. Assessing environmental outcomes under NFP in this case requires careful consideration of flow management, climate change impacts, agricultural needs, and ecological conservation.

The Teesta River originates in Sikkim, passes through West Bengal, and enters Bangladesh before merging with the Brahmaputra. The river sustains millions of people by providing irrigation, drinking water, and

fisheries. Negotiations to finalize a water-sharing agreement—originally proposing 42.5% of the flow for India and 37.5% for Bangladesh—have stalled due to concerns raised by West Bengal over water security for its farmers. While NFP encourages cooperative resolution, political sensitivities often overshadow environmental priorities such as maintaining ecological flows, preserving biodiversity, and adapting to climate variability.

Environmental stresses in the Teesta basin are evident in several dimensions. Reduced downstream flows have caused wetland shrinkage, declining fish stocks, and soil degradation in Bangladesh, while upstream areas in West Bengal face irrigation pressures of their own. Although bilateral discussions under NFP have opened space to address these flow management issues, no binding agreement ensures minimum ecological flows. Climate change adds another layer of complexity, as glacial retreat, glacial lake outburst floods, and erratic monsoons threaten the river's seasonal stability. Under NFP, India and Bangladesh have improved data-sharing during floods and lean periods, but joint climate adaptation programs remain limited.

Agricultural livelihoods on both sides of the border are under strain. Farmers in West Bengal require reliable irrigation during the dry season, while farmers in northern Bangladesh face reduced paddy and jute yields due to inadequate water availability. NFP talks have occasionally considered collaborative approaches to irrigation efficiency and technology transfer, but progress has been partial and implementation inconsistent. The river's biodiversity also suffers as aquatic species and wetlands face degradation from altered flows and pollution. Proposals have been made to initiate joint ecological studies and conservation programs under NFP, yet these remain under consideration rather than fully operational.

Institutionally, the Joint River Commission has provided a forum for dialogue, but it lacks binding authority to enforce sustainable basin-wide rules. Active discussions have prevented unilateral actions and maintained diplomatic goodwill, yet the absence of a finalized Teesta agreement continues to limit environmental safeguards. While environmental clearance processes for hydropower and irrigation projects upstream show an emerging recognition of ecological impacts, the broader governance framework is still dominated by political bargaining rather than science-based planning.

Table 1: Environmental Outcomes under NFP: A Snapshot

Key Issue	Environmental Impact	NFP-Driven Action	Status
Reduced downstream flow	Wetland shrinkage, declining fish stocks	Bilateral dialogue on flow management	**Ongoing, no final agreement**
Climate change hazards	Glacial retreat, GLOF risk, erratic monsoons	Data-sharing during floods and lean periods	**Improved, but limited scope**
Agricultural water stress	Cropping losses upstream & downstream	Discussion on irrigation efficiency	**Partially addressed**
Biodiversity decline	Threat to aquatic species & habitats	Proposal for joint ecological studies	**Under consideration**
Institutional gaps	Lack of enforceable basin-wide rules	Joint river commission remains active	**Limited authority**

Overall, the environmental outcomes of NFP in the Teesta basin are mixed. On the positive side, dialogue platforms have reduced the risk of escalation, improved real-time hydrological data exchange, and kept cooperative mechanisms functional. However, major shortcomings remain: ecological flow thresholds have not been defined, environmental concerns remain subordinate to state-level politics, and collaborative efforts on biodiversity and watershed management have yet to take shape.

Strengthening environmental outcomes under NFP will require embedding eco-hydrological principles into river management. India and Bangladesh could benefit from establishing a joint river basin authority that includes scientists, policymakers, and community representatives, defining minimum ecological flows to protect downstream ecosystems, improving real-time hydrological monitoring to address floods and droughts, and implementing joint watershed restoration and biodiversity projects alongside water-sharing negotiations.

The Teesta River dispute is both a challenge and an opportunity for the Neighborhood First Policy. While the policy has succeeded in maintaining dialogue and preventing unilateral measures, its environmental performance has been uneven due to the lack of binding agreements and enforceable ecological safeguards. By prioritizing sustainable river governance and aligning diplomatic goodwill with science-

based planning, India can enhance trust with Bangladesh and set a precedent for environmentally responsible transboundary water management in South Asia.

POLICY OPTIONS TO ALIGN NFP WITH MEASURABLE ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY

India's Neighborhood First Policy (NFP) is designed to deepen regional cooperation through economic and political engagement, yet in transboundary water disputes such as the Teesta River issue with Bangladesh, ecological considerations have often been overshadowed by competing development priorities. Aligning NFP with measurable environmental recovery is crucial to ensure that diplomacy produces tangible ecological outcomes rather than symbolic agreements. Several policy options can make this alignment possible. First, an integrated basin governance mechanism, such as a joint Indo–Bangladesh Teesta River Authority, could oversee equitable water allocation, regulate seasonal flows, and monitor ecosystem health. This would require real-time hydrological data sharing and transparent decision-making frameworks to minimize distrust. Second, legally enforceable environmental flow (E-flow) guarantees must be incorporated to maintain minimum river discharge during lean seasons, protecting biodiversity and reducing riverbed degradation. Compliance could be verified through automated telemetry stations jointly audited by both countries. Third, green investment and technology transfer—including efficient irrigation systems, sediment management tools, and renewable energy–powered water infrastructure—should be supported through cross-border financing mechanisms, where disbursement is linked directly to ecological performance indicators. Fourth, diplomacy must be outcome-oriented, with clear, quantifiable benchmarks such as water quality improvements, biodiversity restoration, and sediment load reduction tracked through a joint sustainability dashboard. Finally, inclusive stakeholder participation involving local communities, farmers, NGOs, and hydrologists can validate policy implementation on the ground, ensuring scientific and social legitimacy.

To illustrate how measurable recovery can be embedded into policy, the following table presents projected environmental indicators if these measures are implemented between 2025 and 2030:

Table 2: Projected Environmental Indicators

Policy Instrument	**2024 Baseline**	**2030 Target**	**Expected Change** (%)
Minimum Lean-Season Flow (m^3/s)	280	350	+25%
Dissolved Oxygen Level (mg/L)	5.0	6.5	+30%
Sediment Load (tons/year)	1.2M	0.9M	–25%
Aquatic Biodiversity Index (0–1 scale)	0.42	0.60	+43%
Frequency of Bilateral Data Reports	Annual	Quarterly	+300%

Integrating such quantitative ecological targets into India's Neighborhood First Policy would reframe the Teesta negotiations as a cooperative environmental restoration initiative rather than a zero-sum contest over resources. Transparent data-sharing, enforceable flow agreements, and performance-linked financing would ensure that regional diplomacy results in verifiable environmental recovery, reinforcing India's role as both a strategic partner and an ecological steward.

DISCUSSION: WHY NFP HAS NOT YET "MOVED THE NEEDLE" ENVIRONMENTALLY IN TEESTA

India's Neighborhood First Policy (NFP) was designed to enhance regional cooperation, with river-sharing arrangements expected to balance developmental priorities and ecological protection. However, the environmental outcomes in the Teesta basin have remained limited despite diplomatic progress. Several factors contribute to this stagnation. Institutional coordination between India and Bangladesh is fragmented, as water-sharing dialogues tend to emphasize political and economic allocations over ecological targets. The absence of a joint scientific monitoring framework has resulted in conflicting hydrological assessments, making it difficult to establish agreed minimum ecological flows. Seasonal and climatic variability further compounds the challenge, with pre-monsoon flows declining by nearly 18–20% in recent years, rendering static allocation agreements ineffective in responding to rapid hydrological changes caused by climate change. Additionally, both countries continue to prioritize irrigation and hydropower development, often at the expense of sediment balance, fish migration, and riparian habitat, with limited environmental safeguards integrated into bilateral projects. The largely top-down approach of NFP has also excluded meaningful participation from local communities, NGOs, and river-dependent stakeholders, reducing the practical enforcement of any ecological commitments.

Table 3: Indicative Environmental Indicators of Teesta Basin (2018–2024)

Indicator	2018	2021	2024	% Change (2018–24)
Average pre-monsoon flow (m^3/s)	520	470	425	–18%
Wet-season sediment load (Mt/year)	7.5	7.2	6.8	–9% (riverbed deepening)
Fish species diversity (no. species)	92	86	80	–13%
Riparian vegetation cover (%)	41	39	37	–10%

The table highlights a steady decline in ecological indicators over the period 2018–2024, showing reduced water flow, sediment disruption, biodiversity loss, and vegetation decline. These trends confirm that while NFP has improved diplomatic goodwill, it has yet to translate into measurable ecological restoration. Without enforceable environmental provisions, climate-resilient allocation mechanisms, and robust cross-border scientific collaboration, the policy remains insufficient to "move the needle" on Teesta's environmental health. Embedding ecological sustainability as a core priority—rather than a subsidiary objective—will be essential for future agreements to deliver tangible outcomes.

CONCLUSION

On paper, the Neighborhood First policy provides a strong foundation for transboundary environmental cooperation: consultative, outcome-oriented, and generous. In practice, Teesta outcomes remain mixed. The 2023 GLOF has starkly illustrated that Teesta is simultaneously a scarcity and an excess problem—demanding a basin-wide risk chain approach from glacier to delta. Meanwhile, dry-season ecological degradation continues in Bangladesh's north in the absence of a rule-bound allocation with flow guarantees. The policy window is open in 2025: Bangladesh is moving forward on a major river restoration program with Chinese finance; India can still shape the project ecosystem and the sharing regime to deliver measurable environmental benefits.

The pragmatic path is clear and NFP-compatible: finalize an interim treaty with ecological flow floors and adaptive rules; create a standing Teesta Basin Council that brings Indian states to the table with Bangladesh; build a joint early-warning and dam safety regime; and mobilize blended finance for floodplain restoration and sediment-smart protection. Implemented together, these steps can translate NFP's diplomacy into restored wetlands, resilient livelihoods, and a safer Himalayan-to-delta river system.

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