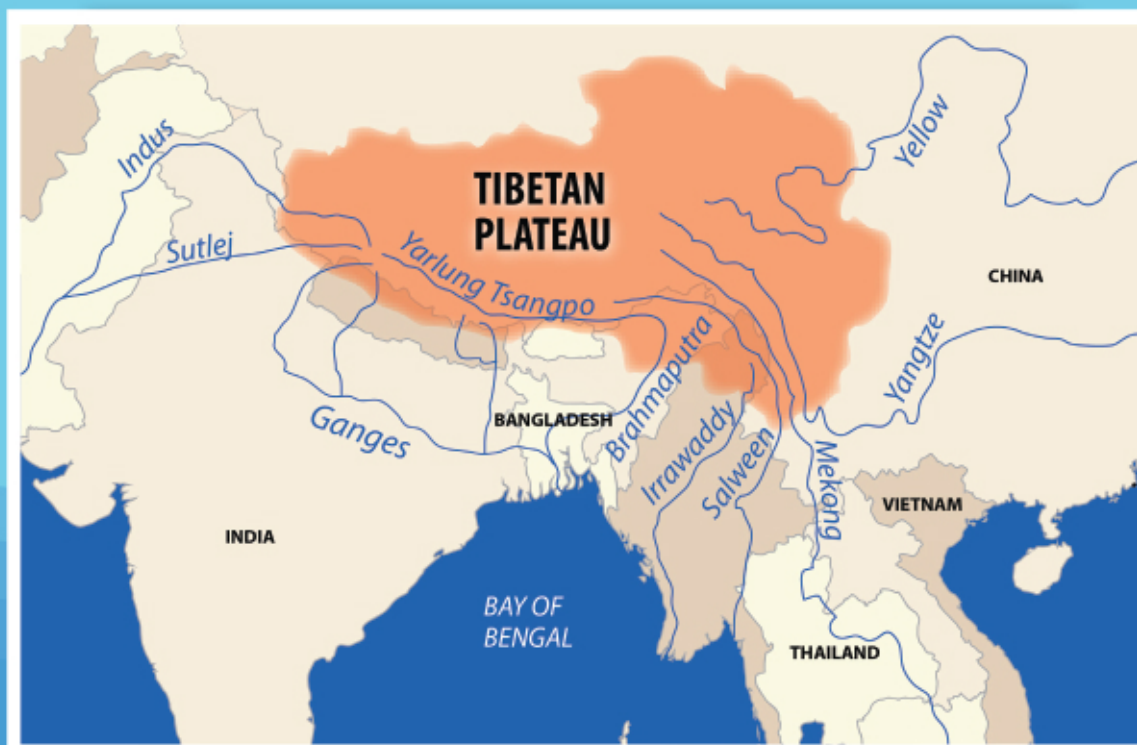


RIVERS OF THE WORLD: ASIA



Often called the **'Roof of the World'**, the Tibetan Plateau is the largest, highest plateau on Earth. It is surrounded by the world's tallest mountains, including the mighty Everest. The plateau has also been called the **'Water Tower of Asia'**, but that's not because of its rainfall. Annual precipitation is so low - 100 to 300 mm a year - that some areas are classified as desert. Much of the rain falls as hail in this cold, lofty land.

The mountain ranges that ring the plateau are the Himalaya, Kunlun, Qilian and Karakoram mountains. These are home to towering, snow-covered peaks and tens of thousands of glaciers. It's the summer melting of these glaciers and snowfields

that gives rise to the plateau's reputation as a water tower. Ten of Asia's mightiest rivers spring from here.

Yet another nickname for the plateau is the **'Third Pole'**. It holds the largest reserves of water outside the north and south poles. This water is bound up in glacial ice and snow. As the glaciers melt they feed the rivers. They bring life-giving water to the 1.3 billion people living in the river basins.

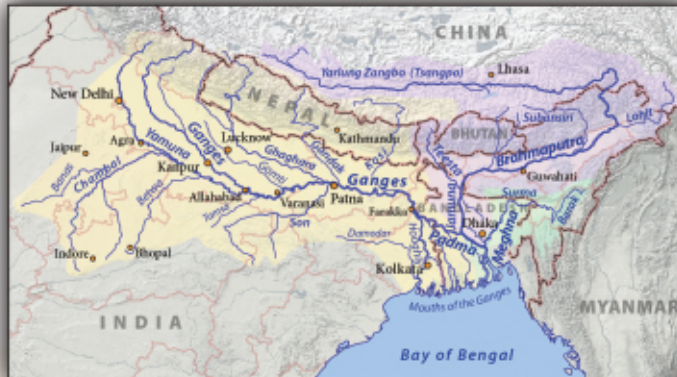
But herein lies the problem. Earth's climate is changing. The ice in the Third Pole is melting at a faster pace than anywhere else in the world. So what happens when the glaciers are gone? What will happen to Asia's life-giving rivers?



Salween River, Burma (Myanmar)

In the top ten countries with the world's highest populations are India (with over 1.25 billion people) and Bangladesh (with almost 170 million). That's more than 1.4 billion people living in an area that's a third the size of Europe and less than half the size of Australia. So how do all these people manage to survive?

Many of them live around the rivers. The rivers provide protein-rich fish for eating. They bring water to nourish the food crops. The silt they carry makes the farmlands more fertile. Trade and travel happen on the water. The rivers form a rich part of the social and spiritual lives of the people living around them.



The **Ganges River** begins in the western Himalayas. Along with its tributaries, it spreads across a quarter of India. It brings water to hundreds of millions of people. Farmers have irrigated their crops with Ganges water for thousands of years. The dams sustain them in the dry seasons and droughts.

The **Brahmaputra River** originates on the northern slopes of the Himalayas in Tibet, where it is called the Yarlung Tsangpo. It emerges from the mountains to enter the north-eastern regions of India. From there it flows south through Bangladesh. It meets the Ganges to form a large, fertile delta that drains into the Bay of Bengal.

But the Ganges-Brahmaputra river system is in crisis. Cities discharge rubbish and sewage into these sacred rivers. Intensive farming and industry have added to the pollution. Deforestation has caused excess silt to flow into the rivers. This increases the risk of severe flooding during the annual monsoonal rains. Yet in the dry season parts of the rivers can dry out.

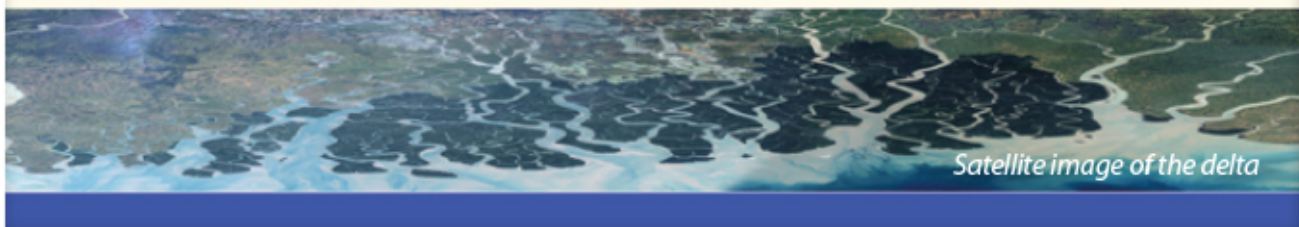
Another serious issue facing this river system is rising sea levels. Over time, sea water could threaten to flood this significant resource. To protect the Ganges-Brahmaputra for future generations to use and enjoy, action needs to be taken now. In 2014 the Government of India announced an integrated Ganges development project called Namami Ganga. This project champions changes that will help clean up the water. This is an important first step in the complicated process of saving the river system.



Tilling the soil



Ganges fisherman repairing nets



Satellite image of the delta