



Water Conflict between India & Pakistan

This editorial is based on “[On the Indus Water Treaty: Hedging...](#)” which was published in Indian Express on 31/01/2023. It discusses the issue of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) between India and Pakistan.

Prelims: Kishanganga and Ratle Hydro Electric Projects, Article IX of the IWT, Indus and its tributaries, World Bank

Mains: Indus Waters Treaty and associated implementation issues, India and its Neighbourhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

Recently, India announced the **desire to modify the 62-year-old Indus Water Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan**, citing what it called Pakistan's unwillingness to find a solution to disputes over the Kishenganga and Ratle hydropower projects, both in Jammu and Kashmir. India also protested Pakistan's “unilateral” decision to approach a court of arbitration at The Hague in the Netherlands.

India called for **modifications to the treaty as per Article XII (3) of the IWT** which specify that provisions of the treaty may from time to time be modified for any specific purpose between the two Governments. India also boycotted the court process as the first hearing of the Pakistani case **began at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague**.

The **decision to issue notice to Pakistan, with a request for a response within 90 days**, is a major step and **could lead to the unravelling and renegotiation of the water sharing treaty**. The treaty is often seen as a rare example of India-Pakistan consensus, at a time when the two countries have snapped trade and cultural exchanges, and most bilateral talks.

What is the Indus Water Treaty?

- India and Pakistan signed the IWT in 1960 after nine years of negotiations, with the [World Bank](#) being a signatory to the pact.
 - It has never been modified and is often cited as one of the most successful international treaties in South Asia which has endured wars and tension between India and Pakistan.
- The **treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two sides on the use of the water of the Indus River** and its five tributaries Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Jhelum, and Chenab.

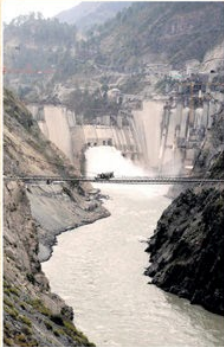
The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)

- The distribution of waters of the Indus and its tributaries between India and Pakistan is governed by the Indus Water Treaty (IWT).
- Was signed on Sept 19, 1960, between India, Pakistan and a representative of World Bank after nine years of negotiations.
- Partition of India cut across the Indus river basin, which has the Indus river, plus five of its main tributaries.

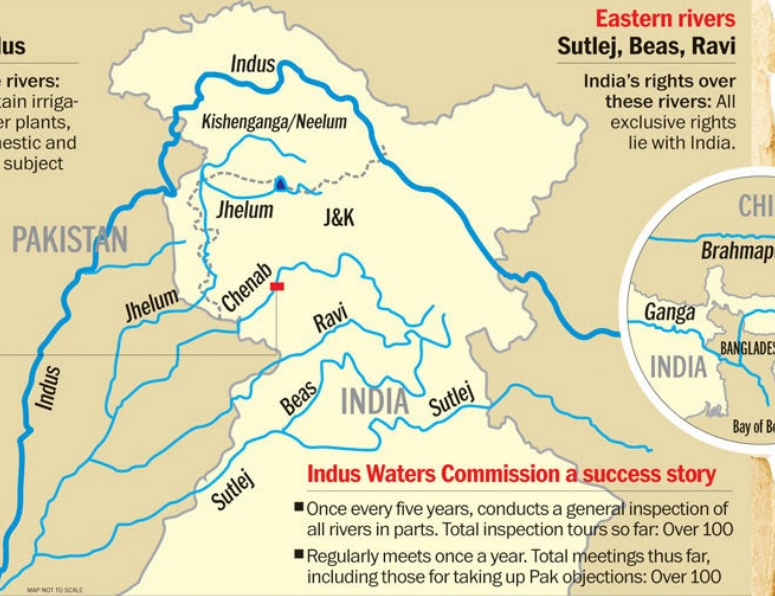
Western rivers

Chenab, Jhelum, Indus

India's rights over these rivers: Limited — can set up certain irrigation, run-of-the-river power plants, very limited storage, domestic and non-consumptive use, all subject to conditions



Baglihar dam on Chenab



Eastern rivers

Sutlej, Beas, Ravi

India's rights over these rivers: All exclusive rights lie with India.

Indus Waters Commission a success story

- Once every five years, conducts a general inspection of all rivers in parts. Total inspection tours so far: Over 100
- Regularly meets once a year. Total meetings thus far, including those for taking up Pak objections: Over 100

Why does the Treaty Need to be Amended?

■ Environmental Factors:

- There have been **significant changes since the Treaty came into being in 1960, and it needs to be updated.**
- The **impacts of [climate change](#) and the advancement in water storage and management technologies are cited** as some of the most compelling reasons to renegotiate.

■ Incapable of Adapting to New Technologies:

- Many of the **technical criteria laid out in the treaty no longer conform to the spirit of the treaty**, which was to foster cooperation between India and Pakistan, and ensure optimum utilisation of water resources in the Indus rivers basin.
- The treaty is **not equipped to cater for new techniques, technologies and studies in the building of hydropower projects**, which increase their life and efficiency but were not available at the time the treaty was negotiated.

■ Conflict Resolution:

- Reforming the treaty to provide a mechanism for resolving disputes over water resources, including disputes between the two countries and disputes between individual states within each country.

■ Transparency and Cooperation:

- Reforming the treaty to promote greater transparency and cooperation between India and Pakistan on water-related issues, including sharing of data and information.

■ Institutional Arrangements:

- Reforming the treaty to enhance the institutional arrangements for water management, including strengthening **the role of the Indus Waters Commission and other relevant institutions.**

What can be the Implications of the Indian move on the IWT?

■ Increase Tensions Between Two Countries:

- The IWT has been a source of stability between India and Pakistan, but if changes are made to the treaty it **could increase tensions between the two nations.**
 - For example, if India were to build a dam that reduces the water flow to Pakistan, it

could lead to increased diplomatic tensions and potentially even military conflict.

- **World Bank Factor:**
 - The World Bank, **as a mediator of the IWT, could find itself in a difficult position if the treaty is revised or renegotiated**, potentially damaging its role as an impartial mediator in water disputes.
- **Set a Precedent for China to take Similar Actions:**
 - China is already **indulging in water aggression on two rivers** (Sutlej and Indus) **of Indus rivers System**, the [Brahmaputra](#), and [Mekong](#).
 - If India were to take aggressive actions on the IWT, it **could set a precedent for China to take similar actions on other rivers, such as the Sutlej, Indus, Brahmaputra, and Mekong**.
 - However, the outcome of such actions will depend on the relative power dynamics between India and China at the time.
- **Factor of Western Power:**
 - There are the Western powers, who will also try to intervene in this matter, especially if they think it could lead to a Water War or worse between India and Pakistan.

What are the other Challenges in India-Pakistan Relations?

- **[Cross-Border Terrorism:](#)**
 - India accuses Pakistan of supporting cross-border terrorism in India, a charge which Pakistan denies.
 - The issue of cross-border terrorism remains a major source of tension between Pakistan and its neighbors, and continues to be a significant security challenge in the region.
- **Kashmir Issue:**
 - The [Kashmir issue](#) refers to the long-standing conflict over the region of Kashmir, which is currently divided between India and Pakistan but claimed in full by both countries.
 - The conflict has its roots in the Partition of India in 1947 and has since resulted in several wars and skirmishes between the two countries.
- **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - The two countries have had **limited diplomatic relations, with periodic attempts to improve relations often ending in failure**.
 - India and Pakistan have had a long history of political tensions and conflicts, including several wars, since their independence from British rule in 1947.
- **Military Buildup:**
 - Both countries have a significant military presence along their border, leading to tensions and the potential for conflict.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Need for Joint Management:**
 - There is a **need for cooperation and coordination between the countries** to ensure equitable and sustainable use of the shared water resources.
 - Joint management helps to prevent conflicts and promote cooperation by establishing a framework for sharing the benefits and responsibilities of water use, as well as for addressing any challenges that may arise.
- **Greater Flexibility in Utilisation of Waters:**
 - There have been calls for greater flexibility in the utilization of waters under the IWT.
 - This **could include allowing for the transfer of water from one river basin to another**, increased storage capacities, and the use of the waters for non-consumptive purposes such as hydropower generation.
 - However, any changes to the treaty would require the agreement of both India and Pakistan.
- **Adoption of Basin-Wise Approach in the Management:**
 - A basin-wise approach in the management of the Indus Waters Treaty involves managing the water resources of the Indus Basin as a whole, rather than focusing on individual

- projects or rivers.
- This **approach emphasizes the inter-connectedness of the various components of the Indus Basin** and seeks to optimize water use and management for the benefit of both India and Pakistan.
 - The adoption of a basin-wise approach in the management of the Indus Waters Treaty **could potentially lead to improved water security, increased economic benefits, and enhanced environmental sustainability for both countries.**

Drishti Mains Question

What role can water diplomacy play in resolving the India-Pakistan conflict and what measures are needed to ensure effective water sharing between the two countries?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. With reference to the Indus river system, of the following four rivers, three of them pour into one of them which joins the Indus directly. Among the following, which one is such a river that joins the Indus direct? (2021)

- (a) Chenab
- (b) Jhelum
- (c) Ravi
- (d) Sutlej

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- The Jhelum joins the Chenab near Jhang in Pakistan. The Ravi joins the Chenab near Sarai Sidhu.
- Satluj is joined by the Chenab in Pakistan. Thus, Satluj receives the collective drainage of the Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum rivers. It joins the Indus a few kilometres above Mithankot.
- Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.

Q2. Consider the following pairs (2019)

	Glacier	River
1.	Bandarpunch	Yamuna
2.	Bara Shigri	Chenab
3.	Milam	Mandakini
4.	Siachen	Nubra
5.	Zemu	Manas

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

- (a) 1, 2 and 4
- (b) 1, 3 and 4
- (c) 2 and 5
- (d) 3 and 5

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. Present an account of the Indus Water Treaty and examine its ecological, economic and political implications in the context of changing bilateral relations. **(2016)**

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/water-conflict-between-india-pakistan>

