



Pahalgam Terror Attack and Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty

For Prelims: The Resistance Front, [Indus Waters Treaty](#), [Integrated Check Post](#), [Article 370](#), [World Bank](#), [Permanent Court of Arbitration](#)

For Mains: **Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, Terrorism and Security**, India's Foreign Policy and Strategic Interests

[Source:IE](#)

Why in News?

The **Cabinet Committee on Security**, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved a **5-point action plan** against Pakistan following the deadly terrorist attack in **Baisaran valley (Pahalgam), Jammu and Kashmir**, which claimed the lives of 26 civilians.

- **The Resistance Front (TRF)**, a proxy of banned Pakistan-based [Lashkar-e-Taiba \(LeT\)](#), reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

Note: The TRF surfaced in 2020. It was declared a terrorist organisation by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** in 2023 under the [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act, 1967](#) for its involvement in terror recruitment, infiltration, and smuggling from Pakistan into J&K.

- TRF's rise followed two key developments: the **decapitation of LeT's top leadership** in 2018 and the revocation of J&K's special status in 2019.

What is the 5-Point Action Plan Announced by India After the Pahalgam Terror Attack?

- **Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty:** India has **suspended the [1960 Indus Waters Treaty \(IWT\)](#)** until Pakistan ceases its support for **cross-border terrorism**.
 - It reflects a shift in India's strategic calculus, using **hydrological leverage** as a pressure tool.
- **Closure of the Attari-Wagah Border Check Post:** India has **shut down the [Integrated Check Post \(ICP\)](#) at Attari, Punjab** suspending all movement of people and goods.
 - Only individuals who have crossed over with valid documents will be permitted to return by **1st May 2025**.
- **Cancellation of SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme for Pakistan:** India has **revoked the [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation \(SAARC\)](#) Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES)** for Pakistani nationals.

- All SVES visas already issued are considered **void**.
- **Expulsion of Pakistani Military Advisors:** Pakistan's Defence, Naval, and Air advisors in New Delhi have been declared **persona non grata** and must exit India. India will also withdraw its own advisors from Islamabad.
- **Reduction of Diplomatic Personnel:** India will reduce the staff strength at its High Commission in Islamabad to 30, down from 55, by **1st May 2025**.
 - This marks a clear **downgrade in diplomatic engagement**, intended to freeze bilateral dialogue at the official level.

How has Pakistan Responded to India's Five-Point Action Plan?

- **Suspension of Bilateral Agreements:** Pakistan declared it would consider placing "all bilateral agreements" with India, including the [1972 Simla Agreement](#), in abeyance.
- **Trade suspension:** All forms of trade with India, including transit trade via third countries, have been suspended.
 - India-Pakistan trade had shown signs of recovery, reaching USD 1.2 billion in 2024, a 127% increase from 2023. Suspension reverses these gains.
- **Strong rejection of IWT Suspension:** Pakistan condemned India's suspension of the IWT, calling it unacceptable and warned that any diversion of river waters under the treaty would be considered an **"act of war."**
- **Airspace Closure:** In a move similar to the **2019 post-Pulwama airspace closure**, Pakistan has once again shut its skies to all Indian-owned or operated aircraft, including military flights.
 - This affects Indian flights to the Gulf, Europe, and the US, increasing travel time, with higher fuel costs, and fare hikes.
- **Closure of Wagah Border:** Pakistan has sealed its side of the **Wagah border** post as well.
- **Diplomatic Downsizing:** The strength of India's High Commission in Islamabad will be reduced to 30 members, with the expulsion of Indian defence officials.
- **SAARC visa Cancellations:** All SAARC visas for Indian nationals have been cancelled, except for Sikh pilgrims, for whom the [Kartarpur Corridor](#) will remain open.

What are the Potential Geopolitical Factors Behind Pakistan's Pahalgam Attack?

- **India's Kashmir Policy:** Pakistan views India's revocation of [Article 370 in 2019](#) and Kashmir's integration as a challenge to its self-claimed sovereignty due to its illegal occupation over Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
 - Pakistan's increasing marginalization and **India's success in stabilizing Kashmir** may have pushed Pakistan to resort to violence to reassert its position in the region.
- **International Isolation:** Pakistan's traditional allies like the **US, Gulf states, and even China** are distancing themselves due to Islamabad's declining reliability and returns.
 - Additionally, the [US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021](#), Pakistan's strategic importance to the US has sharply declined, leaving it diplomatically isolated.
- **Economic Collapse:** A crumbling economy, soaring [inflation](#), and weak state institutions have left Pakistan increasingly unstable.
 - Rising [Baloch insurgency](#) and persistent terror activities along Pakistan's western front have made the country less appealing to foreign investors, worsening its economic troubles and hindering prospects for recovery.
- **Global Geopolitical Messaging:** The timing of the Pahalgam attack, coinciding with [PM Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia](#) and the **US Vice President's trip to India**, suggests Pakistan is asserting its regional power and signaling its continued influence in South Asia.
 - Despite global condemnation, Pakistan may see international attention as an opportunity to **re-engage diplomatically** amid its growing isolation.

What is the Significance of the Indus Waters Treaty?

- **Indus Waters Treaty:** The IWT, signed in 1960 in Karachi after nine years of negotiations between **India and Pakistan**, was mediated by the [World Bank](#).

- The treaty allocates the **"Eastern Rivers" of the Indus system** (Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej) to India for unrestricted use, while the **"Western Rivers"** (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab) are reserved for Pakistan, effectively giving **Pakistan access to about 80% of the total water**.
 - India is allowed limited **non-consumptive uses of the Western Rivers**, such as for navigation, agriculture, and hydroelectricity, subject to design and operational conditions under the treaty.
- IWT established a **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)** to ensure annual dialogue and cooperation, and laid out a **three-tier dispute resolution mechanism**, including resolution at the PIC level, through a **Neutral Expert** (appointed by the World Bank or jointly by the India and Pakistan), or if needed, a **Court of Arbitration**.
- **Actions Regarding IWT:** In 2023, India issued its first notice under the IWT, requesting modifications to the Treaty, focusing on the **Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects**.
 - Despite these projects being classified as **"run-of-the-river"** and intended to **generate electricity** without obstructing the **natural river flow**, Pakistan raised concerns, claiming they violate the IWT's stipulations.
 - India responded with another notice in 2024, seeking a review and modification of the IWT.
 - **Article XII (3) of the IWT** allows for modifications to the Treaty through a duly ratified agreement between the two governments.
- **India's Suspension of the IWT:** India's suspension marks the first suspension of the treaty since its inception, signaling a **shift in water diplomacy linked to cross-border terrorism**.
 - **Article 62 of the Vienna Convention** allows a country to withdraw from or repudiate a treaty if there is a fundamental change in circumstances that makes the continuation of the treaty untenable.
- **Implications of IWT Suspension:**
 - **India:** Suspension of the IWT gives India greater flexibility in managing the Indus river system.
 - India can now carry out **reservoir flushing** on projects like Kishanganga (Jhelum) without waiting for the peak monsoon period, as previously mandated by the treaty. This will help in increasing the **life of the Kishenganga dam**.
 - India can fast-track hydroelectric projects on western rivers, bypassing design and operational restrictions, and halt Pakistani inspections at ongoing projects like **Kishenganga and Ratle (on Chenab)**.
 - However, the suspension won't immediately affect Pakistan's water supply, as **India lacks the infrastructure to fully control or divert the flow at this stage**.
 - **Pakistan:** The suspension of the IWT threatens Pakistan's water security, as **80% of its cultivated land relies on these rivers**.
 - Disruption could impact **food security**, urban water supply, and power generation, while also causing economic instability due to the Indus system's contribution to **25% of Pakistan's GDP**.
 - India's ability to withhold river flow data further compounds Pakistan's vulnerability, hindering **flood preparedness and water resource management**.
 - Pakistan may pursue arbitration, seek World Bank aid, and rally allies like China to negotiate favorable terms with India, but economic constraints may limit strong retaliation.

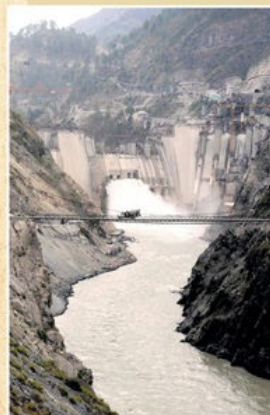
The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)

- 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 eight 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

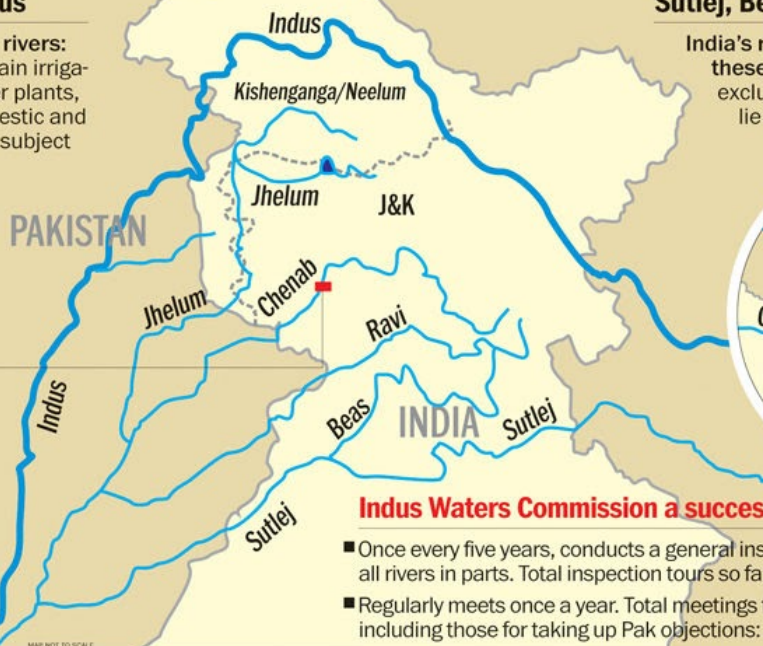


Baglihar dam on Chenab

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

Note: Reservoir flushing is a technique used to remove **accumulated sediment from reservoirs** by releasing water through low-level outlets to scour out the sediment and transport it downstream.

India's Key Dams on the Indus System

- **Kishanganga (Jhelum):** Operational since 2018, diverts water from a key tributary of the Mangla Dam.
- **Ratle (Chenab):** Under construction, may further reduce flows to Pakistan's Punjab region.
- **Shahpurkandi (Ravi):** Redirects Ravi water to Indian channels, reducing Pakistan's access.
- **Ujh (Ravi):** A planned dam that will decrease downstream water availability to Pakistan.

What Should Be India's Long-Term Strategy Toward Pakistan?

- **Strengthening Deterrence:** India must maintain a strong military presence along the border, modernizing its forces with **High Tech Border Surveillance System**, and **smart fencing**.
 - A credible deterrent, including robust border security, can prevent Pakistan from escalating tensions, particularly over Kashmir or potential military incursions
- **Utilizing UN Security Council:** India should persist in highlighting Pakistan's support for terrorist groups at the **UN Security Council**, emphasizing global condemnation.
 - India should leverage **Article 51 of the UN Charter**, which calls for collective action against terrorism, to mobilize global support for greater sanctions on Pakistan.
 - Additionally, India should advocate for Pakistan's inclusion in the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** blacklist for its involvement in terror financing, to pressure Pakistan into compliance.
- **Internal Resilience and Social Cohesion:** India must adopt a proactive **counter-radicalization strategy**, focusing on vulnerable border regions.

- This involves not just security measures, but also fostering unity through public awareness campaigns that **emphasize peace, pluralism, and national cohesion.**

Drishti Mains Question:

Analyze the implications of the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty by India. How does this impact India's strategic interests and Pakistan?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. 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) Sutle

Ans: (d)

Q. 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. The interlinking of rivers can provide viable solutions to the multi-dimensional inter-related problems of droughts, floods, and interrupted navigation. Critically examine. (2020)

Q. The scourge of terrorism is a grave challenge to national security. What solutions do you suggest to curb this growing menace? What are the major sources of terrorist funding? **(2017)**

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