

## QUESTION

How do you see the water politics in the region after India's decision to move out of the Indus Water Treaty and China's decision to build the world largest dam on Brahmaputra river.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

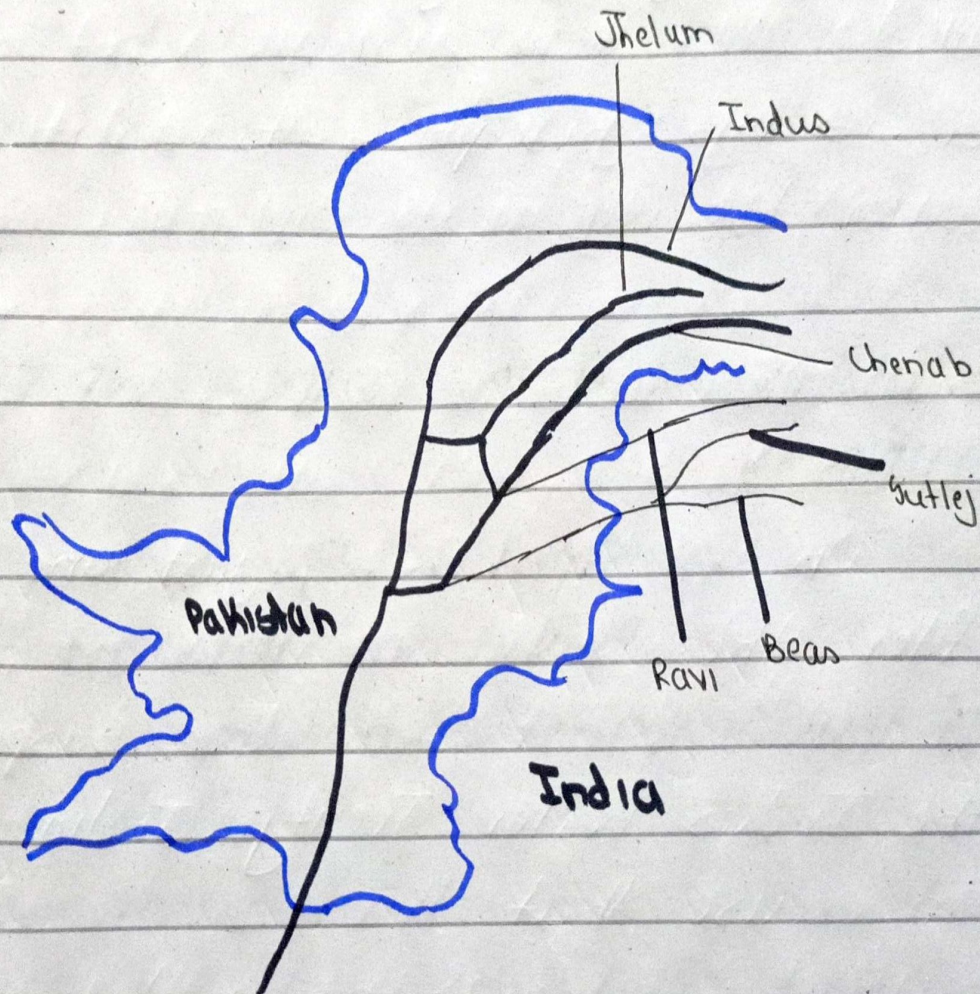
Wars on resources are as old as time; however, a new found dimension in 21<sup>st</sup> century is the **weaponization of water** by upper riparian. Many instances are there, historically, where upper riparians control the flow of water by denying the right of **transboundary water** to the low riparians. In South Asia, the conflict on water resources is more than a **political fault line**. It is a way by which countries like India plan to exert their image as a **regional hegemon**. Similarly, China is planning to build super dam on **Brahmaputra river** to exhibit its control over South Asia. As Stephen Cohen rightly said,

"Control over rivers has become control over destiny in South Asia."

## 2 INDUS WATER TREATY - A BILATERAL AGREEMENT

Relationships between India and Pakistan have remained tensed ever since independence. One of the key issue between the two **nuclear power** states is the issue of **aqua aggression** of India. Just seven months after the independence, India controlled the **water flow** of River **Butley** causing severe **water scarcity** in Pakistan for 5 weeks. However, the water was resumed after negotiations and a **temporary agreement** on **4 May 1948**. After 9 years of negotiations a **bilateral treaty** was signed between India and Pakistan with the help of **World Bank** on **19 September 1960**. This treaty divides the river system into **eastern** and **western** rivers where

India attained autonomous control over 3 eastern rivers like Ravi, Beas and Sutlej and Pakistan attained unrestricted control over western rivers: Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.



This treaty is considered to be one of the most successful water treaty in the world; however, the cracks started to appear after the 2016 Uri Attack when PM Modi passed a statement.

"Water and Blood cannot flow together."

After this occasion, on multiple events he reinforced this aggressive feeling by giving various statements like **water legally owed to India** or discuss his plans to divert the water to **Rajasthan**.

### 3. SUSPENSION OF INDUS WATER TREATY

On 24 April 2025, just one day after the **Phalgham incident**, the **Indian Cabinet Committee** suspend the **Indus water Treaty**. India gave an excuse that **treaties are kept in good faith** as no good faith remain two countries remain the two countries thus, **Indus** is revoking the treaty by citing **Article 60** and **Article 62** of the **Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaty**. But, there is no such provision in **Indus water** that allow unilateral

suspension of the treaty. It is clearly mentioned in Article 12 (iv)

No country could unilaterally pull out of the treaty nor can annul it (nor can held it in abeyance). It can only be reversed with bilateral consensus

Thus, it is the clear violation of the Article 26 of Vienna Convention on the Laws of Treaties, and under the Article 40 of United Nations Charter allow Pakistan the use of force. As Pakistan being a lower riparian and an agrarian economy, these rivers are the backbone of Pakistan's economy. National Security Committee of Pakistan clearly mention that any attempt to violate this agreement will be considered an act of war and Pakistan will spend all possible means of national resources to creat deterrence.

#### 4. IMPLICATION ON PAKISTAN INDIA RELATIONSHIP

This suspension will further deteriorate the relations between the two nuclear armed nations. Thus, there is a need to counter this new strategic front in Indo-Pak rivalry by revival of resolution mechanism and seek diplomatic solutions.

Only cooperation can turn water from a source of conflict to a source of peace

Kofi Annan.

#### 5. CONSTRUCTION OF CHINA'S SUPER DAM

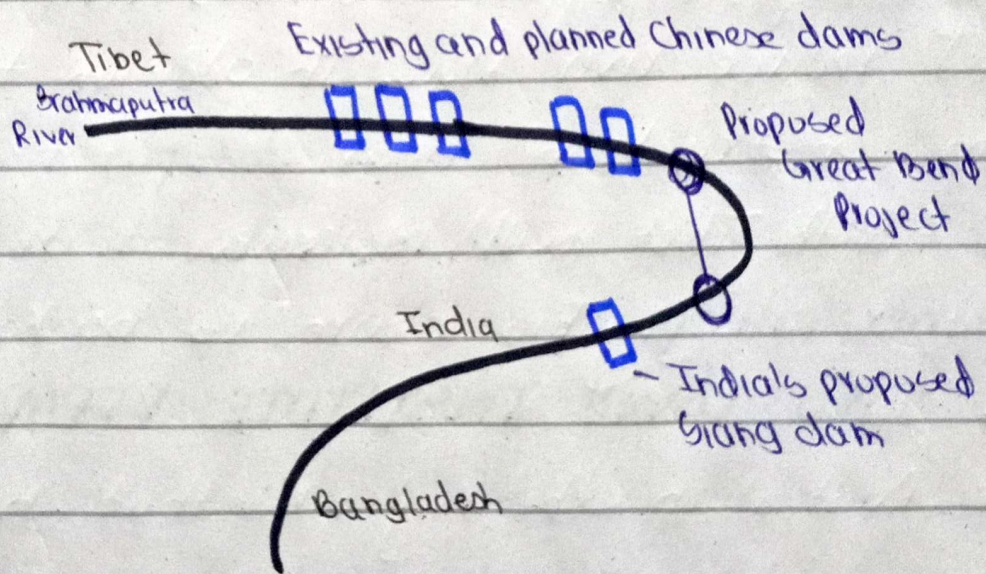
China is planning to construct the world largest dam on the lower reaches of the **Yarlung Zangbo river** in Tibet.

The construction will be significant and crucial turning point in **South Asia's geo politics**. This construction will intensify the **water politics** in the region and potential conflict in

South Asia.

## Strategic Significance for China

This dam will be able to generate 300 billion kWh annually 3 times larger than the **Three Gorges Dams**. As this river plunges some 6500 feet along a section called the **Great Bend** before entering India, offering a great potential for **electricity generation**.



This project will ensure **carbon neutrality** and **energy security** goals and BRI by giving China a strategic control over Asia. As China has signed no treaty with lower riparians it will give it leverage over India and Bangladesh.

## 6. CONCERNS OF DOWNSTREAM COUNTRIES

China's decision to build this hydropower project has raised concerns in both countries over the project potential to damage the lives of millions living downstream.

### Concerns of India

As Brahmaputra river is the lifeline of **North Eastern** states of India, environment-  
alists have claimed that a dam over the Great Bend will harness river water and reduce river flow. In addition to this, dam construction near **disputed area** of South Tibet will increase **strategic vulnerability**. This claim is backed by a **2020 LOWY INSTITUTE REPORT**, an Australian think tank that noted a control over these rivers will give China a chokehold on India's economy.

Moreover, there is a potential of policy manipulation as China is lacking **transparency** in hydrological data sharing.

## Environmental Risk

The Himalayas are one of the most **seismically active region** that makes large scale infrastructure risky. Thus, such infrastructure can cause **landslides**, and **flash floods**.

## Siang Dam - A Buffer

India has proposed construction of **Siang Dam** in order to create a buffer to prevent flash floods in the area. The main goal is to counter the Chinese regional water politics.

## Concerns of Bangladesh

Tens of thousands are dependent upon this river for agriculture and drinking water as there will be risk of **water scarcity** and reduction in **nutrient rich sediment** flow. China describes this project as **safe** that provides **ecological protection**, but many analysts warn about threat of riverbank erosion and sediment ecological imbalance.

## 7. REGIONAL WATER POLITICS

The new found shift of upper riparian from cooperation to confrontation will have deeper impacts on the relations of neighbouring states. This will foster mistrust although countries are facing water scarcity due to climate change, there is still need to avoid using water as a weapon. These new flashpoints need to be resolved by hydrodiplomacy.

## 8. WAY FORWARD

There is need to revive water talks by increasing regional water sharing framework and hydrodiplomacy for trans boundary water management. As South Asia faces a triple crisis - water scarcity, mismanagement and mistrust, without water management, water could become the next flash point. Thus there is an urgent need for regional cooperation and global mediation.