

How did the Indus Water Treaty (1960) affect water distribution and relations between Pakistan and India?

1) Introduction :-

Indus Water Treaty (1960) has successfully regulated the distribution of water of Indus River System for the past 65 years. Although India has tried several times to restrict Pakistan's water privileges, the treaty has allowed both parties avoid any major clashes over water distribution. In the recent years, however, India is increasingly trying to sabotage the treaty. It has repeatedly called for renegotiation of the treaty since 2015. A recent blow to the treaty came in form of India's announcement of "suspending" the treaty after Pechalgam Incident (2025). The announcement suggests that the relations are heading towards a clash.

2) Indus Water Treaty : Clauses for Water Distribution :-

Indus Water Treaty was signed by Ayub Khan and Nehru and negotiated via good offices of World

Bank. The treaty had following clauses:-

- 1) India is bound to release the same amount of water in Western rivers that it stops at any day.
- 2) India will share the construction design of any dam/barrage 6 month before, that its plans to construct with Pakistan
- 3) World Bank is the guarantor.
- 4) In case of lack of consensus on any issue, both parties will solve the matter via Indus Water Commission. If that fails, both parties can take the case to a neutral arbitrator. International Court of Justice can be approached as a last resort.
- 5) This treaty is for sharing of water (not rivers).
- 6) Under this treaty, stopping of Pakistan's water is illegal.

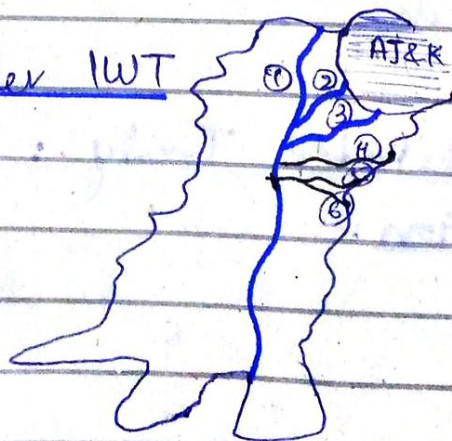
Water Distribution Under IWT

• Western Rivers for Pakistan's Use

- ① Indus ② Jhelum
③ Chenab

• Eastern Rivers for India's Use

- ④ Ravi ⑤ Sutlej
⑥ Beas



3) Water Distribution after IWT and Associated Issues:-

The treaty was lauded as a successful agreement between both parties but soon after it, India started constructing dams on Western rivers.

a) Dams India is Constructing on Western Rivers:-

Since in 1980s, India has started constructing dams on Western Rivers. Overall it is working on 62 small and medium sized dams. Important ones include Uri dam, Karchan dam, Salal, Wullar dam and Kishanganga dam.

b) Case of Bughliar Dam:

This dam is constructed on Chenab River. Pakistan objected on its design in 1999. The case was taken to World Bank whose neutral arbitrator resolved the issues in 2010 and allowing India to continue without making much changes in the design.

c) Water Tunneling Project:

This is another one of India's project where it is constructing a 22km long tunnel to divert Kishanganga's water.

Pakistan has contested that the project is in violation of IWT as it has caused $\approx 30\%$ decline in the Neelum-Jhelum water in Pakistan

4) India's Bid to Use Water as a Leverage:-

After initial years of signing of IWT, India has started to see this treaty as a tool for manipulation.

a) Demands to Renegotiate IWT

The demand to renegotiate IWT was first put forward after Uri attacks (2016). India said the treaty is outdated and "doesn't reflect the realities of today". Since then it has mentioned that it wants to renegotiate the terms of IWT.

b) Irregularity in IWT Commission's Meetings

IWT Commissioners are supposed to meet annually. However, these meetings have been met with irregularities since 2019 Pulwama attacks. The last meeting took place in 2022 indicating IWT's purpose of mutual cooperation is lost.

c) 'Holding in Ahegance' of IWT Since April 2025:-

Since Peshawar attacks (April 2025), India has said that it is holding its participation in IWT in abeyance - Although there is no such clause for unilateral suspension of the treaty, India is using this decision to retaliate for what happened in Peshawar.

5) Impacts of IWT on Pakistan-India Relations:-

For 65 years IWT has tried to maintain peaceful relations and cooperation between the two arch rivals.

a) Helped Sustain Cooperation on Water Sharing Despite Clashes/Wars

IWT has stood the test of time especially during the war of 1965, 1971 and 1999. During all of these occasions, India could have suspended its participation in the treaty, but it decided otherwise. Both parties continued to cooperate on water sharing formula despite the geostrategic tensions.

b) Is lauded as the Most Successful Bilateral Agreement

IWT is seen as the most successful transboundary water sharing mechanism. US congress and International organization refer to this treaty as an example for bilateral cooperation for resource sharing.

c) Is Being Weaponized by India as of late :-

Since the arrival of ultra-nationalist government in India, the resistance against the term of IWT has strengthened. So far, India has served Pakistan two notices (in 2023 and 2024) to renegotiate the terms as it is an "outdated" treaty now.

d) Pakistan can take suspension of its water supply as Casus Belli :-

The recent suspension of IWT is a dangerous trend. Analysts like Ahmar Bilal Soofi say that stopping of Pakistan's share of water can be taken as a Casus Belli in Pakistan. This is a dangerous situation.

because ministers in Pakistan have asserted that either "the water will flow or the blood."

6) Conclusion :-

For decades, IWT has successfully administered the division of water between India and Pakistan. During this time India has continuously tried to obstruct the supply of Western rivers but the treaty has remained in force. The recent unilateral suspension is a dangerous trend and it must be resolved via peaceful means to ensure that IWT remains in effect.