

Q No: 1

Date

How did the Indus waters Treaty affect water distribution and relations between Pakistan and India? (2025)

Ans.

Indus Water Treaty

Introduction:-

Water has been most crucial natural resource for human survival and development, particularly in the agrarian economies of South Asia. After the partition of 1947, both Pakistan and India inherited the Indus Basin System, but without a proper mechanism to manage its water. The dispute over water sharing became one of the earliest and most serious challenge to their bilateral relations. To address this, the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) was signed between Pakistan and India with the World Bank's mediation. This treaty not only regulated

the distribution of the Indus River water but also became a symbol of cooperation amid decades of political hostility. As former World Bank President "Eugene Black" stated,

"The Indus water Treaty was more than a water-sharing arrangement; it was a framework for peace in a divided subcontinent"
(World Bank Archives, 1960)

Historical Background

After the partition, the division of irrigation infrastructure left Pakistan vulnerable. The headworks of crucial canals were located in the Indian territory, particularly in Punjab. In April 1948, India abruptly stopped the water supply to Pakistan from the Ferozpur headworks, creating an acute agricultural crisis. This event exposed Pakistan's hydrological dependence and showed deep mistrust between the two nations. Negotiations

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Began under the World Bank's mediation in 1952 and continued for nearly eight years finally, the Indus water Treaty was signed on September 19, 1960 in Karachi by Pakistan president Ayub Khan and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India.

Main Provisions of the Indus Water Treaty

The treaty divided the Indus River system, comprising six major rivers, Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej between the two countries. Its main features include:

- 1- Division of Rivers
- 2- Limited Use by India
- 3- Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)
- 4- Dispute Resolution Mechanism
- 5- Financial Arrangements

1- Division of Rivers

Eastern rivers Ravi, Beas, Sutlej were

allocated to India.

Western Rivers Indus, Jhelum, Chenab were allocated to Pakistan.

Thus, Pakistan received control over about 80% of the total basin waters.

2-Limited Use by India

India was permitted non-consumptive uses of the western Rivers such as hydropower generation, navigation, and small-scale irrigation, provided it did not alter the flow significantly.

3- Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)

A joint institution to exchange data, monitor implementation, and discuss the technical issues. It continues to meet annually, even in times of political tension.

4- Dispute Resolution Mechanism

The treaty provides a three-tier mechanism:

- a) Bilateral discussion through the PIC.

- b) Referral to a Neutral Expert (technical disputes).
- c) Court of Arbitration (Legal disputes).

5. Financial Arrangements

To compensate Pakistan for the loss of Eastern Rivers, the Indus Basin Development Fund was established, financed by the World Bank, the U.S., the U.K., Canada and others. This facilitated the construction of major projects like Mangla Dam (1967) and Tarbela Dam (1976).

Impacts on Water Distribution

1. Equitable Allocation

The treaty provided Pakistan with a secure and predictable share of river water, ensuring that its agricultural dependent economy could function without Indian interference. As Ayub Khan remarked in his memoir *Fire and Ice* (1967):

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"The Indus waters treaty gave Pakistan the assurance of water security and an opportunity to strengthen its agricultural base."

2- Strengthened Irrigation Infrastructure

The Indus basin Replacement Works, financed through international assistance, transformed Pakistan's Irrigation system. Projects like the Link canals Rasul, Qadirabad, Chasma-Jhelum connected the Western and Eastern rivers, ensuring continuous supply to Punjab and Sindh.

3- India Control over Eastern Rivers

India gained full control of the Eastern Rivers, which facilitated rapid agricultural development in Punjab and Haryana under its Green Revolution (1960s). This significantly increased its food grain output and irrigation potential.

4- Dependence and Strategic sensitivity

While Pakistan gained security over the western rivers, it remained geographically dependent on India for upstream flows. This dependence became a strategic concern, particularly when India began constructing hydroelectric projects on the western rivers.

Impacts on Pakistan and India Relations

1. Symbol of Cooperation

The IWT is often hailed as a rare example of successful cooperation between two rival states. It survived three wars (1965, 1971, and 1999 Kargil) and numerous diplomatic crises.

According to UNESCO's World Water Assessment Report (2016):

"The Indus Waters Treaty remains one of the most durable transboundary water agreement in the world."

The treaty provided a platform, the Permanent Indus commission that kept communication channels even during wartime.

2- Reduction of Immediate Conflict

The treaty mitigated the risk of a direct water war between the two nations in the initial decades after partition. It established clear rules and technical procedure for water use, preventing ambiguity and misinterpretation.

3- Emergence of New Disputes

Despite initial success, tensions resurfaced over Indian projects on Western rivers particularly the Baglihar Dam (Chenab) and Kishanganga Hydropower Project (Neelum-Jhelum). Pakistan argued that these violated treaty provisions by altering natural flow.

- The Baglihar Dam (2005-2007) was referred to a World Bank appointed neutral expert.

who updated some of india's positions but also placed restrictions on its operation.

- b) The kishanganga dispute (2010-2013) was settled by Permanent Court of Arbitration, which allowed india's project but required it to maintain minimum downstream flow for Pakistan's use.

4. Political and Strategic Rhetoric

Indian politicians have occasionally threatened to review or reconsider the treaty in response to political tensions. For example, after the Uri attack (2016), Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi remarked:

"Blood and water cannot flow together."

(The Hindu, 27 September 2016)

Such statement deepen Pakistan's insecurity and reinforce the perception of water being used as a political weapon.

Conclusion

The Indus waters Treaty of 1960 stands as a landmark in the history of Pakistan and India relations. a product of pragmatic diplomacy that ensured peace over water resources for more than six decades.

It secured Pakistan's agricultural foundation and offered a diplomatic mechanism for conflict resolution.

Yet, in the changing environmental and political context, it requires modernization and renewed trust.

As Dr. Ishrat Hussain, former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, rightly observed:

"The Indus waters Treaty has survived wars, politics, and rhetoric not because of friendship, but because both countries know that water is life". (Dawn 2015)

For South Asia's stability, both

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Pakistan and India must preserve the spirit of cooperation embodied in the Indus water treaty and accept it to the challenges of the twenty-first century.