

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

Introduction

Indus water treaty signed in 1960 with the mediation of the **World Bank**. The treaty not only restructured water distribution between the two states but also played a crucial role in shaping the bilateral relations. As the World Bank rightly observes the Indus water treaty is

"One of the most successful water-sharing agreements in the world."

Background Of the Treaty

Immediately after independence, disagreement (betwe) over canal headworks

and irrigation supplies heightened tensions between the two countries. Temporary arrangements failed to ensure long term stability, compelling both states to negotiate a permanent framework. After nearly nine years of technical and diplomatic negotiations, the Indus water treaty was concluded, aiming to prevent it from becoming a trigger.

Impacts On Water Distribution

• Allocation Of Rivers

The treaty divided the six rivers of the Indus Basin into two groups

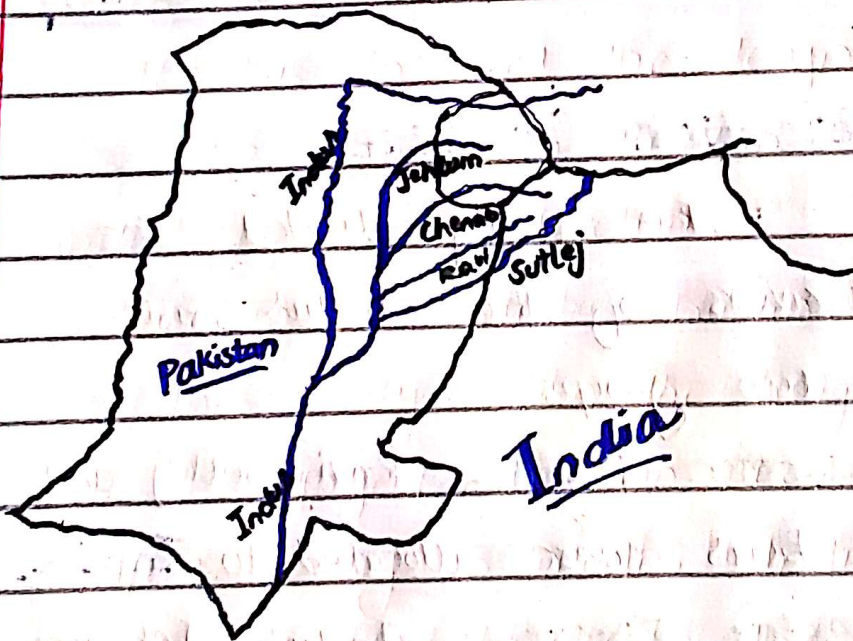
Eastern Rivers → Ravi, Sutlej and Beas were allocated to **India**.

Western Rivers → Indus, Jehlam and Chanab were allocated to **Pakistan**.

India was given full control over

the eastern rivers, while Pakistan received rights over about 80% of the total water flow through the western rivers, ensuring the survival of its irrigation based economy.

According to John Briscoe the treaty for Pakistan is "not merely a legal document but a lifeline for its agrarian economy."



- Ravi, Sutlej and Beas — **India**
- Indus, Jhelum and Chenab — **Pakistan**

• Development OF Water Infra-Structure In Pakistan

To compensate for the loss of eastern rivers, Pakistan undertook major water projects with World Bank support:

- Mangla dam (on Jhelum)
- Tarbela dam (on Indus)
- Extensive Link Canal System

These projects enabled Pakistan to maintain agricultural productivity and food security.

• Indian Rights On Western Rivers : Limited Rights

→ From 1960 to 80 India was not allowed to use the water or build any water reservoir on the western rivers in order to give Pakistan enough time to increase its water need and utilization.

→ But from 1980 onwards - India can use the water of western rivers only for hydel generation. It means India can build dams on the western rivers but with list of Conditionalities;

- i- It can use the water of western rivers if the water need downstream in Pakistan is less.
- ii- It can not divert the flow of rivers.
- iii- It has to send the design of the project to Pakistan before initiating the construction.
- iv- Pakistan can raise structural objections only like the height of the project, diversion etc.
- v- After every 6 months India is bound to facilitate the Pakistani team to inspect the under construction project up-stream.

This clause aimed to protect Pakistan's downstream interests.

Affects on India-Pakistan Relations

- Conflict managements
- Survival through Conflicts (Political and military)

• Conflict Management Institutions Prevent From War

The treaty established the Permanent Indus Commission,

comprising representatives from both countries, to manage data exchange and resolve the technical issues.

→ In case of disagreement between both countries these three step process to resolve the dispute;

- i- Water Commission of Pakistan and India would meet and resolve the structural or legal issues.
- ii- Neutral Observer
- iii- Court of Arbitration

These will help to resolve the conflict peacefully. These constitutions provide continuity even when political dialogue collapsed.

As David Michel said

"The Strength of Indus water treaty lies in its detailed engineering provisions and permanent dispute resolution mechanism."

- Survival OF Treaty Despite Political and Military Conflicts

One of the most remarkable aspect of the Indus water treaty is its endurance despite wars in

1965, 1971 and Kargil Conflict of 1999. However, India always

try to end it but this treaty can not be suspended from one

side, that's why this treaty survived till date.

Water Scholar Aaron T. Wolf

remarks that the treaty

demonstrate that

**"Water cooperation can
endure even in hostile
relations."**

This has prevented water from
becoming an instrument of open
warfare.

• Source OF Contemporary Tension for Pakistan

In recent years, Indian hydropower
projects such as **Baglihar** and
Kishanganga dam have raised
concerns in Pakistan regarding
water security. Although disputes
were resolved by arbitration and
neutral experts, political rhetoric
has heightened mistrust.

As noted by regional analyst,
water has increasingly been
portrayed as a strategic tool
rather than a shared resource.

Conclusion

Indus water treaty fundamentally restricted water distribution in South Asia and served as rare pillar of cooperation between Pakistan and India. While not free from disputes, it has successfully insulated water management from political volatility for over six decades. However, evolving environmental and demographic pressures demand greater cooperation and technical transparency to preserve the historic agreement as a source of stability rather than contention.