

INDIA - PAKISTAN WATER DISPUTE

- AN ALARMING ISSUE

OUTLINE

1 INTRODUCTION

2 TRACING THE HISTORY OF INDO-PAK WATER DISPUTE

3 WHY IT IS AN ALARMING ISSUE?

A) Pakistan already declared a water stressed country.

Case in point: The UN Global Water Security 2023 Assessment

B) Wreaking havoc upon Pakistan's agrarian economy.

Case in point: Pakistan Economic Survey 2022-23 and 2024-25.

C) Perpetuating food insecurity through decreased yields.

Case in point: 40% of Pakistan's population suffers from acute food insecurity.

D) Driving poverty and mass rural migration

Case in point: 44% of Pakistan's population lives under abject

poverty - World Bank Report

E) Aggravating an ecological disaster

Case in point: UN Environmental Programme 2024 report.

F) Blatant violation of international customary law and treaties.

Case in point: Indus Water

Treaty 1960 and Declaration of Montevideo 1933.

G) Encourages a culture of disregard for the international community leading to regional instability.

Case in point: China's planned mega dam on Tibet

4 WAY FORWARD

A) Stricter implementation and international pressure to abide by existing treaties and conventions.

Case in point: The Vienna convention on the Law of Treaties 1969.

B) Regional Cooperation to find diplomatic solutions to the water issues.

Case in point : SAARC + SCO

c) Environmental and cultural
preservation by saving the
Indus Delta

5 CONCLUSION

THE ESSAY

The British poet W. H. Auden once wrote, "Thousands have lived without love, not one without water." This quote represents the stark reality of life: mankind cannot survive without water. Water is the essential need for every human being. As nation states become increasingly competitive over natural sources, water too has become a scarce resource. History has seen wars fought over much less, let alone a precious resource like water that is a lifeline for many. Disputes over water, therefore, are not new. As the world now faces challenges of climate change, water resources have increasingly become scant. The neighbouring countries of India and Pakistan, which are among the most populous in the world, have been at loggerheads over water distribution since the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent.

As of late,

this has become an issue with potentially devastating consequences for the South Asia region and ultimately the whole world.

It could devastate Pakistan economy, social fabric, push more people into poverty, driving an ecological disaster already in the making, and have broader ramifications for regional and global peace.

This issue is an alarming one, not an unsolvable one. By utilising regional cooperation methods and respecting the mandate of international law, diplomatic solutions can be sought which will garner regional peace and prosperity but also avert an ecological catastrophe.

Before diving into what makes the Indo-Pak water dispute an alarming one, it is pertinent to understand the historical development behind this dispute. Post-1947 partition of India, an agreement was signed in 1960, known as the **Indus water treaty**, between India and Pakistan. It divided the Indus and its tributaries between both the countries, with Ravi, Sutlej and Beas going to India

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and Indus, Chenab and Jhelum rivers given to Pakistan. The headworks of the waterways were in India and Pakistan became the lower riparian. Historically, disputes pertaining to the IWT were referred to the World Bank with its award considered binding upon all parties. In the wake of the **pahalgam incident** in April 2025, India unanimously declared the IWT in abeyance. This went against **Article 20** of the IWT, which notes that neither party can arbitrarily hold the treaty in abeyance, it must be a mutual decision. By taking such a step, India has violated the treaty and international customary norms. Such a decision has grave consequences for Pakistan.

Firstly, Pakistan has been declared a water stressed country, thereby even a slight temperment to its waterflows could have severe consequences. According to the **United Nations Global Water Security 2023 Assessment Report**, Pakistan is placed in the "critically water-insecure category".

This underscores a national emergency as Pakistan is home to almost 240 million people. As the upper - riparian country, India has an advantage to divert water flows which could severely devastate Pakistan economically and socially. Therefore, the Indo - Pak water dispute has perilous consequences for the lower - riparian that is Pakistan.

Secondly, this conflict could cripple Pakistan's economy which is majorly dependent on agriculture. As an agrarian society, Pakistan's Gross domestic product is comprised majorly from its agricultural exports. Pakistan is also among the countries most vulnerable to climate change, this has already put a strain on its agrarian sector. This can be depicted by ^{the} agricultural growth fluctuation ^{rate} reported by the **Economic Survey of Pakistan 2022-23**, the rate stood at 4.4% in **FY2022** and dropped down to a meagre 1.55% in **FY2023**. This rate further declined to an alarming 0.56% in **FY2025**. This is due to water shortage already faced by

by Pakistan, coupled with erratic climate patterns. This issue will be further compounded by Indian abeyance of the IWT. Therefore, further development in the water dispute could prove fatal for Pakistan's economy.

Furthermore, decreased agricultural yields and a declining GDP can perpetuate food insecurity. The water dispute has the potential to cripple Pakistan's agrarian sector which will in turn drive food insecurity as the country will not be able to meet the food demands of its growing population. According to a 2024 **World Bank Report**, 40% of Pakistan's population is already food insecure. The Indo-Pak water dispute can push more people to the brink thereby resulting in a complete and utter human catastrophe. This, therefore, proves how further escalation in the water dispute could have irreversible and irreparable consequences for Pakistan.

Moreover, economic downfall and persisting food insecurity further

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drives poverty and mass migration. The present conditions in Pakistan already paint a dire picture. **44%** of Pakistan's population already lives under abject poverty according to a **2025 World Bank Report**. Further, the number of migrants leaving Pakistan, who used illegal channels, reached a record **253,000** in 2025 according to a **preliminary finding** by the **Federal Investigation Agency**. These issues will be further compounded.