

Day: Sunday

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NOA Test Series

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Subject: Pak Affairs

Question # 01

Domestic Dimensions of Hydro Politics.

Answer:

Outline:

01. Introduction.
02. Domestic Dimensions of Hydro politics in Pak.
03. Key Inter-Provincial Water disputes
04. Impact on National Unity
05. Impact on Agricultural development.
06. Way Forward.
07. Conclusion.

Introduction :-

Water in Pakistan is not just a resource ;
it's the lifeblood of the nation's political,

economical and emotional ecosystem. With the Indus River System powering more than 90% of agriculture and supporting millions of livelihoods, hydropolitics has naturally become a high-stakes arena. The domestic dimensions of this issue intertwine governance, federalism, climate stress and provincial identity, making water management not just a technical matter but a national romance with collective survival on the line.

Domestic Dimensions of Hydro-Politics in Pakistan:

Pakistan's hydro-political is shaped by a tight loop of demographic growth, increasing agricultural demands and structural dependence on a single river basin. Each province relies heavily on Indus waters, which funnels competition into everyday governance. Institutions like IRSA and the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord were designed to stabilize the game, but recurring mistrust, outdated data systems,

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and climate-driven unpredictability continue to strain the framework.

Rising Demographic Pressure and water demand:

Pakistan's population is soaring, and with it, water consumption is blowing past sustainable thresholds.

Per capita water availability has dropped from 5600 cubic meters in 1947 to around 900-1,000 cubic meters today, placing the country in the water-scarce category.

Heavy Dependence on Indus River System:

The entire domestic water infrastructure revolves around the Indus River System. IRS contributes upto 138 million acre-feet annually in an average year. Punjab receives ~48% of its water from IRS, Sindh ~42%, KP ~8% and Balochistan ~2%. This concentrated dependency makes even slight variations in flows a lightning rod for political tension.

Climate change and Seasonal variability:

Climate change has added a new layer of complexity. Pakistan experiences heatwaves crossing 50°C , causing rapid early melting.

Monsoon variability increased by 18-20% in the last three decades. This climatic chaos often leads provinces to accuse others of unfair withdrawals when the real issue is unpredictable inflows.

Political Mobilization and Narratives:

Major political parties in Sindh and KP have made water grievances rallying points. Controversy over Kalabagh dam has acted as a symbol of provincial autonomy.

Inter-Provincial Water disputes:

The most intense disputes emerge between Sindh and Punjab, particularly over water distribution during shortages. Sindh frequently alleges that Punjab divers more than its allocated share, while Punjab cites technical

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data to defend its compliance.

KPK adds another layer, often expressing reservations about upstreams reservoirs, specifically the Kalabagh Dam, fearing submergences of its lands and reduced irrigation flows.

The political contention around mega-infrastructure like Kala Bagh Dam exemplifies how hydro-politics can spiral into identity politics, locking provinces into defensive postures rather than collaborative planning.

Impacts on National Unity:

These disputes ripple deep into the emotional core of national unity. Provinces often perceive water decisions as symbols of power imbalance, which amplifies feelings of marginalization. As political actors leverage water grievances to mobilize support, the narrative becomes charged, and sometimes polarized. This undermines trust in federal

institutions, weakens cooperative federalism, and creates an internal branding crisis where the nation's unity KPI starts dropping.

Impacts on Agricultural development:

Agriculture, Pakistan's corporate superstar of rural livelihoods, faces operational disruptions due to these disputes. When provincial tensions lead to inconsistent water (disputes) releases, cropping calendars get thrown off, reducing yields of wheat, cotton, and rice.

Furthermore, the uncertainty inhibits adoption of modern irrigation systems like drip and sprinkler technologies. The overall impact trickles into reduced exports, inefficiencies in value chains, and heightened food insecurity, essentially compromising nation's agri-performance dashboard.

Way Forward:

A sustainability-driven, data-powered vibe shift is essential. Strengthening IRSA through real-time telemetry, transparent reporting, and joint provincial oversight can rebuild trust. Large water reservoirs must be pursued through consensus-building rather than political imposition.

Conclusion:

Hydro-politics in Pakistan sits at the crossroads of federal harmony and agricultural vitality. Inter-provincial disputes, if left unchecked, can erode national unity and compromise economic stability. But with collaborative governance, modern water stability, and transparent systems, Pakistan can turn its water challenges into a shared success story.
