

Indus Waters Treaty - UPSC Notes

The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan signed in 1960. It was brokered by the World Bank. This is an important treaty and one of the most successful water-sharing agreements till date. It is an important topic for the [UPSC exam](#) as it features in the news whenever Indo-Pak relations are discussed.

Indus Water Treaty (IWT)

The IWT was signed by the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the then Pakistani President Ayub Khan. Brokered by the World Bank (then known as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), the negotiations for the agreement went on for nine years.

Ever since partition in 1947, the Indus River had been a bone of contention between the four countries through which it runs - India, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan. The river originates from Tibet.

India had blocked water to Pakistan for some time in 1948, but later restored it after the ceasefire. In 1951, Pakistan took the matter to the UN and accused India of cutting the supply of water to many Pakistani villages.

On the recommendations of the UN, the World Bank came up with this agreement in 1954. It was eventually signed on September 19, 1960.

Indus Water Treaty - Provisions in Brief

The treaty spells out conditions for water-sharing of the River Indus and its five tributaries.

- India got control over the three **eastern rivers**, which are:
 - Ravi
 - Beas
 - Sutlej
- Pakistan got control over the three **western rivers**, which are:
 - Indus
 - Chenab
 - Jhelum
- A **Permanent Indus Commission** was set up by the United Nations for resolving any disputes that may arise in water sharing, with a mechanism for arbitration to resolve conflicts amicably.
- According to the treaty, India can use the water from the western rivers for domestic, non-consumptive needs such as storage, irrigation, and also the generation of electricity.
- The treaty gives India 20% of the water from the Indus River System and the rest 80% to Pakistan.

Indus Water Treaty Issues

There have been issues concerning the treaty with both sides accusing each other of violating the terms of the treaty.

- In 2016, Pakistan had approached the World Bank raising concerns of India's **Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric power projects** being constructed in Jammu & Kashmir. India then requested for neutral experts to inspect the plants, saying that the points raised by Pakistan were technical ones and do not require a court of arbitration (as Pakistan has taken it to an arbitration court). The World Bank permitted India to proceed with the projects after talks were concluded between both the

countries on the technicalities of the treaty.

- The **Tulbul project** (which is a navigation lock-cum-control structure at the mouth of the Wular Lake, situated on the Jhelum from Anantnag to Srinagar and Baramulla) was suspended in 1987 after Pakistan objected to it. Recently, the government decided to review this suspension not taking into account Pakistan's protestations.
- Pakistan's **Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD) project** passes through the Rann of Kutch in India's Gujarat. The project was constructed without India's consent. India has objected because this is in contravention to the IWT. The lower riparian state is in India and hence it needs to be given all details. There is also the danger of flooding in the state of Gujarat.
- Recently, the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan have taken on a downward spiral. In the wake of the Uri attacks on India, Prime Minister Modi remarked that **blood and water cannot flow simultaneously** indicating to Pakistan that its support to terrorism across the border will lead to India rethinking its generous stance on the IWT. Indeed, many experts are of the opinion that the treaty is more favourable towards Pakistan than India.
- Another issue cited with the IWT is that it was signed on India's behalf by the then PM Nehru. However, he was not the head of state and that the treaty ought to have been signed by the head of state, the then president of the country.
- India does not use its entire share of water it is entitled to as per the provisions of the IWT. About 2 million acre feet (MAF) of water from the River Ravi flow into Pakistan unutilised by India.
- In the wake of the Pulwama attacks in 2019, the Indian government stated that all water flowing into Pakistan at present, in the three eastern rivers, will be diverted to Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan for different uses.
- In order to prevent this flow and **utilise the entire share of water under the Treaty**, India has taken the following steps:
 - Shahpurkandi Project: This will help in generating power for Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.
 - Ujh Multipurpose Project: This will create storage of water on the Ujh, which is a tributary of the River Ravi, for irrigation as well as power generation.
 - 2nd Ravi Beas link below Ujh: This has been declared a National Project by the GOI. This involves constructing a barrage across river Ravi for diverting water through a tunnel link to the Beas Basin. This is planned to prevent excess water flowing into Pakistan.

Options for India

A few political thinkers are of the opinion that the treaty is one-sided biased towards Pakistan and that it should be abrogated.

However, this is easier said than done and not without serious ramifications.

- The treaty's provisions do not allow a unilateral abrogation.
- Even if India decides to back down from the treaty, the 1969 Vienna Convention on the law of treaties should be abided by.
- This can hamper the country's image internationally. India's other neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal may become skeptical about similar treaties with them.
- Some experts on international affairs are of the opinion that India should safeguard bilateral treaties if it is aspiring for a permanent seat in the UNSC.
- The move to abrogate the treaty may lead to more problems with respect to terrorist activities.
- India should also build adequate infrastructure to use the entire water before stopping water to Pakistan.
- Another angle is that of China. China, with its support to Pakistan, may block the water from Brahmaputra to Assam. It can also stop the waters of the Indus which does originate in Chinese territory.

Experts opine that India should use the waters of the western rivers as permitted by the IWT. This alone can

send a strong signal to Pakistan. A lot should be thought over before any other drastic steps are taken, as they can have lasting effects on the relationship with Pakistan.

UPSC Questions related to Indus Water Treaty

What is Indus Water Treaty?

It is a water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan signed in 1960, to divide the waters of the Indus and its five tributaries between the countries.

Who signed on Indus Basin Treaty from Pakistan?

The treaty was signed between Jawaharlal Nehru from India and Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan.

Can India stop water supply to Pakistan?

As per the treaty, India cannot abrogate it unilaterally, but India can fully utilise its share.