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WEAPONISING

WATERS

Historical, Legal, and Strategic
Dimensions of IWT Suspension

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TREATIES

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Weaponising Waters: Historical, Legal, and Strategic Dimensions of IWT Suspension

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**Weaponising Waters: Historical, Legal,
and Strategic Dimensions of IWT Suspension**

Acronym

BCM
CEA
CVPPPL
CWC
EOI
FAO
HEP
IIOJK
IOB
IWT
J&K
LoC
MAF
MCM
MPP
MW
NHPC
PIDE
PIB
SJVN
UN
VCLT
WAPDA

Full Form

Billion Cubic Metres
Central Electricity Authority, India
Chenab Valley Power Projects Private Limited
Central Water Commission
Expression of Interest
Food and Agriculture Organization
Hydroelectric Project
Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir
International Competitive Bidding
Indus Waters Treaty
Jammu & Kashmir
Line of Control
Million Acre-feet
Million Cubic Metres
Multipurpose Project
Megawatt
National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited
Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
Press Information Bureau
Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam
United Nations
Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties
Water and Power Development Authority

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Foreword

Water has been central to the story of human civilization. From the earliest settlements along the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Yangtze, Indus and other major river systems, access to water enabled communities to develop agriculture, sustain livelihoods, build cities, and establish enduring civilizations. The availability, control and management of water have often influenced the development, prosperity and at times, decline of societies. Even today, water remains indispensable for human life, food security, economic development, energy production and environmental sustainability.

Given its vital importance, water has also been a source of tension and conflict among communities and states. Competition over access to water, its allocation and distribution, and the rights of upstream and downstream uses has often complicated inter-state relations in many parts of the world. From the ancient city-states of Mesopotamia to the modern nation states including Ethiopia and Egypt, Turkey, Syria and Iraq, China and Laos, and Pakistan and India, disagreements over transboundary waters have often intertwined with wider political, economic, and strategic interests. These states have sought to manage such differences through water-sharing agreements, institutional mechanisms and treaties, mostly with the assistance of third parties.

In South Asia, the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) between India and Pakistan provides an important example of such cooperation. After a decade-long negotiations, facilitated by the World Bank, the two countries reached the consensus for allocation and the use of waters of the Indus river system, together with institutional and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Despite wars and periods of political and diplomatic tensions, the Treaty performed well in providing a framework for managing differences over shared waters.

However, India's unilateral decision to put the Treaty 'in abeyance' following the Pahalgam attack in May 2025 has triggered a new and uncertain phase and further deteriorated ties between the two countries. Pakistan has rejected New Delhi's decision maintaining that the Treaty does not provide for its unilateral suspension and also termed it as an act of war. In view of Pakistan's dependence on the Indus Basin and the wider implications for its water and food security and transboundary water governance, the recent developments warrant a careful examination.

It is in this backdrop that the India Study Centre of the Institute of Strategic Studies presents this research study covering all important dimensions related to the issue. The study traces the evolution of India-Pakistan water-sharing arrangements from partition in 1947 to the present, analyzes the political and legal foundations of IWT, and assesses the implications of India's decision to place it in abeyance. It further examines the domestic narratives in India surrounding the Treaty, developments in India's upstream water infrastructure, and their wider hydrological, economic, and security implications for Pakistan. Finally, it explores the legal, diplomatic, and strategic options available for Pakistan in responding to this evolving challenge.

I hope that this research work will contribute in deeper understanding of the significance of IWT, its linkages with South Asian geopolitics and will provide useful insights to policy makers, diplomats, academics, researchers and students. I commend Dr Khurram Abbas, Ms. Mahwish Hafeez, Mr. Usama Hameed, and Mr. Muhammad Mateen at the ISSI's India Study Centre for undertaking this important research and for their efforts to examine a subject of growing significance for Pakistan and the region.

Ambassador Moin ul Haque
Director General
Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad

Part 1

Historical Background and Evolution of IWT

Pre-Partition Irrigation and Water Disputes

Irrigation in the Indus Valley dates back to prehistoric times. By the middle of 19th century, due to the growing scale and extent of irrigation, the upper Bari Doub Canal was constructed in 1859¹ to irrigate around one million acres of land with water from the Ravi River.² Apart from extending existing canals, other new canals were also constructed by British Raj, which included the Sirhind Canal which resulted in doubling the irrigated land in Sindh from 1.5 million acres to 3.0 million acres between 1857 and 1900.³ After the First World War, new proposed irrigation projects, including the Sukkur Barrage, Bhakra projects, and the Sutlej Valley, raised concerns between Punjab and Bombay and the States of Bahawalpur and Bikaner. However, since Punjab and Bombay (the province of Bombay also included Sindh until 1935) were part of the British Raj, the mechanism to resolve such issues rested with the Government of India through an executive order. Using this authority, the Government of India authorised the Sutlej Valley and Sukkur Barrage, whereas the Bhakra Project was rejected as it threatened to inundate the State of Bilaspur.⁴

The situation once again took a turn as the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed. This Act made water issues a subject of provincial jurisdiction and provinces were given the powers to develop their own water resources. The Governor General of India could only intervene if a dispute emerged between two or more provinces over inter-state water resources.⁵ By this time, Sindh had started raising concerns regarding certain projects being considered by Punjab. At the request of Sindh, a Commission was set up in 1941,⁶ and the subsequent negotiations remained inconclusive as in August of 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided into two independent states, i.e., India

¹ A. K. Chaturvedi, "Indus Water Treaty: Options for India." *Scholar Warrior* (2017), https://archive.claws.co.in/images/journals_doc/867954295_04_chap.pdf.

² "Indus Irrigation System," Indus River Basin, <https://indusriverbasin.org/indus-irrigation-system/>

³ Asit K. Biswas, "Indus Water Treaty: The Negotiating Process," *Water International* 17, no. 4 (n.d.), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508069208686140>.

⁴ Biswas, "Indus Water Treaty: The Negotiating Process."

⁵ Sharad S. Javali, "Water Disputes over Inter - State Rivers: The Indian Experience," *Christ University Law Journal* (Bengaluru) 4, no. 2 (2015).

⁶ Javali, "Water Disputes over Inter - State Rivers: The Indian Experience."

and Pakistan. With this partition, the conflict over water resources became a conflict between two countries instead of a conflict between two provinces of the same dominion.

The Post-Partition Water Crisis Between India and Pakistan

With the partition of the Indian sub-continent, the resolution of the water dispute became even more complicated as the Eastern part of Punjab went to India, whereas the Western Punjab became part of Pakistan. In fact, due to the canal system that existed in Punjab made this division even more complicated because it had been developed to be governed under a single administration.⁷ Nevertheless, following Independence, both countries signed a standstill agreement as a temporary solution to allow water to flow from India (upstream) to Pakistan (downstream). This agreement lasted till 31 March 1948.⁸ As soon as the agreement expired, India stopped the flow of water to Pakistan from the Ferozepur headworks to the Dipalpur Canal and the main branches of the Upper Bari Doab Canal, which affected irrigation of about 1.66 million acres of land in Pakistan.⁹ This was the very first instance of New Delhi's decision to use water as a coercive tool to hurt Pakistan's interests.

Pakistan had already been grappling with problems like the unfair Radcliff Award granting Muslim-majority area of Gurdaspur to India, thereby giving it direct access to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and India withholding Pakistan's due share of 750 million rupees to economically cripple Pakistan. Pakistan's share of military equipment was also withheld by India¹⁰, and later handed over the equipment that was obsolete and damaged.¹¹ At the same time, the refugee crisis posed a serious challenge to Pakistan's food, shelter, and medical resources. On top of these problems, Pakistan also faced a challenge where India claimed complete rights over water resources, denying the former the share it had been receiving prior to the partition. American geographer and academic Aloys Arthur Michel believe that India was using every possible means

⁷ Soutik Biswas, "Electoral Autocracy: The Downgrading of India's Democracy," *BBC News*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56393944>.

⁸ Engineer Syed Jamait Ali Shah, "Indus Waters Treaty Under Stress: Imperatives Of Climatic Change Or Political Manipulation," *Margalla Papers, National Defence University*, (Islamabad), 2011.

⁹ Amit Ranjan, "Indus Waters Treaty Negotiations: Geopolitics, Disputes and Cooperation," *South Asia Research* 45, no. 1 (2025): 110–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280241303540>.

¹⁰ Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2019 - A Concise History* (Oxford University Press, 2006; fifth Edition, Oxford University Press, 2020). 18

¹¹ Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *Pakistan's Defence Policy, 1947-58* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1990). 32

available at their disposal to exert maximum pressure on Pakistan.¹² By doing so, India had hoped that Pakistan would not be able to survive economically and would have no other option but to reintegrate with India. New Delhi calculated that restricting water supply to Pakistan would expedite the reunification of subcontinent forcing Pakistan to surrender its claims on State of Jammu and Kashmir. Further, Pakistan had imposed export duty on raw jute from East Bengal for processing in the jute mills in West Bengal which had also annoyed India.¹³

In May 1948, India and Pakistan signed yet another agreement as India continued to claim proprietary rights over all the waters in the eastern rivers. Under this agreement, India imposed certain conditions including that West Punjab would be required to pay the fee levied by East Punjab for the water.¹⁴ Consequently, West Punjab agreed to deposit ad-hoc sum of money as a fee specified by India. As a result of this agreement, India restored the flow of water to the Dipalpur canal and main branches of the Central Bari Doab canals, but withheld water to the Bahawalpur state distributary and nine lesser distributaries of the Central Bari Doab system.¹⁵

From Bilateral Negotiations to the Indus Waters Treaty

As India and Pakistan were busy contesting rights over water, an article published by David E. Lilienthal, former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority grabbed the attention of Eugene Black, President of the World Bank. The article made several suggestions, including that the Indus Basin be treated, exploited, and developed as a single unit. Black then offered his good offices to India and Pakistan to find a long-term negotiated settlement of the water dispute.¹⁶ In 1952, David Lilienthal and Eugene Black of the World Bank held discussions with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistani leaders. Both India and Pakistan agreed that, while negotiations were continuing, neither country would deliberately reduce the water available to the other. By late 1952 and early 1953, India and Pakistan could not agree on how the Indus waters should be divided. As negotiations reached a deadlock, the World Bank proposed its own water-sharing plan

¹² Michel, Aloys Arthur. *The Indus Rivers: A Study of the Effects of Partition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967, 197.

¹³ Michel, *The Indus Rivers, 196-197*.

¹⁴ "Inter-Dominion Agreement Between the Government of India and the Government of Pakistan, on the Canal Water Dispute Between East and West Punjab," International Water Law Project, <https://www.internationalwaterlaw.org/documents/regionaldocs/punjab-canal.html>

¹⁵ Ranjan, "Indus Waters Treaty Negotiations."

¹⁶ Shafqat Kakakhel, "The Indus Waters Treaty: Negotiation, Implementation, Challenges, and Future Prospects," *Pakistan Horizon* (Karachi) 67, no. 1 (2014), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23726076>.

between the two countries under which Western rivers would be allocated to Pakistan and Eastern rivers to India. Initially, Pakistan had some reservations.¹⁷ However, as a result of almost ten years of negotiations, the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was signed between the two countries on 19 September 1960. As per the agreement, three eastern rivers, the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej, were granted to India, whereas three Western rivers, the Indus, the Jhelum, and the Chenab, were granted to Pakistan.¹⁸

The IWT contains 12 Articles, 79 paragraphs, 8 annexures, and 85 pages. As per the Treaty, the Eastern rivers, which were given to India exclusively, were to be allowed to flow to Pakistan uninterrupted for the transition period of 10 years to allow Pakistan to construct replacement works for the water of the Eastern rivers. India also agreed to pay a fixed contribution of Pounds Sterling 62 million for the cost of this replacement infrastructure in 10 annual instalments.¹⁹ Article VI compelled both India and Pakistan to exchange data on rivers and canals.²⁰

As a mechanism for cooperation and exchange of information regarding the use of rivers, the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC), with a commissioner as its head from each country, was established under Article VIII. The Treaty also laid out various procedures to address issues that may arise from time to time. As per these procedures, “questions” are addressed by the Commission; “differences” are to be resolved by the Neutral Expert; whereas “disputes” are to be handled by an ad hoc arbitral tribunal called the “Court of Arbitration”.²¹

For Pakistan, the IWT brought with it a secure allocation and legal basis for the use of Western rivers for its water needs, particularly the irrigation system. It also created a mechanism for the disputes to be resolved peacefully and in a cooperative manner. For almost four decades, the IWT had been hailed for withstanding the test of time. It was long viewed as a Confidence Building Measure (CBM), which, unlike other CBMs, survived two full-scale wars of 1965 and 1971 as well as military escalations of the Kargil conflicts and the Balakot strikes in 1999 and 2019,

¹⁷ Biswas, “Indus Water Treaty: The Negotiating Process.”

¹⁸ “Indus Waters Treaty 1960,” *United Nations Treaty Series* 419 (1962): 125–217, signed September 19, 1960, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>

¹⁹ India, Pakistan, and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, “Indus Waters Treaty 1960,” *United Nations Treaty Series* 419 (1962)

²⁰ Dr. Saqib Riaz et al., “Indian Aqua Aggression: Investigating The Impact of Indus Water Treaty (Iwt) On Future Of India-Pakistan Water Dispute,” *NDU Journal* (Islamabad), 2020.

²¹ “Fact Sheet: The Indus Waters Treaty 1960 and the Role of the World Bank,” Text/HTML, World Bank, June 11, 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/fact-sheet-the-indus-waters-treaty-1960-and-the-world-bank>.

respectively. For the former U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, the IWT was “one bright spot ... in a very depressing world picture that we see so often.”²²

Indus Waters Treaty: From Cooperation to Coercion

By the turn of the century, cracks started to emerge in IWT. The recent Indian decision of holding it in abeyance may be swift in implementation but not necessarily in thinking. The ideas of renegotiating the Treaty or even completely withdrawing from it echoed in the power corridors of New Delhi as early as 2001, following an attack on the Indian Parliament, as one of the means to punish Pakistan for its alleged support for terrorism inside India.²³ However, legal experts in India pointed out that India cannot withdraw from the Treaty unilaterally, as there was no such clause in the document, besides the fact that the Treaty was guaranteed by the World Bank. Later, the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 invoked a similar response in India, as it was argued that India could withdraw from the Treaty, citing Pakistan’s non-compliance with Security Council Resolution 1373, which relates to the denial of support and sanctuaries to terror outfits. Diverting the flow of water from Western rivers, particularly the Chenab and Jhelum were also considered.²⁴ In March 2009, more than 20 different UN bodies warned that, since water has become the latest cause stoking tensions between India and Pakistan, the world may be perilously close to its first water war.²⁵

The Modi Era: The Transformation of Water into a Strategic Instrument

This situation, which was already challenging, became further complicated with the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the helm of affairs in New Delhi in 2014. Modi’s entire election campaign revolved around Pakistan-bashing and therefore, IWT became a natural part of his rhetoric. Though initially, India under Modi did express its commitment to the ‘time tested’ framework for water sharing,²⁶ the situation changed following the attack on an army base in the town of Uri in Baramula district of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). At

²² World Bank, “Fact Sheet.”

²³ Shaheen Akhtar, “Emerging Challenges To Indus Waters Treaty - Issues of Compliance & Transboundary Impacts of Indian Hydroprojects on the Western Rivers,” *Regional Studies* (Islamabad) XXVIII, no. 4 (2010).

²⁴ Akhtar, “Emerging Challenges To Indus Waters Treaty

²⁵ “Water Dispute and War risk,” Dawn, January 18, 2010, <https://www.dawn.com/news/838786/water-dispute-and-war-risk>

²⁶ “Indus Water Treaty,” Press Information Bureau Government of India, July 23, 2016, <https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=107306®=48&lang=2>.

least 17 soldiers lost their lives in the attack.²⁷ As an established pattern in India, Pakistan was blamed for the attack without sharing any evidence or actionable intelligence.

Following the Uri attack, Prime Minister Modi, while chairing a high-level meeting, decided to suspend the upcoming meeting of the Indus Water Commissioners.²⁸ The meeting in which Modi made his famous remark “blood and water cannot flow together,” explored ways to hurt Pakistan by stopping and diverting water flow to Pakistan including suggestions to revive the Tulbul Navigation project.²⁹ Since then, Modi and his Ministers continued their rant for stopping flow of water to Pakistan and taking an increasingly assertive position towards IWT.

India’s Push for Renegotiation of the Treaty

At the same time, besides threatening Pakistan of stopping the water or withdrawing from the IWT altogether, India also floated the idea of renegotiating the Treaty. Several factors contributed to this Indian demand for renegotiating the IWT that included Pakistan’s repeated objection to Indian projects on Western rivers, starting from the Salal hydropower project in the 1970s to the Tulbul Navigation project, Baglihar dam, Kishanganga, Rattle and Nimmo Bazgo, irritated India.³⁰ Secondly, realising that using Article IX of the Treaty, which deals with the settlements of differences and disputes, Pakistan can approach the Court of Arbitration and prevent India from designing the projects that contravene the Treaty, India therefore now seeks to modify the dispute resolution mechanism.³¹ In order to have greater flexibility in drawing the designs of future projects, India desires that, for any dispute resolution, first neutral expert may be approached before reaching the Court of Arbitration.³²

²⁷ “Militants Attack Indian Army Base in Kashmir ‘Killing 17,’” India, *BBC News*, September 18, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-37399969>.

²⁸ “India to suspend Indus water talks with Pak,” *Deccan Herald*, September 27, 2016, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/india-suspend-indus-water-talks-2088902>

²⁹ Indrani Bagchi and Vishwa Mohan, “Blood and Water Can’t Flow Together’: PM Narendra Modi Gets Tough on Indus Treaty,” *Times of India*, September 27, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/blood-and-water-cant-flow-together-pm-narendra-modi-gets-tough-on-indus-treaty/articleshow/54534135.cms>.

³⁰ Sushant Sareen, “Indus Water Treaty: Opening the Water Front,” *Observer Research Foundation*, January 28, 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indus-waters-treaty>

³¹ Brig Dr Raashid Wali Janjua et al., *Indian Water Aggression: Violation of Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) and Threats to Pakistan’s Water Resources* (Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2026), <https://ipripak.org/indian-water-aggression-violation-of-indus-water-treaty-iwt-and-threats-to-pakistans-water-resources/>.

³² Janjua et al., *Indian Water Aggression*.

In this connection, India issued four notices to Pakistan between 2023 and 2024.³³ Later, it also withdrew from Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) meeting till Pakistan agreed to renegotiate the Treaty.³⁴ Though India had flagged a number of concerns that included growing population, climate change, growing demand for energy, etc, the main motive behind this suggested modification is to limit Pakistan's option of approaching Court of Arbitration instead of a neutral expert. Pakistan, on its part, firmly communicated to India that since, being a lower-riparian country, it depends on the Western rivers, it believes and insists that IWT is a crucial legal and institutional guarantee of its water rights, abandoning or even restructuring it may undermine Pakistan's interest. Pakistan believes that Article IX is fundamental to the Treaty's enforcement as it allows Pakistan to check any violation carried out by India.³⁵

In this context, the Pahalgam incident provided India a perfect opportunity to put forth its designs regarding renegotiating the IWT and force Pakistan to surrender its interests to Indian geo-strategic ambitions. Hence, following the attack, statements like "Terror and talks cannot go together; water and blood cannot flow together"³⁶ echoed throughout India. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs too came forward and alleged that India concluded the IWT with Pakistan in good faith as indicated in the preamble of the Treaty. However, "Pakistan has held these principles in abeyance by its promotion of cross-border terrorism for several decades now". The statement further cited climate change, demographic shifts, and technological changes as new realities on the ground that demand renegotiation of the Treaty.³⁷

Besides other diplomatic measures that included closing the Attari-Wagah border, declaring the defence, military, naval, and air advisors as persona non grata and asking them to leave New Delhi within a week, directing Pakistanis visiting India on SAARC Visa Exemption scheme to return to their home country within 48 hours, and reducing staff at Pakistan's High Commission, the IWT

³³ Suhasini Haidar & Jacob Koshy, "Indus Water Treaty: No More Indus Commission Meetings till Treaty Renegotiated, India Tells Pakistan," India, *The Hindu*, September 18, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-serves-notice-to-pakistan-seeking-review-of-indus-water-treaty/article68655577.ece>.

³⁴ Koshy, "Indus Water Treaty."

³⁵ Janjua et al., *Indian Water Aggression*.

³⁶ "Water and blood cannot flow together': PM Modi Signals no reversal on Indus Water Treaty Suspension," Times of India, May 12, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/water-and-blood-cannot-flow-together-pm-modi-signals-no-reversal-on-indus-waters-treaty-suspension/articleshow/121116091.cms>

³⁷ "Indus Treaty on hold till Pak stops exporting terror: Jaishankar," Times of India, May 16, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indus-treaty-on-hold-till-pak-stops-exporting-terror-jaishankar/articleshow/121196820.cms>

was also put in ‘abeyance’ by India.³⁸ This decision did not formally terminate the Treaty. Instead, it puts the Treaty in legal ambiguity, thereby betraying Indian intentions of revisiting and renegotiating the Treaty.

Much to Pakistan’s disappointment, India has repeatedly made it clear that the IWT will not be operationalised in its present form as it needs renegotiation.³⁹ Additionally, India has also stopped sharing hydrological data impeding Pakistan’s ability to agricultural scheduling, irrigation forecasting, and energy planning. Hence, Pakistan has rightfully declared that Indian efforts to cripple Pakistan by stopping and diverting waters are nothing short of an “Act of War.”⁴⁰ Thus, it has converted a cooperative framework into a coercion tool, putting lives of 240 million people at risk.

³⁸ “Pahalgam Attack: India Suspends Indus Waters Treaty with Immediate Effect, Closes Attari Border Crossing,” Pakistan, *Dawn*, 10:34:18+05:00, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1906075>.

³⁹ Kallol Bhattacharjee, “Indus Waters Treaty Will Not Remain Operational in Its Present Form, Says Official,” India, *The Hindu*, July 21, 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indus-waters-treaty-will-not-remain-operational-in-its-present-form-says-official/article71246737.ece>.

⁴⁰ Naveed Siddiqui, “Dar Warns India: Water Blockade to Be Treated as ‘an Act of War,’” *Brecorder*, May 6, 2026, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40419827>.

Part 2

Domestic Politics in India around the IWT

1960 Indus Waters Treaty was purely a legal outcome of a decade-long diplomatic negotiation between India and Pakistan. Yet, the discussions surrounding its validity, legitimacy, and practicality during the later decades reflected its currency and relevance as a domestic political issue in India as well. Especially, the BJP-led NDA government, long before suspending the Treaty, repeatedly used it for political rhetoric and electoral communication.

Following the Pahalgam attack in April 2025, the BJP government cited Pakistan's alleged 'support for cross-border terrorism' to immediately hold the Treaty 'in abeyance'.⁴¹ This pretext makes it a strategic move to use the pact as a tool for national security and achieving certain foreign policy interests by threatening or actually denying the flow of water to Pakistan. On the other side, an analysis of the rhetoric amplified by the political leadership of India, especially Prime Minister Modi himself, around the Indus Waters Treaty reveals an interesting domestic political side as well. The government officials in New Delhi used the criticism of the water-sharing arrangement with Islamabad to garner political support domestically, while maintaining that Pakistan did not deserve a 'single drop' of water originating from India.⁴² The discourse around an 'unjust' water-sharing mechanism also serves as an ideological tool, which the Indian leadership used to delegitimize the Nehruvian legacy while portraying the Treaty suspension as a long-due 'course correction'.

Additionally, political narratives around water distribution carry a civilizational undertone and identity-driven nationalist approach calling for India's sovereign rights on the waters that not only originate from its soil but are centuries-old architects of its civilizational identity. In doing so, the role of third-party mediation by the World Bank also comes under scrutiny, with an underpinning

⁴¹ "Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA" *Ministry of External Affairs*, April 23, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/39443/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_by_MEA_April_23_2025.

⁴² Arpan Rai, "India ensuring 'not a single drop of water' flows into Pakistan After suspending major river-sharing treaty," *The Independent*, June 11, 2026, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/india/india-pakistan-indus-water-treaty-modi-b2993159.html>.

that a civilizational power like India was made dependent on foreign forces in decisions regarding the use of its own resources. The suspension of ‘unfair’ water distribution through IWT has further been used for electoral mobilization among farmers and regional constituencies. Demonstration of a strong, masculine character of the incumbent Indian leadership has remained another significant characteristic of the domestic political discourse built around IWT. The following lines discuss these themes in some detail to explain how IWT —and its suspension for that matter— serves as a domestic political gambit for India’s ruling elite, besides meeting its foreign policy objectives.

A Gradual Shift

The BJP government’s approach vis-à-vis the Indus Waters Treaty has not remained consistent since 2014. A gradual shift can be noticed in its dealings with the Treaty from a technical water-sharing mechanism to securitizing water as a national strategic issue. Despite the BJP’s historical reservations over the Treaty, cautious cooperation was maintained in the early years of the Modi government before it gradually resorted to weaponising water.

Following an armed attack in the Uri region of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in 2016, Prime Minister Modi used his ‘blood and water’ rhetoric for the first time.⁴³ This would become the ruling party’s popular slogan for India’s domestic political audience in later years. While New Delhi was keen to renegotiate the Treaty with Pakistan purely on technical grounds, the quest was domestically sold as an effort to ‘teach lessons’ to Pakistan, linking alleged terror with water. After another militant attack in Pulwama in 2019, India again threatened to withdraw from the IWT.⁴⁴ The Pahalgam attack in 2025 marked a departure point when the BJP government finally decided to suspend the Treaty, blaming Pakistan for conspiring the attack.

Besides expediting practical work on several construction projects on the rivers allocated to Pakistan, the BJP’s political narrative around the Treaty also drastically sharpened. The rhetorical approach even comprised questioning Jawaharlal Nehru’s lack of technical knowledge, —and at some instances, his sincerity, and his alleged preference for diplomatic posturing over local needs that led India to enter the pact. In the instances prior to the Treaty suspension, we do not find such

⁴³ “Indus Treaty: Blood and water cannot flow together, says PM Modi after meeting,” *India Today*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indus-waters-treaty-meeting-narendra-modi-pakistan-343297-2016-09-26>.

⁴⁴ “Explained: India to stop share of water flowing to Pakistan,” *India Today*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/indus-water-treaty-nitin-gadkari-pulwama-attack-1462432-2019-02-22>.

sharp criticism of the Treaty and Nehru's leadership coming from India's Prime Minister himself. After the Pahalgam attack, however, Prime Minister Modi repeatedly mocked the approach—or the lack thereof—of Nehru and the Congress party pertaining to water distribution.

Water Securitization: From Resource-sharing to Counter Terrorism

The Modi government has gradually drifted away from its objections towards IWT on a technical basis towards making it a part of its counter terrorism toolkit. In the post-Pahalgam attack context, the Treaty suspension was successfully marketed before local audience as a punitive action to teach Pakistan a lesson for its alleged involvement in conspiring terrorism across the border. In his public addresses as well as parliament speeches, Prime Minister Modi can be seen frequently switching narratives to justify his government's jibe on the Treaty. But his favourite theme in public appearances remained linking water with terrorism. In a public gathering in Rajasthan, around two weeks after the 'Operation Sindoor', the Indian Prime Minister stated:

*"If Pakistan continues to export terrorists, it will have to beg for every penny. Pakistan will not get India's rightful share of water. Playing with the blood of Indians will now cost Pakistan heavily."*⁴⁵

He echoed the same securitization narrative through his infamous 'blood and water' mantra in his Independence Day speech on August 15, 2025, from New Delhi's Red Fort.⁴⁶ These adjustments in the narrative gave the ruling BJP the leverage to embed its criticism of the Treaty with its counter-terrorism strategy, while framing Pakistan as the main pariah that deserves no basic rights such as water because it 'masterminds bleeding India and its citizens'. The threatening undertone of 'costing Pakistan heavily' and 'having to beg for every penny' vis-à-vis an enemy state is part of the rhetoric that sits well with voters' minds.

⁴⁵ "The world and the enemies of the country have seen what happens when 'Sindoor' turns into 'Barood': PM Modi in Bikaner, Rajasthan," *Narendra Modi*, May 22, 2025, accessed August 8, 2026, <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-laying-of-foundation-stone-and-inauguration-of-development-works-in-bikaner-rajasthan-593598>.

⁴⁶ "Today, the mantra for 140 crore Indians should be building a prosperous India: PM Modi in Independence Day," *Narendra Modi*, August 15, 2025, accessed August 8, 2026, <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-shri-narendra-modi-s-address-from-the-ramparts-of-red-fort-on-the-occasion-of-79th-independence-day-596314>

Historical Revisionism: Delegitimizing Nehruvian Legacy

Another striking theme seen in the public statements of the BJP leadership with reference to water sharing with Pakistan is their sharp disapproval of Nehru and the Indian National Congress. Demeaning Nehru's ethos, policies, and political standing has been a concentrated part of the Modi government's political strategy, whether it is in terms of foreign policy or on internal issues. The IWT is no exception, which the Prime Minister and his party colleagues have repeatedly termed as unfair and one-sided. The Treaty is presented as a 'grave betrayal' on the part of Nehru and the Congress party, a gamble that harmed India's identity and self-respect. This ideological rhetoric allows the BJP government to present itself as the 'defender' of India's sovereignty, identity, resources, and peoples while painting its political opponents as weak and, sometimes, anti-national, compromising on issues pertaining to national security and India's interests.

Prime Minister Modi frequently projects the Congress party as accommodating Pakistan's interests at the price of India's security. In a parliamentary speech in February 2025, he accused that the party wanted his grave dug because he put the 'unjust IWT signed by Nehru in abeyance'.⁴⁷ He also accused Nehru of prioritizing diplomacy over Indian farmers' interests and, while Nehru had later admitted his mistake, the subsequent Congress governments refrained from revisiting the Treaty.⁴⁸

Framing the water-sharing issue with anti-Nehruvian rhetoric allows the BJP to re-write history in order to meet three-fold objectives, i) challenging the Nehruvian legacy of foreign, security, and development policies; ii) portraying Congress as weak on national security no matter who heads the party or its government; and iii) Presenting the BJP government's policies as 'course correction' aimed at restoring national pride and sovereignty.

⁴⁷ "No matter how many challenges there are, we have 140 crore solutions: PM Modi in Rajya Sabha," *Narendra Modi*, February 5, 2026, Accessed August 7, 2026, <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-reply-to-the-motion-of-thanks-on-the-president-s-address-in-rajya-sabha-5th-february-twenty-twenty-six-602416>

⁴⁸ "We will reduce terrorists to dust, their handlers will face unimaginable punishment: PM Modi in Lok Sabha," *Narendra Modi*, July 29, 2025, accessed August 7, 2026, <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-addressing-lok-sabha-during-special-discussion-on-operation-sindoor-595830>

Resource Sovereignty and Water Nationalism

Hyper-nationalist and populist parties like India's BJP build their appeal around diverse forms of divisive mechanisms. Attaching everything to 'the nation' in order to claim exclusive belonging to and rights on the resources and create an 'us versus them' binary is an essential part of this hyper nationalism. Following the Pahalgam attack, the BJP has also used the narrative of 'water nationalism' to attract mass support and disqualify Pakistan's claim over shared waters. Prime Minister Modi frequently justifies the Treaty suspension on the pretext that waters 'originating from *Bharat*' must not flow outside its territory. In his Independence Day address in 2025, Modi maintained that "the waters originating from *Bharat*" were irrigating the fields of India's "enemies."⁴⁹ In his Lok Sabha address 17 days earlier, he questioned:

*"A country with such a huge population, with rivers originating from our own land — and only 20% of the water for us? And 80% of the water was given to the very country that openly declares *Bharat* as its enemy, repeatedly calls *Bharat* its enemy. And who had the rightful claim over that water? Our country's farmers, our citizens..... Pakistan kept enjoying the benefits of something that rightfully belonged to us."*⁵⁰

An element of identity politics is also at play when it comes to claiming India's exclusive rights over waters. Prime Minister Modi, on one instance, criticized Nehru and Congress for handing over the dispute over waters, which have for centuries shaped *Bharat*'s identity, to the World Bank.⁵¹

Using such rhetorical statements, the BJP leadership increasingly frames rivers, not just a resource but the drivers of India's centuries-old identity, which comes under danger as rivers flow outside the country. Indus waters are also portrayed as a sovereign national resource rather than a shared transboundary basin. Such framing helps generate mass support for a harsher posturing vis-à-vis Pakistan —the enemy and the 'other' in this identity. This way, the political principle of territorial ownership replaces the legal principle of treaty-based allocation of water.

⁴⁹ "PM Modi in Independence Day," *Narendra Modi*, August 15, 2025.

⁵⁰ "PM Modi in Lok Sabha," *Narendra Modi*, July 29, 2025.

⁵¹ "PM Modi in Lok Sabha," *Narendra Modi*, July 29, 2025.

Media: Amplifying Modi's Narrative

Instead of offering objective analyses of how the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty might further affect the diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan; how the deadlock might lead to a humanitarian catastrophe in a region already vulnerable to climate change and seismic environmental degradation; and what technical problems might emerge for India itself in the longer run, the majority of Indian popular media can be viewed amplifying and justifying the BJP's rhetorical stance pertaining to Nehru's historical blunders, teaching lessons to Pakistan or course correction by the Modi government.

Media coverage frequently framed the suspension in terms of its coercive utility against Pakistan rather than examining questions of treaty law, basin management, humanitarian consequences, or long-term regional water security. For instance, *India Today* hosted a discussion framing it with the title “*Is water the best way to choke Pakistan?*.”⁵² An NDTV opinion article accused Nehru of encouraging “Pakistan's ‘blackmail and play victim tactics’” while lauding the BJP government's decision to suspend the Treaty as a “long-overdue course correction.”⁵³

In sum, reporting pertaining to the post-Pahalgam suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty by popular Indian media basically supported Modi government's stance on the water-sharing mechanism, and adopted rhetorical narratives around punitive statecraft, national sovereignty, and terrorism. This contributed to deflecting the public discourses from legal, humanitarian, and technical aspects of the development, which as a result, largely remain void of objective assessments of the long-term consequences of the Modi government's policy on the Indus Waters Treaty.

⁵² “Is water the best way to choke Pakistan? Experts Debate,” *India Today*, May 6, 2025, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/video/is-water-the-best-way-to-choke-pakistan-experts-debate-2720590-2025-05-06>.

⁵³ Tuhin A Sinha, The Indus Waters Treaty: A Course-Correction, Finally, *ND TV*, August 21, 2025, <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/the-indus-waters-treaty-congresss-betrayal-bjps-course-correction-9128913>

Part 3

Assessing the Legal Validity of the ‘Abeyance’ Claim

Indus Waters Treaty, in essence, is a legal instrument reached to settle a decade-long water dispute between India and Pakistan—upper- and lower-riparian neighbours, respectively. It is one of the successful examples of the peaceful settlement of disputes in modern world history. The reciprocal goodwill, realisation of the humanitarian aspect of the IWT, and a mutual commitment to fulfil its provisions were the factors that made it durable and effective despite persistent hostility, deepening mistrust, and even occasional military stand-offs.

The Modi government’s decision to hold it ‘in abeyance’ following the Pahalgam attack in April 2025, has therefore, raised a critical question around the legal validity of this decision — does the Treaty permit a party to unilaterally suspend or hold it in abeyance? Equally important is the question about a legal pathway to modify or exit the Treaty and why India and Pakistan have not been able to reach a consensus over the modification of the IWT.

The following discussion is based on the argument that, while the two countries can, in good faith, engage with each other seeking required modifications in the Treaty, neither IWT nor customary international legal doctrines provide a legal foundation for India’s unilateral decision to put the Treaty in abeyance.

The Legal Architecture of the Indus Waters Treaty

The Indus Waters Treaty, signed in 1960 under the patronage of the World Bank, established a permanent distribution of eastern and western rivers originating from the Indus Basin between India and Pakistan. India was granted unrestricted rights over three eastern rivers —the Sutlej, the Ravi, and the Beas. Alternatively, India was directed to allow the water of the three western rivers, the Indus, the Jhelum, and the Chenab for Pakistan’s unrestricted use.⁵⁴

IWT Provisions on Suspension

The Treaty was designed in a way that it could survive military and political crises. The IWT document does not provide an explicit clause on withdrawal, nor does it provide for any basis to

⁵⁴ *The Indus Waters Treaty 1960 (With Annexes)*, United Nations — Treaty Series, vol. 1962, 1960, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

suspend the Treaty or to hold it ‘in abeyance’. Article XII of IWT acknowledges the parties’ right to modify or amend the Treaty provisions from time to time, but only with a new, duly ratified treaty.⁵⁵ Article VIII calls for establishing the Permanent Indus Commission as a dispute-management mechanism.⁵⁶ Through these arrangements, the Treaty deliberately puts a bar on unilateral actions, minimizes the chances of its failure, and instead emphasizes continuity despite prospective hostility on other fronts. These facts establish that the Indian decision on holding IWT ‘in abeyance’ does not enjoy any legal protection under the Treaty’s own provisions.

Can India legally suspend the Treaty under VCLT?

Bilateral treaties such as the Indus Waters Treaty do not function in a vacuum. They have international legal protection under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT) which is the primary legal framework that governs the formation, interpretation, and termination of treaties. India is not a signatory to the VCLT, while Pakistan did not ratify the Convention despite signing it. In this sense, the Convention falls short of directly governing the IWT or any other bilateral agreement between the two countries. However, its provisions can be used as guiding principles wherever a legal ambiguity emerges in bilateral mechanisms, especially on IWT.

The Convention does not carry any provisions on holding a treaty ‘in abeyance’. Article 57, however, allows for ‘suspension’ of a treaty “in conformity with the provisions of the Treaty” or “by consent of all the parties.”⁵⁷ As for India’s action on IWT, it was taken without fulfilling any of the two provisions: Neither does it conform to any provision of the IWT, nor was it taken after consulting the second party, i.e., Pakistan.

VCLT permits unilateral suspension of a treaty only in one scenario. Article 60 of the Convention entitles a party to terminate or suspend a bilateral treaty in case of a ‘material breach’ by the other party.⁵⁸ The provision of a ‘material breach’, however, does not apply in the case of IWT because Pakistan did not commit a material breach to the Treaty. If, for example, India’s allegation of cross-border terrorism against Pakistan is accepted without calling for substantive proof, this still does

⁵⁵ *The Indus Waters Treaty*, United Nations — Treaty Series.

⁵⁶ *The Indus Waters Treaty*, United Nations — Treaty Series.

⁵⁷ *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, United Nations — Treaty Series, 1969.

⁵⁸ *VCLT*, 1969.

not automatically constitute a material breach of IWT on Pakistan's part. This is because under the IWT, Pakistan's obligations are related to water management, not counterterrorism.

Further, India's allegation of cross-border terrorism on Pakistan's part cannot be legally accepted on its face. As per Ahmer Bilal Soofi, a renowned International Law expert, while India paints 'cross-border terrorism from Pakistan' as a *fact*, Islamabad categorically denies it and is ready to enter any independent investigation process on it. Pakistan's conduct, therefore, does not amount to a material breach, while what India portrays as a *fact* is disputed by Pakistan and is merely an *allegation*.⁵⁹ Thus, even Article 60 of the VCLT does not back India's position vis-à-vis IWT abeyance post-Pahalgam.

Additionally, Article 62 of the Vienna Convention titled "Fundamental Change of Circumstances" allows a party to terminate or withdraw from a treaty in case of exceptional or unforeseen circumstances.⁶⁰ States are rarely granted permission by the international courts or bodies to invoke this provision because its frequent use can affect treaty stability. Therefore, this doctrine applies only in exceptional cases where the change is really fundamental, completely unforeseen, and radically transforms the extent of obligations originally undertaken by the parties. However, the Indian allegations against Pakistan or its rhetoric concerning IWT lack the legal grounds to fulfil the criteria of Article 62. Given the persistent mistrust and security situation between India and Pakistan since the signing of IWT in 1960, there seems little weightage in India's argument that circumstances have fundamentally altered, creating the requirement for termination of the Treaty.

IWT Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

The Indus Waters Treaty establishes a graduated institutional mechanism for addressing disagreements between India and Pakistan. Under Article IX, questions concerning the interpretation or application of the Treaty are first examined by the Permanent Indus Commission. Where the Commission fails to reach agreement, a "difference" arises, which may, where it falls within the specified technical matters of Annexure F, be referred to a Neutral Expert. Where a difference falls outside the Neutral Expert's competence, or is determined to constitute a "dispute,"

⁵⁹ Ahmer Bilal Soofi, Abeyance Without Proof, *Dawn*, July 11, 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/2014553/abeyance-without-proof>

⁶⁰ *VCLT*, 1969.

Article IX provides for further negotiations and, where the prescribed conditions are met, establishment of a Court of Arbitration under Annexure G.⁶¹

The importance of these mechanisms has become particularly evident following India's April 2025 decision to place the IWT in "abeyance." Pakistan has continued to invoke the Treaty's institutional dispute-settlement framework, including the Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration mechanisms, in relation to its disagreement with India, whereas India has rejected the jurisdiction of the Court of Arbitration and disputed the parallel proceedings.⁶² This disagreement over the applicability and operation of the Treaty's dispute-settlement provisions has created a significant institutional impasse. From Pakistan's perspective, recourse to the mechanisms expressly contemplated by Article IX represents an effort to address the dispute through the Treaty's own procedures rather than unilateral action. India's rejection of these proceedings, conversely, has raised questions regarding the continued operation of the Treaty's institutional framework. The resulting impasse has implications not only for the immediate India-Pakistan water dispute but also for the principle of good-faith implementation upon which the Treaty's cooperative architecture rests.

State Practices and International Water Law

Holding the Indus Waters Treaty 'in abeyance' also amounts to a stark violation of the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*. This principle is the cornerstone of treaty law. Article 26 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties stipulates that "every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it and must be performed by them in good faith."⁶³ The IWT and its implementation is based on good faith, and its suspension amounts to the breach of this critical international norm. As per international water laws, rivers split between states require predictability, and upstream nations are duty-bound in good faith not to make sudden and unannounced changes to the flow of water.

Provisions in the IWT, such as clear division of rivers, mandatory data exchange, strict construction rules, and advance notification, also strengthen the predictability rule stemming from

⁶¹ *The Indus Waters Treaty*, United Nations — Treaty Series.

⁶² Abid Hussain, "Pakistan wins Indus Waters battle at the Hague, but India threat remains," *Al Jazeera*, September 2, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/9/1/pakistan-wins-indus-waters-battle-at-the-hague-but-india-threat-remains>.

⁶³ *VCLT*, 1969.

pacta sunt servanda. India's 'abeyance' rhetoric contradicts broader principles governing interstate waters. Water-sharing arrangements are therefore generally insulated from political disputes in order to ensure their continuity. Mekong Cooperation, Nile River Basin Commission, and Danube Regime are glaring examples from different parts of the world on how international norms are emerging to ensure stability and durability of international water-management regimes. But sadly, IWT, one of the most enduring water-sharing mechanisms for decades has become a victim of political hostilities in the garb of legal argument.

Implications for the Future of the Treaty

The IWT suspension has far-reaching, multidimensional implications for the future durability, credibility, and effectiveness of the Treaty regime. While the IWT may continue to remain legally operative, prolonged non-implementation risks undermining its institutional architecture, including the functioning of the Permanent Indus Commission, established mechanisms for data exchange, and procedures for dispute resolution. The growing divergence between the parties regarding the interpretation and implementation of treaty obligations may further weaken confidence in the Treaty's governance framework. Moreover, the suspension has introduced a greater degree of uncertainty into the management of transboundary water resources, raising concerns regarding the long-term stability and predictability that the Treaty has historically provided. The weakening of the IWT regime may also have broader implications for bilateral relations by eroding confidence in the durability of other India-Pakistan agreements and treaties, thereby creating a precedent that political and security disputes can be invoked to suspend or disregard treaty commitments.

In the longer term, the current impasse may produce one of three outcomes: restoration of the existing framework, renegotiation of certain treaty provisions, or the emergence of a *de facto* dysfunctional regime despite the Treaty's continued legal existence. The latter scenario would create a distinction between the Treaty's formal validity under international law and its practical effectiveness as a mechanism for bilateral water governance. Beyond the India-Pakistan context, the suspension could also carry wider normative implications for the international law governing shared watercourses. If sustained, it may contribute to a precedent whereby upper riparian states seek to unilaterally alter or suspend long-standing water-sharing arrangements without adequately

addressing the rights, concerns, and dependency of lower riparian states. Such a development could weaken confidence in cooperative river-basin governance and challenge established principles of predictability, stability, and mutual accommodation that underpin international watercourse agreements. Consequently, the future of the IWT is likely to depend not only on legal interpretations of treaty obligations but also on the willingness of both parties to sustain cooperative mechanisms for the management of shared water resources.

Part 4

India's Upstream Water Strategy

Under Article II of IWT, India was allocated the unrestricted use of the Eastern Rivers, the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej, while Article III provides for the unrestricted use of the Western Rivers, including the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab for Pakistan, subject to specified uses permitted to India. These include domestic, non-consumptive, limited agricultural use, and hydroelectric power generation. Significantly, Article III(4) has curtailed India's rights to store water or build storage dams on the Western Rivers.⁶⁴ However, New Delhi has accelerated investments of approximately INR 41,403.92 crore in projects that could provide approximately 7.287 million acre-feet (MAF) of potential diversion and storage capacity on the Western Rivers, against the IWT framework.

An important feature of the IWT framework is the aggregate cap of 3.60 MAF for the usage of India on the Western Rivers. Under Annexure E, this comprises 0.40 MAF for the Indus, 1.50 MAF for the Jhelum, and 1.70 MAF for the Chenab. The total includes 2.85 MAF of conservation storage—1.25 MAF of general storage and 1.60 MAF of power storage—and 0.75 MAF of flood storage.⁶⁵ The IWT did not bar India from developing hydropower on the Western Rivers, but it set limits and technical conditions under which such projects can be developed and operated.

Projects examined in this report represent a combined planned and accelerated capacity of more than 7,620.5 MW, including Pakal Dul (1,000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), Kiru (624 MW), Kwar (540 MW), Sawalkote (1,856 MW), Kirthai-I and II (1,320 MW), Dulhasti-II (260 MW), and Bursar Storage (800 MW). The cumulative expansion of hydropower, storage, diversion, and flow-regulation infrastructure increases the concern over the ability of India to influence the timing, regulation, and utilisation of the Western River waters before they reach Pakistan, coupled with the inability to receive hydrological data from one another and the non-functioning of the Permanent Indus Commission. The issue, therefore, is not simply the construction of infrastructure, but the potential transformation of a treaty-regulated river system into an

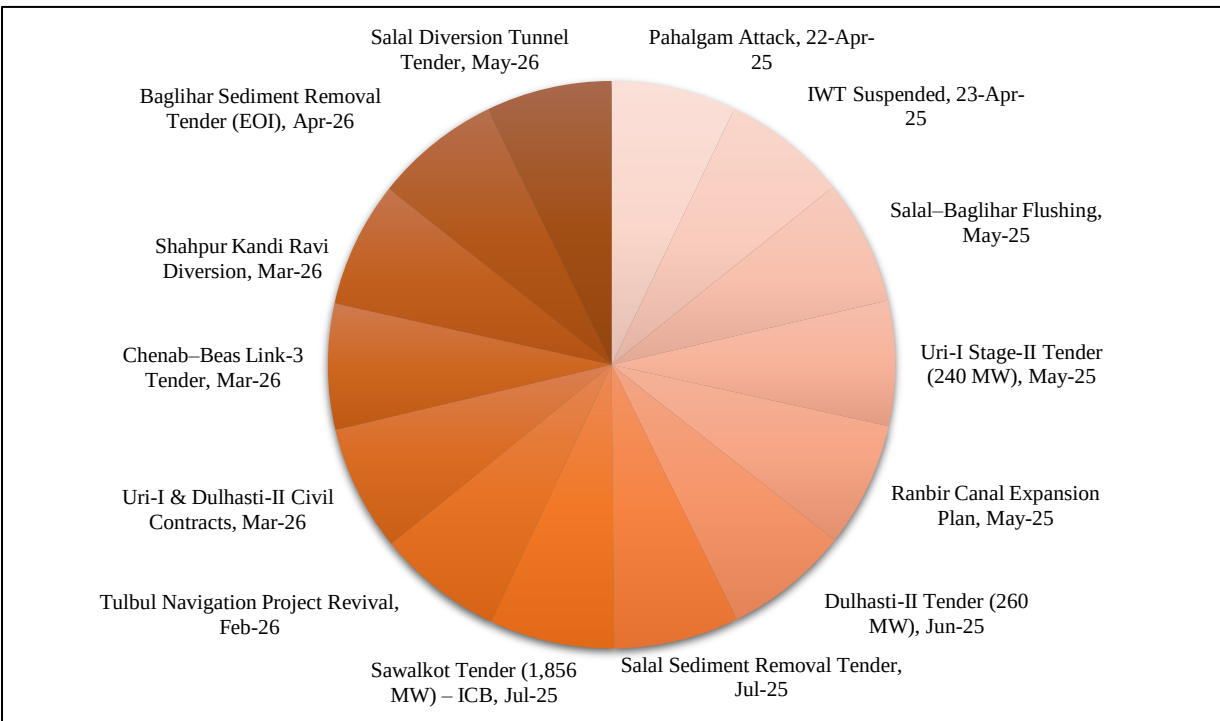
⁶⁴ "India, Pakistan, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development." World Bank, January 16, 1962. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

⁶⁵ "India, Pakistan, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development." World Bank, January 16, 1962. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

increasingly interconnected upstream water-management network with significant implications for Pakistan’s water, agricultural, and energy security.

The following pie chart shows the timeline of major measures taken by India after the suspension of the IWT in April 2025. It starts with silt flushing at Salal Hydroelectric Project (HEP) and Baglihar HEP in May 2025, followed by the swift tendering of hydropower projects, such as Uri-II, Dulhasti-II, and the 1,856 MW Sawalkot project, during mid-2025. By 2026, India also revived of the decades-old Tulbul Navigation Project, awarding civil construction contracts. Together, these developments reflect the shift from reservoir management and hydrological control to long-term infrastructure development, which may result in increased control of India over the Indus River system from the upstream side.

Pie Chart 1. Key Events Timeline: April 2025 – May 2026

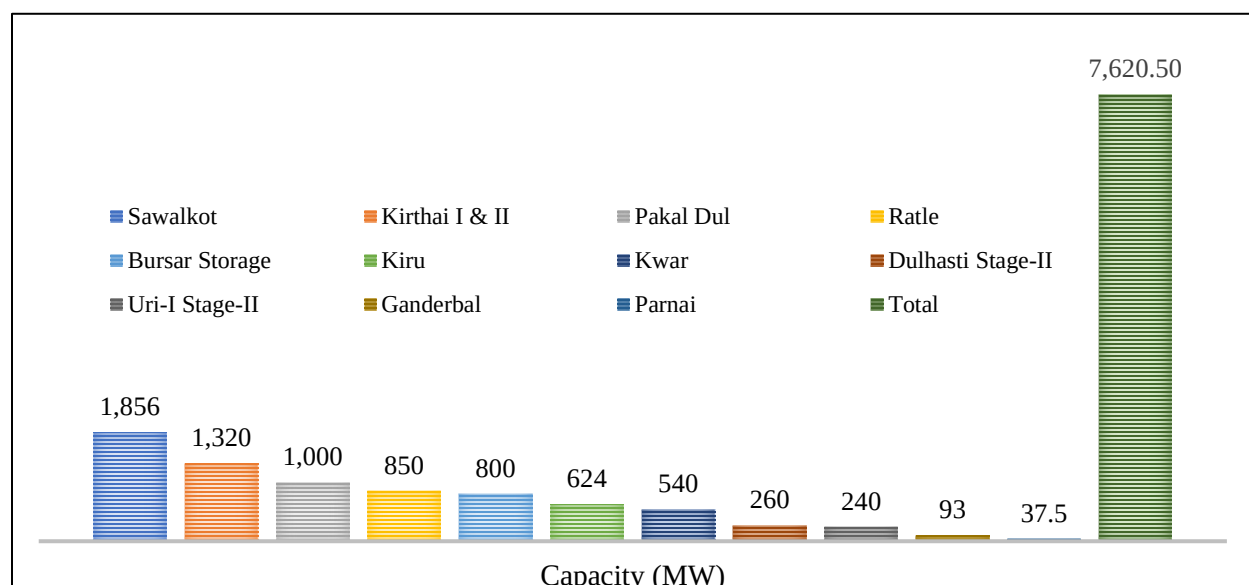


Source: National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited (NHPC), Eprocure India, Reuters, The Indian Express (TIE), NDTV, TRT World, JKTenders

The identified portfolio of new and accelerated hydropower projects has a combined planned capacity of 7,620.5 MW, following the decision of India to put IWT in abeyance. The largest Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) New Delhi is actively engaged in are Sawalkot (1,856 MW), Kirthai I & II (1,320 MW), Pakal Dul (1,000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), and Bursar Storage (800 MW),

followed by Kiru (624 MW), Kwar (540 MW), Dulhasti Stage-II (260 MW), Uri-I Stage-II (240 MW), Ganderbal (93 MW), and Parnai (37.5 MW).⁶⁶ In total, eight projects are located on the Chenab Basin (Sawalkot, Kirthai (I & II), Pakal Dul, Ratle, Kiru, Kwar, Dulhasti (Stage-II), Bursar Storage), and three projects are on the Jhelum Basin (Uri-I (Stage-II), Ganderbal, Parnai). Collectively, these projects demonstrate India's strategy to expand hydropower generation and strengthen upstream water infrastructure on the Western Rivers. The following figure shows the planned development of hydro resources in the Chenab and Jhelum Basins in India.

Graph 1. Active & Accelerated Projects / Jhelum & Chenab



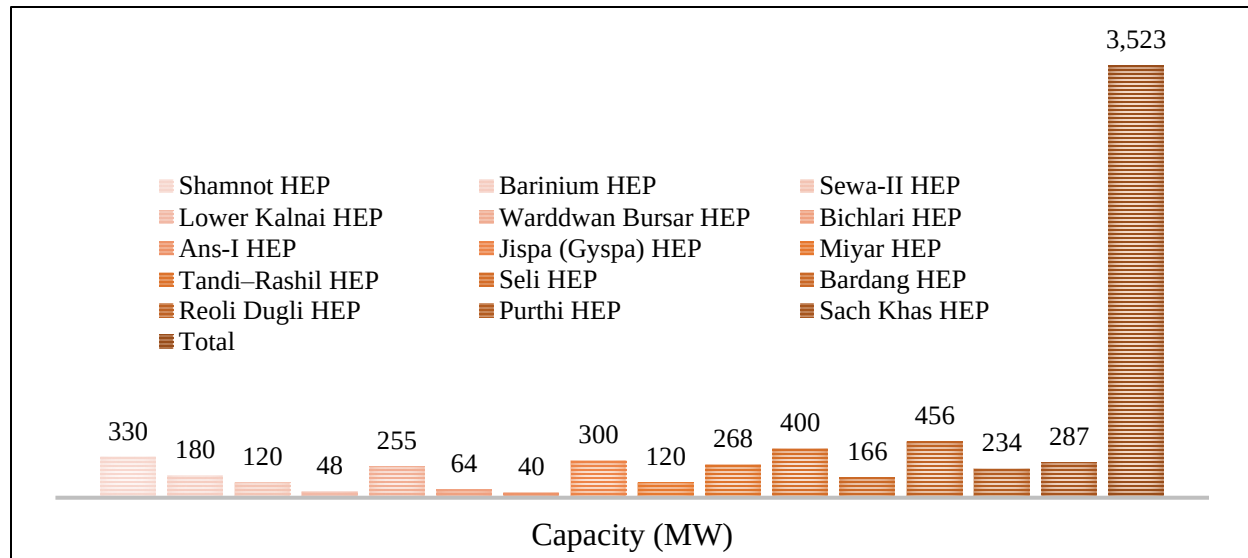
Source: NHPC, Press Information Bureau (PIB), Chenab Valley Power Projects (CVPPPL)

In addition, the following table shows a list of proposed hydropower projects in the Chenab Basin for 2017-2023 that are currently being considered for acceleration across Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). These projects have a combined proposed generation capacity of approximately 3,523 MW, ranging from smaller Lower Kalnai HEP (48 MW) and Bichlari HEP (64 MW) to larger projects including Reoli Dugli HEP (456 MW), Seli HEP (400 MW), and Shamnot HEP (330 MW).⁶⁷ The projects are spread throughout the headwater and the tributary systems of Chenab, such as the Chandra, Bhaga, Miyar, and Marusudar Rivers, and the main Chenab River, demonstrating the scope of planned hydropower development in the Chenab Basin.

⁶⁶ "NHPC India, Construction Projects." National Hydroelectric Power Corporation. <https://www.nhpcindia.com/welcome/project/index.php>.

⁶⁷ "Status of Large Hydro Power Development in Jammu and Kashmir," Central Electricity Authority India, https://cea.nic.in/wp-content/uploads/hpi/2023/05/All_India_State_profile_5.pdf.

Graph 2. Proposed Hydroelectric Projects on Chenab Basin



Source: Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN), Central Electricity Authority India (CEA)

The identified portfolio includes nine major projects with an estimated investment of INR 41,403.92 crore. The chart below illustrates the estimated investment in major hydropower and water infrastructure projects on the Chenab and Jhelum Rivers following India's decision to place the IWT in abeyance. The biggest investment is in Pakal Dul (INR12,728 crore), followed by Kiru (INR5,409 crore), Ratle (INR5,282 crore), Sawalkot (INR5,129 crore), and Kwar (INR4,526 crore).⁶⁸ Additional investments include Dulhasti Stage-II (INR2,994 crore),⁶⁹ Uri-I Stage-II (INR2,709 crore),⁷⁰ Salal HEP restoration and diversion (INR274.75 crore), and the Chenab–Beas Link Tunnel Project (Link-3) (INR2,352.17 crore).⁷¹ These investments collectively suggest a long-term investment commitment to an increased scale of hydropower generation and water infrastructure development on the Western Rivers, with a number of projects already underway and others recently approved and now in implementation stage since the suspension of the IWT.

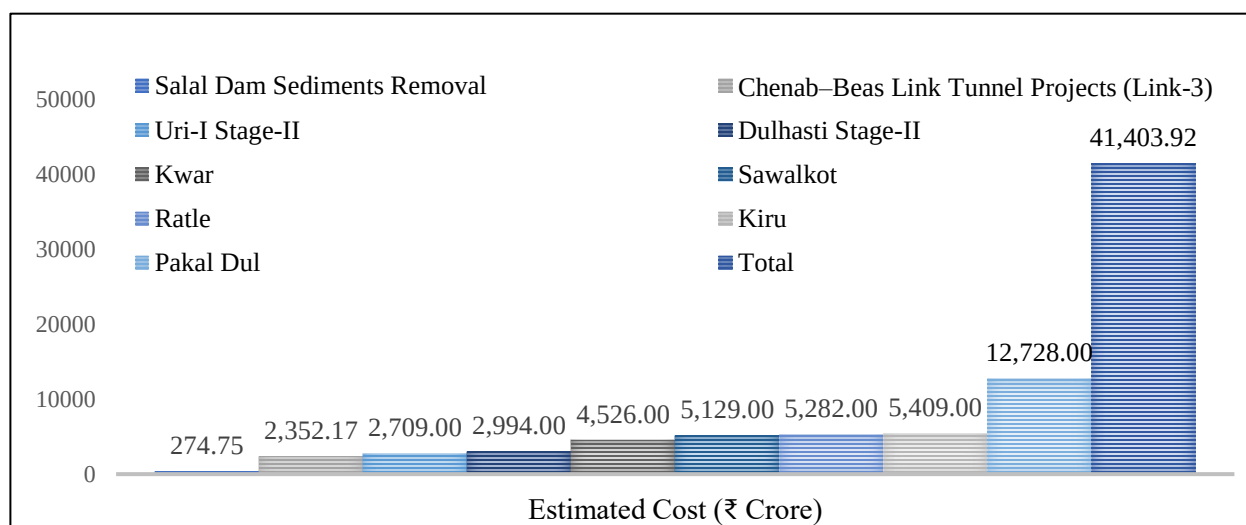
⁶⁸ “NHPC Limited Q4 FY’26 Earnings Conference Call,” NHPC, May 18, 2026, https://www.nhpcindia.com/asests/pzi_public/gallery/17797050360hi.pdf.

⁶⁹ “Lot-I Package: Civil Works of the 260 MW Dulhasti Stage-II H.E Project,” NHPC India, https://www.nhpcindia.com/welcome/tender_detail/index.php.

⁷⁰ “Uri-I Stage-II (240 MW) Package-I Civil Works,” NHPC India, https://www.nhpcindia.com/welcome/tender_detail/index.php.

⁷¹ “Chenab–Beas Link Tunnel Projects (Link-3),” NHPC India, https://www.nhpcindia.com/welcome/tender_detail/index.php.

Graph 3. Estimated Investment in Major Hydropower and Water Infrastructure Projects on the Western Rivers

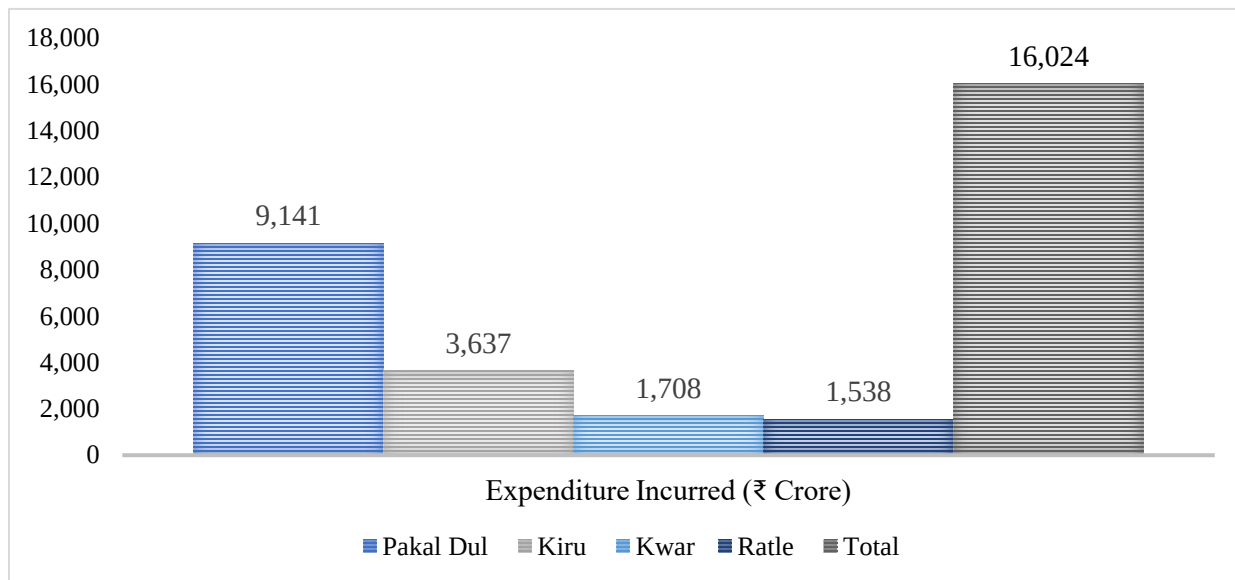


Source: NHPC, Press Information Bureau (PIB), Chenab Valley Power Projects Private Limited (CVPPPL)

The actual expenditure of four major hydropower projects under construction on the Chenab Basin after India suspended the IWT is shown in the graph below. The cumulative expenditure stands at INR16,024 crore as of May 2026, marking significant progress in the implementation of the projects. The largest expenditure is on Pakal Dul at INR9,141 crore, followed by Kiru (INR3,637 crore), Kwar (INR1,708 crore), and Ratle (INR1,538 crore).⁷² The accelerated expenditure suggests that these projects are under progress and continue to be a key priority for India's current hydropower infrastructure development on the Chenab Basin.

⁷² "NHPC Limited Q4 FY'26 Earnings Conference Call," NHPC, May 18, 2026, https://www.nhpcindia.com/asests/pzi_public/gallery/17797050360hi.pdf.

Graph 4. Expenditure Incurred on Major Hydropower Projects in the Chenab Basin

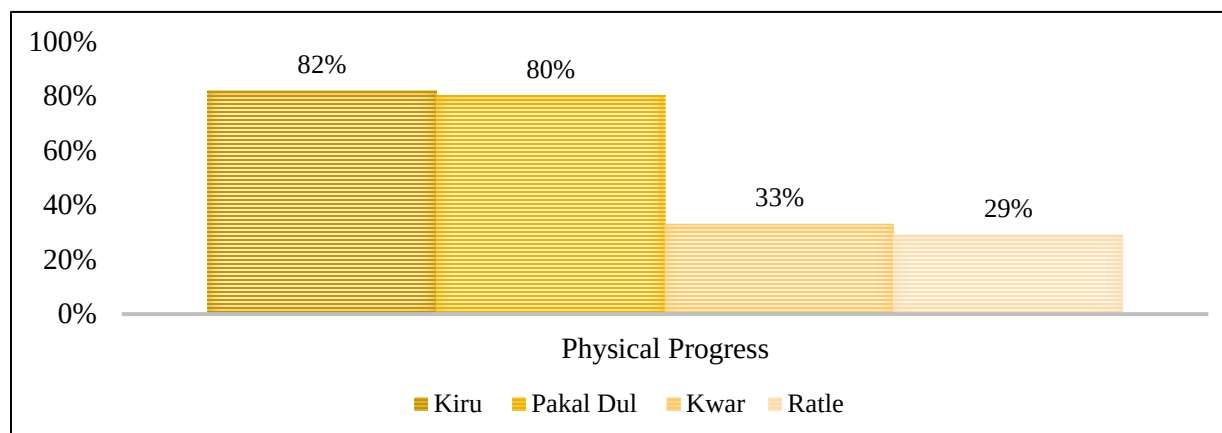


Source: NHPC

New Delhi has fast-tracked major hydropower works underway on the Chenab River after India suspended IWT. As of May 2026, Kiru HEP has the highest construction progress of 82 per cent, followed by Pakal Dul HEP at 80 per cent, both of which are nearing completion and are scheduled to be commissioned in FY2027. Meanwhile, Kwar HEP has made 33 percent physical progress, and Ratle HEP is at 29 percent, with both projects expected to be commissioned in 2028.⁷³ Overall, the progress of these projects demonstrates India's continued acceleration of hydropower development on the Chenab River as part of its broader expansion of water and energy infrastructure on the Western Rivers. The following chart shows the physical development of accelerated major hydropower projects.

⁷³ "NHPC Limited Q4 FY'26 Earnings Conference Call," NHPC, May 18, 2026, https://www.nhpcindia.com/assests/pzi_public/gallery/17797050360hi.pdf.

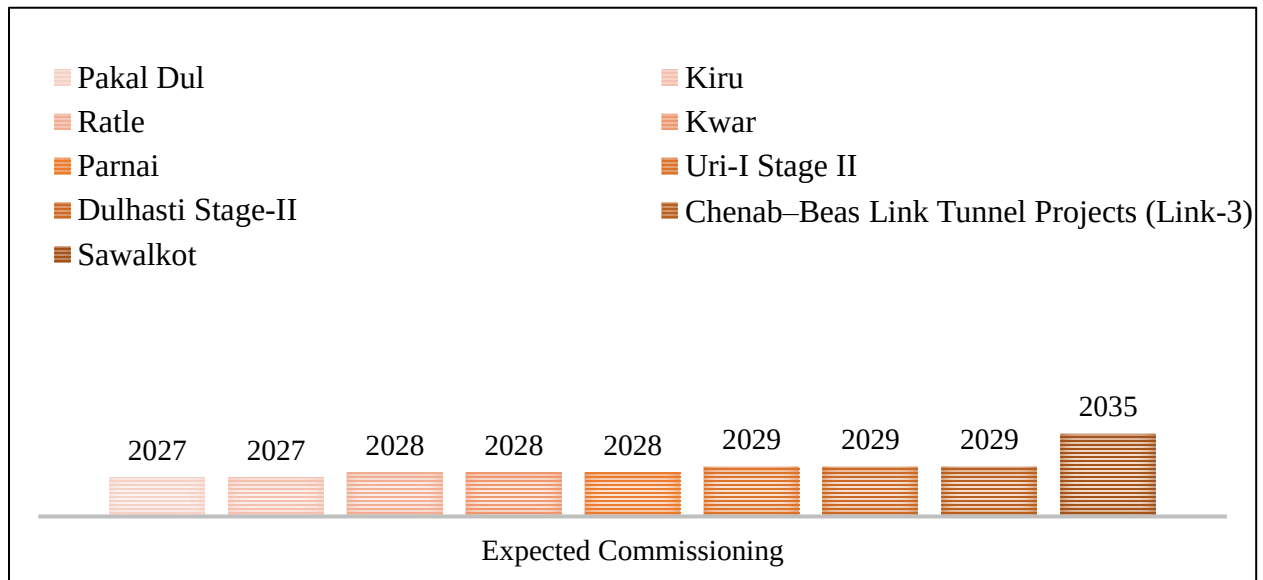
Graph 5. Physical Progress of Major Hydropower Projects on the Chenab River



Source: NHPC

The commissioning timeline shows a gradual increase in India's Western Rivers' infrastructure over the next decade. The first projects that are likely to be operational in 2027 are Pakal Dul and Kiru, followed by Ratle, Kwar, and Parnai projects in 2028. Further, India is set to commission Uri-I Stage-II, Dulhasti Stage-II, and the Chenab–Beas Link Tunnel Project (Link-3) in 2029, while the Sawalkot Hydroelectric Project, the largest project, with 1,856 MW capacity, will be completed by 2035. The phased commissioning schedule reflects India's long-term plans to increase hydropower production and build water infrastructure along the Western Rivers, with substantial new capacity scheduled to be commissioned from 2027 to 2035. The following chart shows the anticipated timeline of the major hydropower and related water infrastructure projects on the Chenab and Jhelum Rivers after suspension of the IWT.

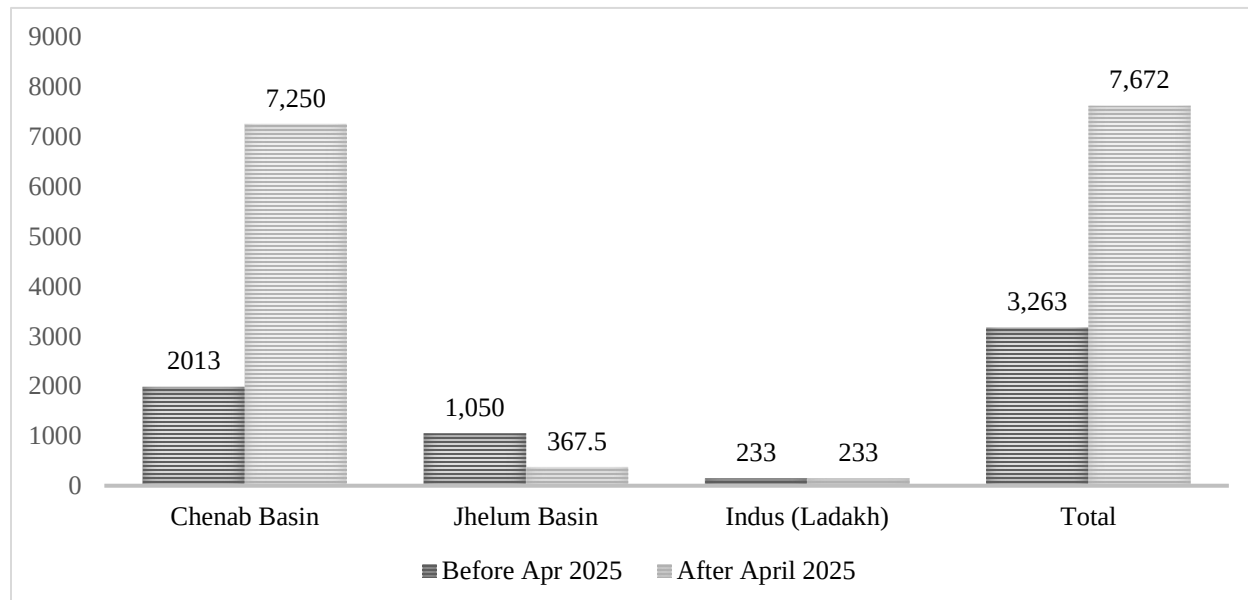
Graph 6. Expected Commissioning Timeline of Major Hydropower and Water Infrastructure Projects on the Western Rivers



Source: NHPC India, CEA

New Delhi's total planned and accelerated hydropower capacity surged by 135.12 percent, climbing from 3,263 MW to 7,672 MW. This aggressive growth was driven mainly by the addition of a massive 260.16 per cent of planned project capacities in the Chenab Basin, which went up from 2,013 MW to 7,250 MW, whereas the Jhelum Basin increased by 367.5 MW and the Indus Basin remained the same. The graph below illustrates a substantial change in India's hydropower policy after the cancellation of the IWT.

Graph 7. Hydropower Capacity (MW): Before vs After IWT Suspension of Major HEPs



Source: NHPC India

Flushing and Sediment Removal in Salal and Baglihar Dams

In May 2025, India began flushing sediment from the Salal (690 MW) and Baglihar (900 MW) hydropower projects on the Chenab. The first flushing exercise at the two reservoirs, which were not flushed since commissioning Salal in 1987 and Baglihar in 2008-09, removed over 7.5 million cubic metres (MCM) of sediment. Further, on 16 May 2025, the Central Water Commission (CWC) reportedly recommended that flushing at Salal and Baglihar be conducted on a monthly basis.⁷⁴

The timing of the May 2025 operation is significant under the IWT. If the Commissioners are unable to reach an agreement on a filling schedule, the annual filling on the Chenab can occur only between 21 June and 31 August with a minimum flow of 55,000 cusecs in the Chenab Main above Marala, as stated in Annexure E, Paragraph 18 of IWT.⁷⁵ Thus, May 2025 was not in the Treaty's default filling period, and the flows reported were also significantly below the 55,000-cusecs threshold. During 4–5 May 2025, the inflows into Chenab at Marala reportedly dropped from

⁷⁴ Ritika Chopra, "Indus Pact on Hold, Govt Plans Monthly Flushing of Salal and Baglihar Dams," The Indian Express, May 16, 2025, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indus-pact-on-hold-govt-plans-monthly-flushing-of-salal-and-baglihar-dams-10009254>.

⁷⁵ "India, Pakistan, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development." World Bank, January 16, 1962. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

35,000 to 3,100 cusecs, followed by a sharp decline at the end of the month, during which inflows fell from 98,200 cusecs on 29 May 2025 to 44,800 and 7,200 cusecs on the 31st.⁷⁶ These fluctuations are significant because the reported downstream flows not only occurred outside the Treaty's prescribed conservation-storage filling window, but in both instances dropped substantially below the 55,000-cusecs benchmark referenced in Paragraph 18. A similar concern emerged on the Neelum River in May 2025, as Pakistani authorities reported that water pressure had fallen by approximately 40 percent below normal at eight locations, following a reduction in downstream releases from India's Kishanganga Dam.⁷⁷

India subsequently moved from temporary flushing to the development of permanent sediment-management infrastructure at Salal. On 6 April 2026, NHPC issued a tender of INR6.27 crore for the removal of Sediments.⁷⁸ This was followed by a Hydrographic survey of the Salal Dam reservoir at Dhyangarh, which was issued on 7th May 2026 with a tender value of INR54.07 lakh.⁷⁹ The survey is important because a bathymetric map can be used to determine the reservoir's current bathymetry, sediment deposition, and available storage, which are all required for future sediment removal operations.

The most substantial intervention came on 20 May 2026, when NHPC issued a tender for the construction of a new diversion-cum-sediment bypass tunnel at Salal Dam, with an estimated cost of INR267.94 crore.⁸⁰ The project represents a transition from episodic sediment removal to a more permanent engineering solution for sediment management and dam operation. The INR6.27 crore dredging tender, INR54.07 lakh hydrographic survey, and INR267.94 crore sediment-bypass tunnel are identified as capital investments of INR274.72 crore in Salal's sediment-management and storage-restoration. The graph below shows the tender date and value for Salal HEP.

⁷⁶ "Chenab Inflows from India Reduce by 91,000 Cusecs in Last Two Days: Wapda." Dawn. May 31, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1914515>.

⁷⁷ "India Stops Water from Kishanganga Dam, Violating Indus Waters Treaty." Dunya News. 22 May 25. <https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/885363-india-stops-water-from-kishanganga-dam,-violating-indus-waters-treaty>.

⁷⁸ "eProcurement System Government of India." Eprocure.

<https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app?component=%24DirectLink&page=FrontEndLatestActiveTenders&service=direct&sp=SW%2Fild%2FdoBkwDJ4S15BMmjg%3D%3D>.

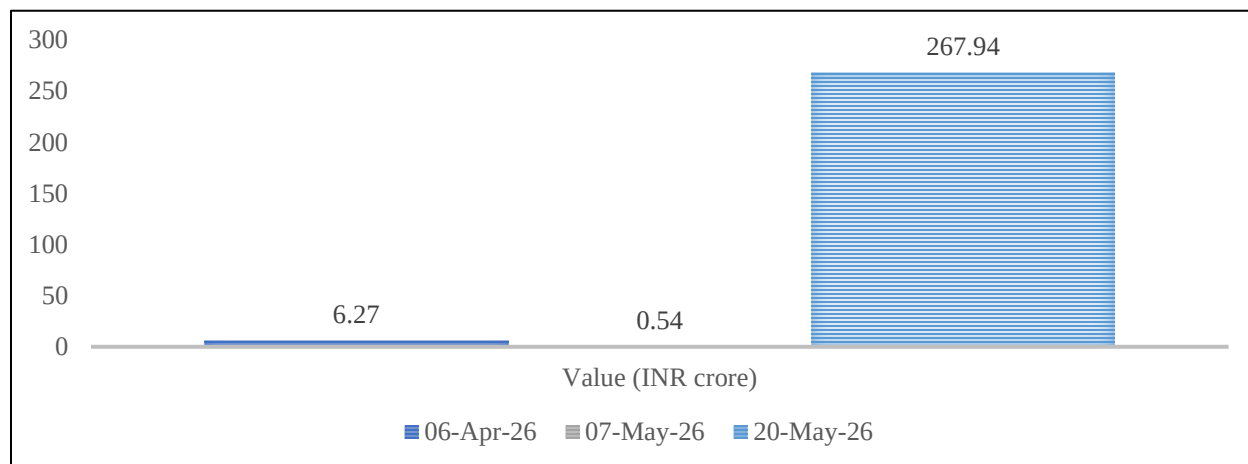
⁷⁹ "Hydrographic survey of Salal Dam reservoir at Dhyangarh for the year 2026."

https://www.nhpcindia.com/welcome/tender_detail/index.php.

⁸⁰ "Construction of a New Diversion-cumSediment Bypass Tunnel for Restoration of Concrete Dam Construction Sluices and Sediment Management of Salal Reservoir." NHCP.

https://www.nhpcindia.com/asests/pzi_public/tender_tendermaster/6a0ea00b20b62.pdf.

Graph 8. NHPC Salal Dam Sediment Management Tenders, April–May 2026

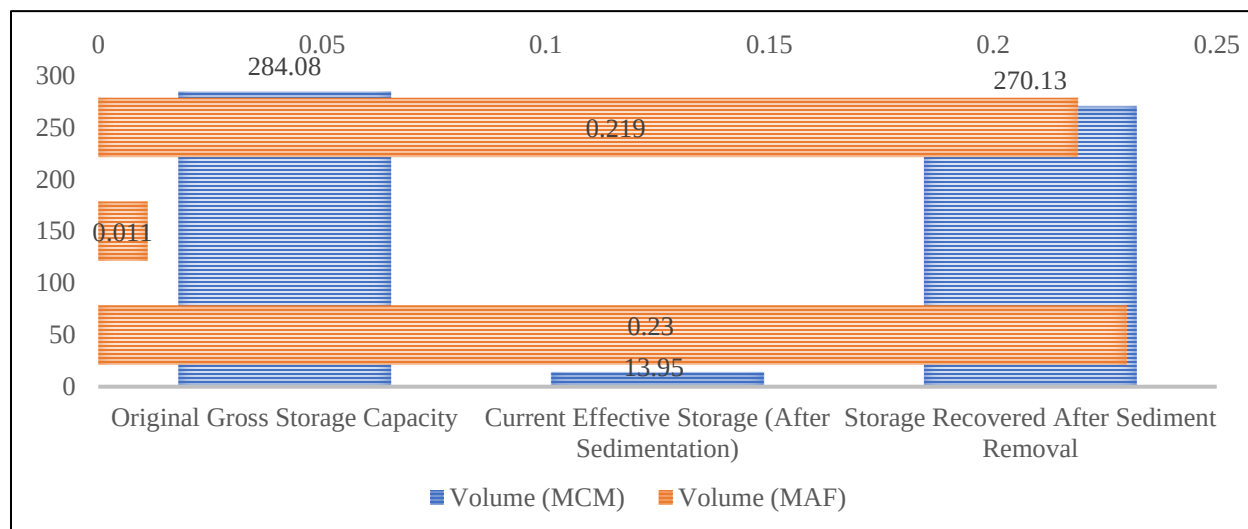


Source: NHPC

The Salal HEP has not been flushed and sediment removal for nearly four decades, which has reduced the storage capacity from 284.08 MCM (0.2303 MAF) to 13.95 MCM (0.0113 MAF) due to objections of Pakistan under IWT. After suspension of IWT, India aims to restore approximately 270.13 MCM (0.2190 MAF) of lost storage, significantly improving the reservoir’s operational efficiency.⁸¹ Following India’s suspension of the IWT, this restored storage capacity will enhance India’s ability to temporarily regulate Chenab River flows during reservoir filling and operational management. The graph below shows the significant rise in available storage capacity following sediment removal after IWT suspension.

⁸¹ “Selection of Firms for Issuance of No Objection Certificate (NOC) for Removal of Deposited Sediments from the Reservoir of Salal Power Station.” National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, May 1, 2026. https://www.nhpcindia.com/asests/pzi_public/tender_tendermaster/696622344cebd.pdf.

Graph 9. Salal Reservoir Storage Capacity Before and After Sediment Removal



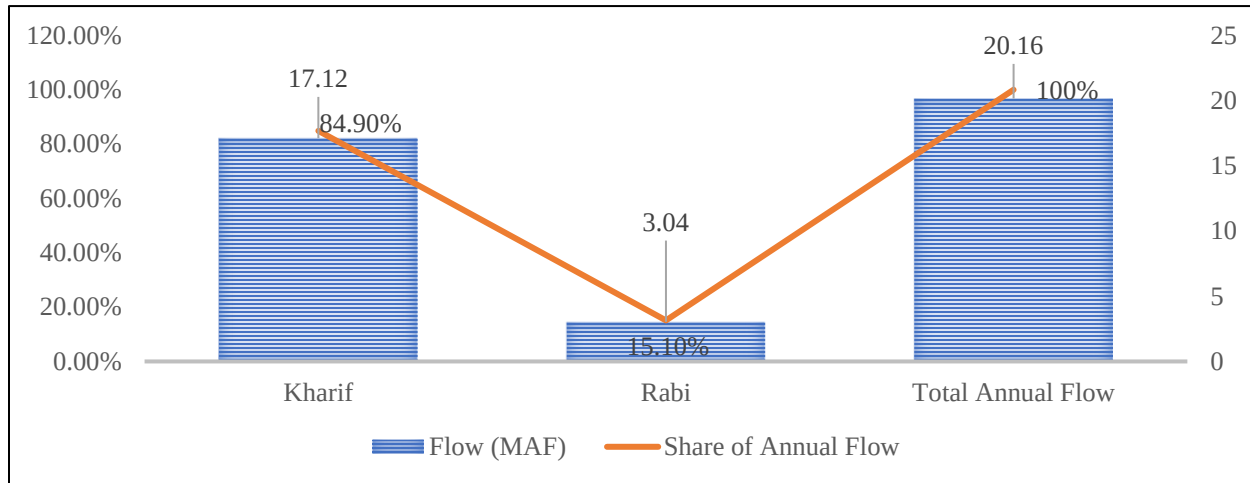
Source: NHPC

Control of Seasonal Chenab River Flows Following the Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty

In Pakistan, the flow of the Chenab River is highly seasonal, with 17.12 MAF (84.9 per cent) of the flow being in the Kharif season and 3.04 MAF (15.1 per cent) in the Rabi season.⁸² After the restoration of the Salal dam, India will use it to store water, during the winter months when irrigation demand in Pakistan remains high. The graph shows how seasonal variation exists in the flows of the Chenab River, highlighting the strategic sensitivity of rabi flow in comparison with kharif flow.

⁸² "IRSA Annual Report 2024-2025." (IRSA.) http://pakirsa.gov.pk/Doc/IRSA_Annual_Report_2024_25.pdf.

Graph 10. Chenab River Flow at Marala (Water Year 2024–25)



Source: Indus River System Authority (IRSA)

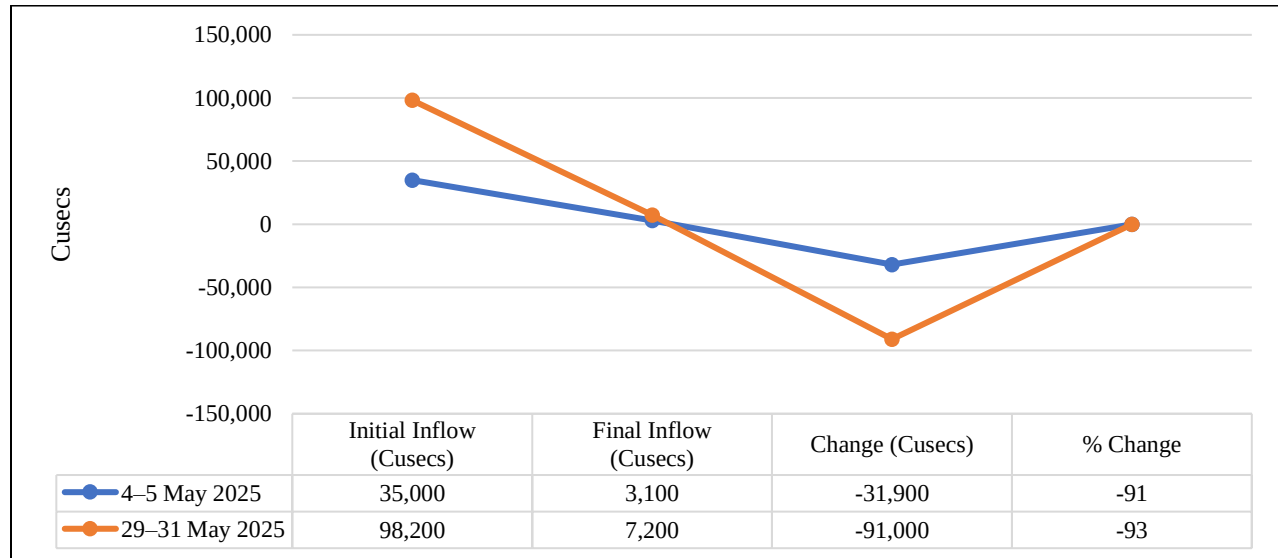
In May 2025, India’s post-suspension reservoir operations at Salal and Baglihar HEPs caused significant Chenab flow fluctuation in Pakistan, with a drop from 35,000 to 3,100 cusecs between 4-5 May and from 98,200 to 7,200 cusecs between 29-31 May, followed by an increase after the releases.⁸³ These actions came after India placed the IWT in abeyance and began reservoir flushing at the two Chenab projects, removing over 7.5 MCM of sediment;⁸⁴ under the Treaty’s default rule, annual Chenab conservation-storage filling is normally tied to 21 June–31 August if the Commissioners do not agree on a specific date.⁸⁵ These post-IWT suspension discharge fluctuations, and their implications for downstream river management, are illustrated in the graph below.

⁸³ Sherani Tahir. “Chenab Inflows from India Reduce by 91,000 Cusecs in Last Two Days: Wapda.” Dawn, May 31, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1914515>.

⁸⁴ Ritika Chopra, “Indus Pact on Hold, Govt Plans Monthly Flushing of Salal and Baglihar Dams,” The Indian Express, May 16, 2025, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indus-pact-on-hold-govt-plans-monthly-flushing-of-salal-and-baglihar-dams-10009254>.

⁸⁵ “India, Pakistan, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.” World Bank, January 16, 1962. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

Graph 11. Chenab River: Sudden Inflow Disruptions



Source: Dawn, Pakistan Today

Ranbir Canal Water Diversion on Chenab River

The IWT acknowledges that the Ranbir Canal is an existing canal on the Chenab River and allows India to withdraw up to 1,000 cusecs from it from 15th April to 14th October and 350 cusecs during 15th October to 14th April. The Treaty also allows for an additional 250 cusecs of water to be released from the Ranbir Canal for hydroelectric power generation, subject to being returned to the Chenab, and all water withdrawn for silt must be returned to the Chenab as well.⁸⁶ However, in March 2026, the canal was recharged almost a month before the seasonal withdrawals under the IWT, which is from 15 April, a failure to adhere to the operational rules set out in the Treaty.⁸⁷

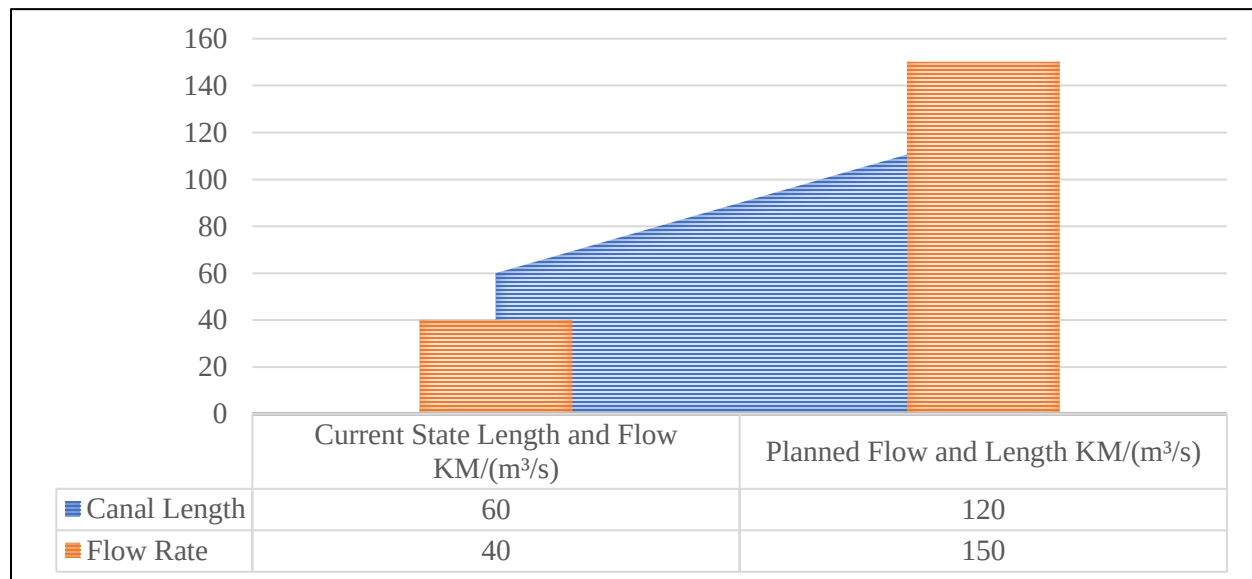
New Delhi started the Ranbir Canal Expansion Project (RCEP) to boost the carrying capacity of the canal from about 40 m³/s to 150 m³/s (1,400 to 5,300 cusecs), expand its length from 60 km to 120 km, and divert an estimated 3.835 MAF (4.3 BCM) of water from the canal every year for IIOJK.⁸⁸ The graph below illustrates India's extension plan for diversion of water from the Ranbir Canal beyond the diversion limit provided for in the Treaty.

⁸⁶ "India, Pakistan, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development." World Bank, January 16, 1962. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

⁸⁷ "Rana Inaugurates Water Release into Ranbir Canal." KNS. March 16, 2026. <https://www.knskashmir.com/rana-inaugurates-water-release-into-ranbir-canal-202780>.

⁸⁸ Singh, Sarita Chaganti, Krishna N. Das, Aftab Ahmed, Charlotte Greenfield, Ariba Shahid, Krishna N. Das, and Ariba Shahid. "India Weighs Plan to Slash Pakistan Water Supply with New Indus River Project." Reuters, May 16,

Graph 12. Ranbir Canal: Current vs Planned Expansion



Source: Reuters

Chenab–Beas–Diversion Plan Post IWT Suspension

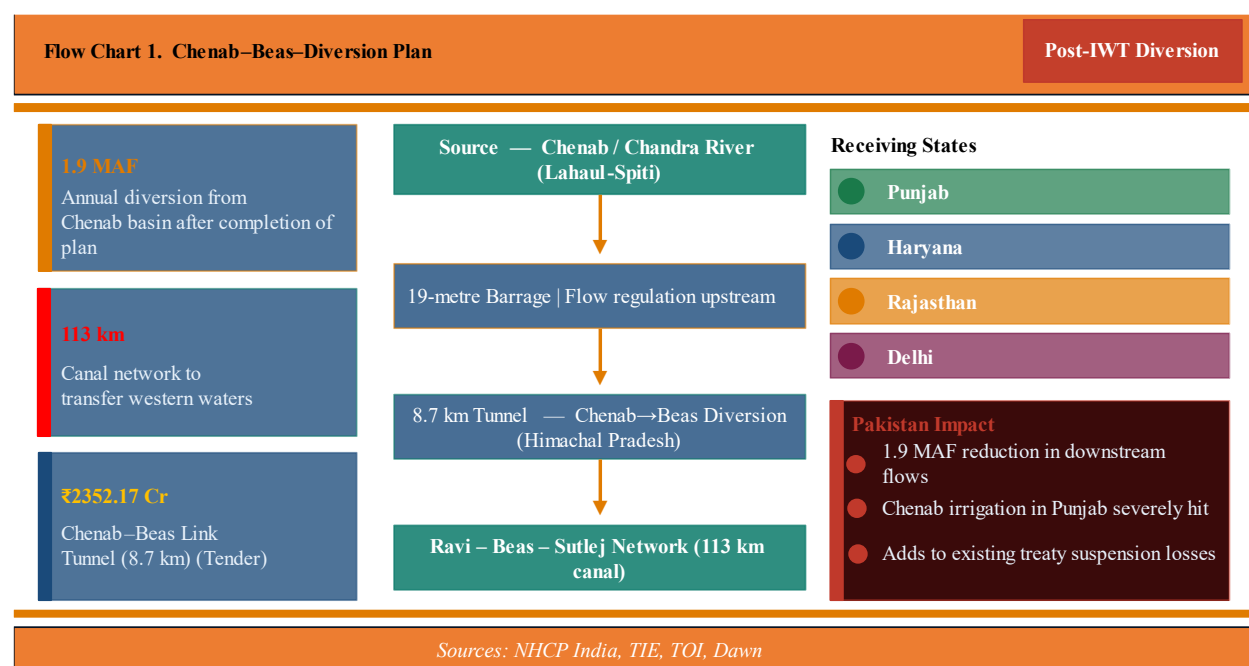
In the post-2025 period, India has increasingly focused on expanding utilisation of the Western Rivers through water-management, diversion, and infrastructure development initiatives. One of such proposals is the Chenab–Beas Link, which proposes to divert the water from the Chandra River (Chenab Basin) to the Beas Basin via an 8.7 km tunnel and link it to the Ravi–Beas–Sutlej canal network.⁸⁹ The proposed system has a 113-km canal network to enable water transfer to Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi. The estimated diversion capacity of the plan is about 1.9 MAF per year from the Chenab Basin.⁹⁰ However, under the IWT, the Chenab is one of the Western Rivers allocated primarily to Pakistan, and Article III requires India to “let flow all the waters of the Western Rivers. None of the provisions authorises the permanent inter-basin diversion of waters from the Chenab to the Beas or any other Eastern River. Consequently, the proposed Chenab–Beas Link would be a significant change in the operational framework provided by the

2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-weighs-plan-slash-pakistan-water-supply-with-new-indus-river-project-2025-05-16/>.

⁸⁹ “India’s Rs 2,352 Crore Chenab–Beas Link Tunnel: The Project That Has Pakistan on Edge.” India Today. June 10, 2026. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/chenab-beas-link-tunnel-project-pakistan-indus-waters-treaty-concerns-2924536-2026-06-10>.

⁹⁰ Syed, Baqir Sajjad. “FO Slams Fresh Indian Bid to ‘Weaponise’ Indus Waters.” Dawn. June 5, 2026. <https://www.dawn.com/news/2005304>.

Treaty, as depicted in the flowchart below, where water would be diverted from a Chenab River to the Beas River, against the spirit of the Treaty.



Shahpur Kandi Dam: Post-Suspension Utilization of Ravi Waters

The final completion and operationalisation date of the Shahpur Kandi Dam on 31 March 2026 represents another step in India’s broader post-23 April 2025 strategy to maximise the utilisation of its allocated river waters.⁹¹ Ravi is an Eastern River, allocated only to India, but a part of its water used to go unutilised into Pakistan for decades, as the Shahpur Kandi dam remained incomplete. The project allows diversion of about 1150 cusecs of Ravi water through a new canal system, with the downstream flow into Pakistan drastically reduced to almost zero, while benefitting an area of about 32,000 hectares in Kathua and Samba districts of Jammu & Kashmir with irrigation water throughout the year.⁹² With the completion of the Shahpur Kandi project, India’s plan to use as much of its water as possible before it reaches Pakistan is being implemented

⁹¹ “A Dry Summer Awaits Pakistan as India Tightens Another Noose after Indus Move.” The Economic Times. February 18, 2026. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/pakistan-water-crisis-ravi-river-india-shahpur-kandi-dam-indus-treaty-dispute-lahore-delhi-shuts-another-tap/articleshow/128497124.cms?from=mdr>.

⁹² “Ravi Water Flow Completely Stopped after Barrage Construction by India: Report.” Geo News. February 26, 2024. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/532619-ravi-water-flow-completely-stopped-after-barrage-construction-by-india-report>.

by constructing new diversion projects, improving storage facilities, and expanding irrigation networks.

Revival of Tulbul Navigation Project (Wullar Barrage)

The Tulbul Navigation Project (TNP), also known as the Wullar Barrage, is located at the outlet of Wullar Lake on the main Jhelum River, one of the three Western Rivers under the jurisdiction of IWT. The project was conceived to build a lock-cum-control structure to control the natural flow of Wullar Lake, keep the water level for inland navigation between Srinagar and Baramulla, and navigate the water in Jhelum during lean winter season. The project began in 1984, but was suspended in 1987 due to Pakistan's objections that the proposed gated structure and associated storage were not in compliance with the IWT.⁹³ In February 2026, the Jammu & Kashmir Government confirmed that it was working with the Central Government to revive the long-pending project following the suspension of the IWT.⁹⁴

The dispute centres on the interpretation of the storage provisions of Annexure E of the IWT, which restricts General Storage and Power Storage on the Jhelum Main, and only Flood Storage as per Paragraph 9 of Annexure E is allowed. However, the Wullar Barrage is located on the Jhelum Main, making its storage provisions particularly relevant to the interpretation of the Treaty. By comparison, the Jhelum (excluding the Jhelum Main) may have an aggregate storage capacity of 0.50 MAF for General Storage, 0.25 MAF for Power Storage, and 0.75 MAF for Flood Storage.⁹⁵

Pakistan has consistently opposed the proposed Tulbul/Wullar Barrage with a capacity of 324,000 acre-feet (0.399 MAF), which would be a controlled storage on the Jhelum Main against treaty provisions. The proposed storage by India of 324,000 acre-feet (0.399 MAF) is 32.4 times larger than 10,000 acre-feet (0.012 MAF) and exceeds by 0.387 MAF that Pakistan claims is allowed under its interpretation of the Treaty.⁹⁶ The graph below compares the proposed storage capacity

⁹³ Quratulain Rehbar. "India Set to Revive 1984 Water Project after Revoking Pact with Pakistan." Nikkei Asia. March 1, 2026. <https://asia.nikkei.com/politics/international-relations/india-set-to-revive-1984-water-project-after-revoking-pact-with-pakistan>.

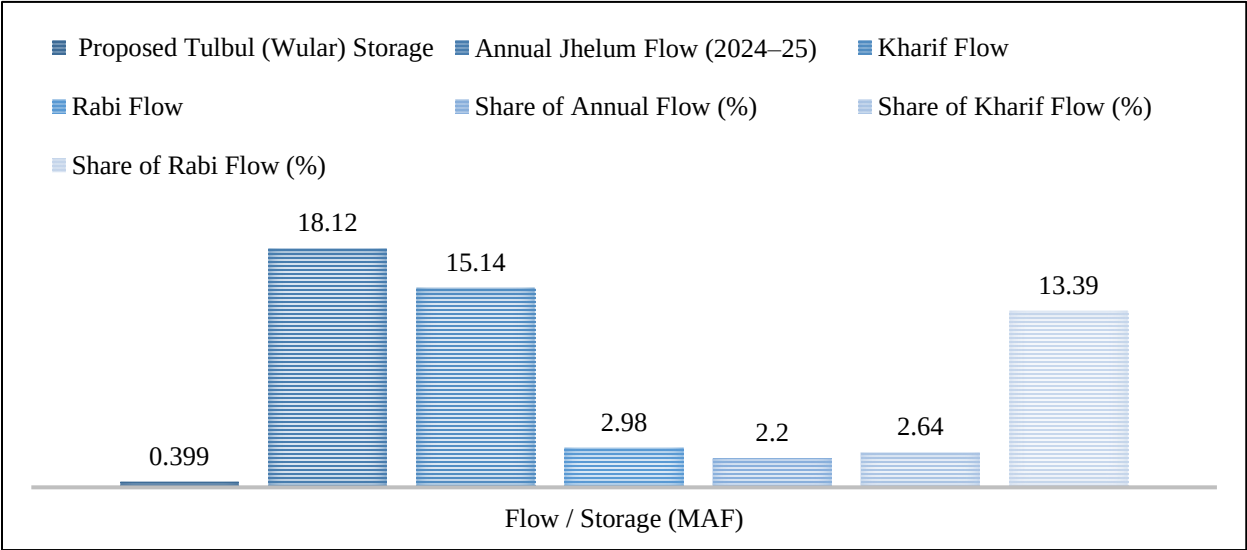
⁹⁴ "J&K Set to Revive Key Water Projects Following IWT Suspension: CM Omar Abdullah." Kashmir Convener. February 10, 2026. <https://kashmirconvener.com/jk-set-to-revive-key-water-projects-following-iwt-suspension-cm-omar-abdullah/>.

⁹⁵ "India, Pakistan, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development." World Bank, January 16, 1962. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20419/volume-419-I-6032-English.pdf>.

⁹⁶ "No Headway in Talks on Wullar Barrage." Dawn. June 23, 2006. <http://beta.dawn.com/news/198297/no-headway-in-talks-on-wullar-barrage>.

of the Tulbul (Wular) Barrage with the recorded Jhelum River flows at Mangla during 2024–25. The proposed storage of 0.399 MAF is 2.20 per cent of the annual flow (18.12 MAF), 2.64 per cent of Kharif flow (15.14 MAF), and 13.39 per cent of Rabi flow (2.98 MAF) of the Jhelum River.⁹⁷ The comparison shows that the potential impact of water storage at Tulbul would be larger during the lean Rabi season when the river flows are significantly reduced.

Graph 13. Proposed Tulbul (Wular) Storage and Jhelum River Flow Comparison 2024–25



Source: Dawn, IRSA

Priority Assessment of India’s Post-April 2025 Hydropower and Water Infrastructure Projects on Western Rivers

The projects have been prioritised according to their capacity, strategic location, importance in the river basin, and high level of activities after 23 April 2025. Very High Priority (VHP) projects include Sawalkote, Pakal Dul, Dulhasti Stage-II, Salal Restoration Works, Baglihar Restoration Works, Chenab–Beas Link-3, and Tulbul Navigation Project, where substantial tenders have been issued, construction is in progress, or restoration/rehabilitation works have been proposed. The High Priority (HP) projects like Ratle, Kirthai-I & II, Kiru, Kwar, Bursar Storage, Uri-I Stage-II, etc., are important because of their large capacity, along with their contribution to the wider utilization of Western Rivers, and several projects are in the construction phase. Moderate-priority projects like Parnai, Ganderbal, and Nimoo Bazgo restoration projects have relatively smaller

⁹⁷ “IRSA Annual Report 2024-2025.” IRSA. http://pakirsa.gov.pk/Doc/IRSA_Annual_Report_2024_25.pdf.

capacity or lesser tender activity but are part of the bigger river infrastructure network in India. The most significant number of new tenders, construction progress, and restoration activities have been identified in the Chenab basin. The following table shows the priority classification of major hydropower, river-management, restoration, and irrigation projects tied up with the post-April 2025 plans for infrastructure in the Indus Basin, on the Western Rivers.

Table 1. Priority Classification of Key Hydropower, Irrigation, Restoration and River-Management Projects on the Western Rivers

Project	Capacity	River / Basin	Priority
Sawalkote	1,856 MW	Chenab	Very High
Pakal Dul	1,000 MW	Marusudar–Chenab	Very High
Dulhasti Stage -II	260 MW	Chenab	Very High
Salal / Baglihar (Restoration & Sediment Management)	690/900 MW	Chenab	Very High
Chenab–Beas Link-3	—	Chenab–Beas	Very High
Uri-I Stage-II	240 MW	Jhelum	Very High
Ratle	850 MW	Chenab	High
Kirthai -I & II	1,320 MW	Chenab	High
Kiru	624 MW	Chenab	High
Kwar	540 MW	Chenab	High
Bursar Storage	800 MW	Chenab Basin	High
Tulbul Navigation Project / Wular Barrage	—	Jhelum	High
Ranbir Canal	—	Chenab	High
Parnai	37.5 MW	Chenab Basin	Moderate
Ganderbal	93 MW	Jhelum Basin	Moderate
Nimoo Bazgo (Restoration Works)	45 MW	Indus	Moderate

India’s Post-IWT Suspension Strategy in the Chenab Basin: Divert–Cascade–Restore–Regulate–Divert

Following India’s decision to place the IWT in abeyance on 23 April 2025, New Delhi’s activities across the Chenab Basin indicate a shift from project-specific hydropower development towards an integrated basin-wide water utilisation strategy. The new strategy is not about single projects, but is based on inter-basin water diversion, cascading hydropower generation, operational flow regulation, restoration of reservoirs, sediment management, and canal modernisation, which tends to the maximum use of Chenab before it enters Pakistan.

The strategy begins in the upper Chenab headwaters at the Chandra River in Lahaul–Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, where India has proposed the Chenab–Beas Link Tunnel (Link-3). The project envisages a 19-metre barrage near Koksar and an 8.7 km tunnel to divert water from the Chandra River into the Beas Basin before the Chandra joins the Bhaga River at Tandi to form the Chenab. The e-tender issued on 20 May 2026 indicates India’s push to develop an inter-basin transfer system upstream, with the ability to divert a portion of the headwaters of the Chenab into the Eastern River network. Once transferred into the Beas, the water would become part of India’s existing Beas–Sutlej River regulation system, passing through Pandoh Dam and the Beas–Sutlej Link (BSL) Canal before reaching Harike Barrage, from where it could contribute to downstream allocations through canal networks in Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

The remaining flow continues downstream through a cascade of hydropower projects. In Himachal Pradesh, the proposed Seli (440 MW), Reoli Dugli (430 MW), Purthi (300 MW), and Sach Khas (260 MW) projects would utilise the upper reaches of the Chenab. As the river enters Jammu & Kashmir, it passes through the proposed Kirthai-I (390 MW) and Kirthai-II (930 MW) projects. In parallel, the Marusudar River, the Chenab’s largest tributary, is being developed through the Pakal Dul Hydroelectric Project (1,000 MW) before re-joining the main Chenab upstream of Kiru (624 MW) and Kwar (540 MW). The river then flows sequentially through Dulhasti I (390 MW), the proposed Dulhasti-II (260 MW), Ratle (850 MW), Baglihar (900 MW), Sawalkote (1,856 MW), and finally the Salal HEP (690 MW). This cascade enables the same volume of water to be utilised repeatedly for electricity generation before continuing downstream.

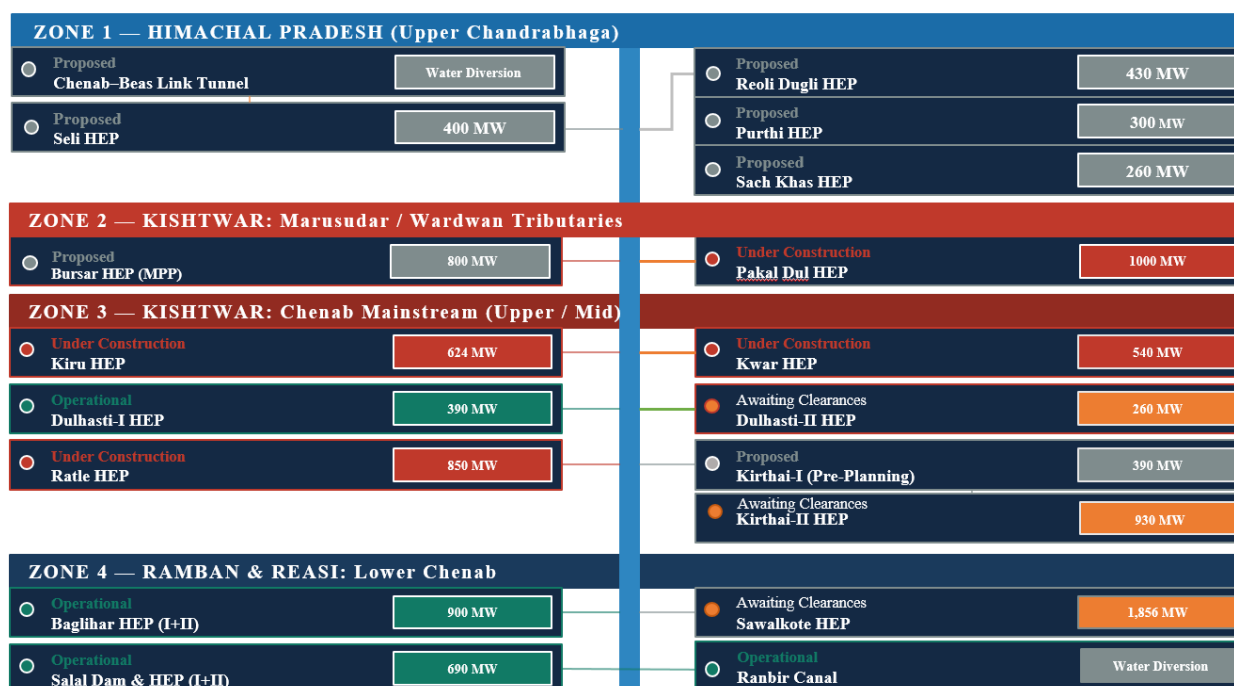
Baglihar reservoir is one of the key players in this cascade. Besides generating power, its gated spillways and pondage provide flexibility of operation for regulating river flow towards the lower downstream projects of the Chenab. Further downstream, Salal acts as the last major control structure before the river reaches the Jammu plains. Since 2025, India has been actively performing reservoir flushing, sediment removal, mapping (hydrographic surveys), and installation of permanent sediment-management infrastructure at Salal to restore operational efficiency and recover the storage capacity lost over decades of sedimentation.

The Chenab enters the Jammu plains after passing Salal, and the focus changes from the regulation of hydropower to consumptive water utilisation. The Ranbir canal diverts water from the left bank of the Chenab, and the nearby Pratap canal also diverts water for irrigation. Following the Treaty

being placed in abeyance, India accelerated the Ranbir Canal Expansion Project, proposing to increase the canal’s carrying capacity from approximately 40 m³/s to 150 m³/s (around 1,400 to 5,300 cusecs), extend its length from approximately 60 km to 120 km, modernise the Ranbir, Kathua, and New Pratap canals, and facilitate the diversion of Chenab water annually. The flowchart below shows the water diversion from upstream to downstream.

Flow Chart 2. Chenab Basin Major Hydroelectric Projects

Upstream → Downstream: Himachal Pradesh to LoC



Source: Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN), NHPC

Viewed collectively, these developments indicate an integrated “divert–generate–regulate–restore–divert” strategy. Water will be partially diverted upstream through the proposed Chenab–Beas Link, then used through a sequential cascade of hydropower projects, with Baglihar and Salal HEPs allowing a flow regulation; finally, water will be diverted for irrigation and consumptive purposes, and will flow through the expanded canal system of Ranbir before reaching Pakistan. The importance from the IWT standpoint is not the specific project but the overall impact of an integrated network of infrastructure extending upstream to downstream, that may enhance the operational flexibility of India to divert, regulate, store and utilise water from the Chenab.

Post-April 2025 Expansion of Water Diversion, Storage and Flow-Regulation Capacity

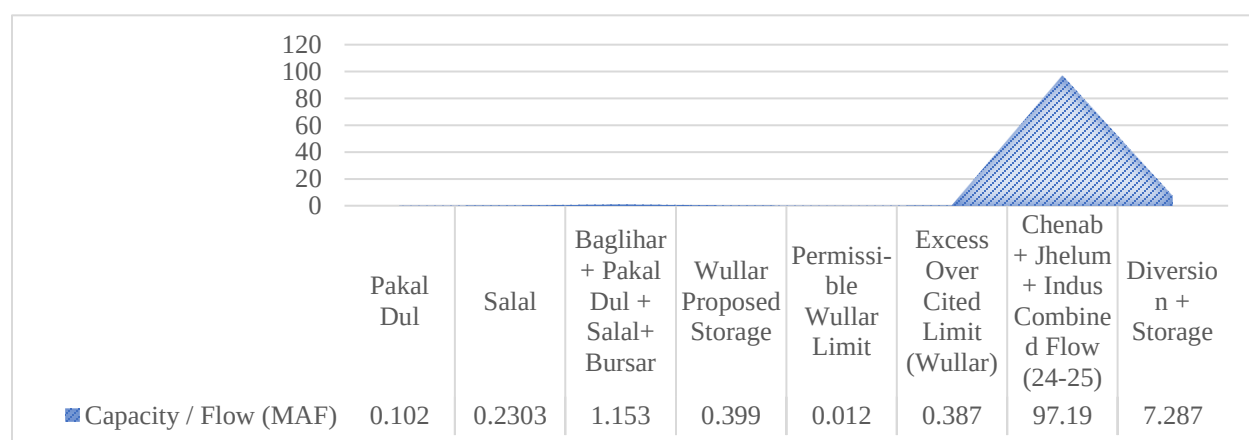
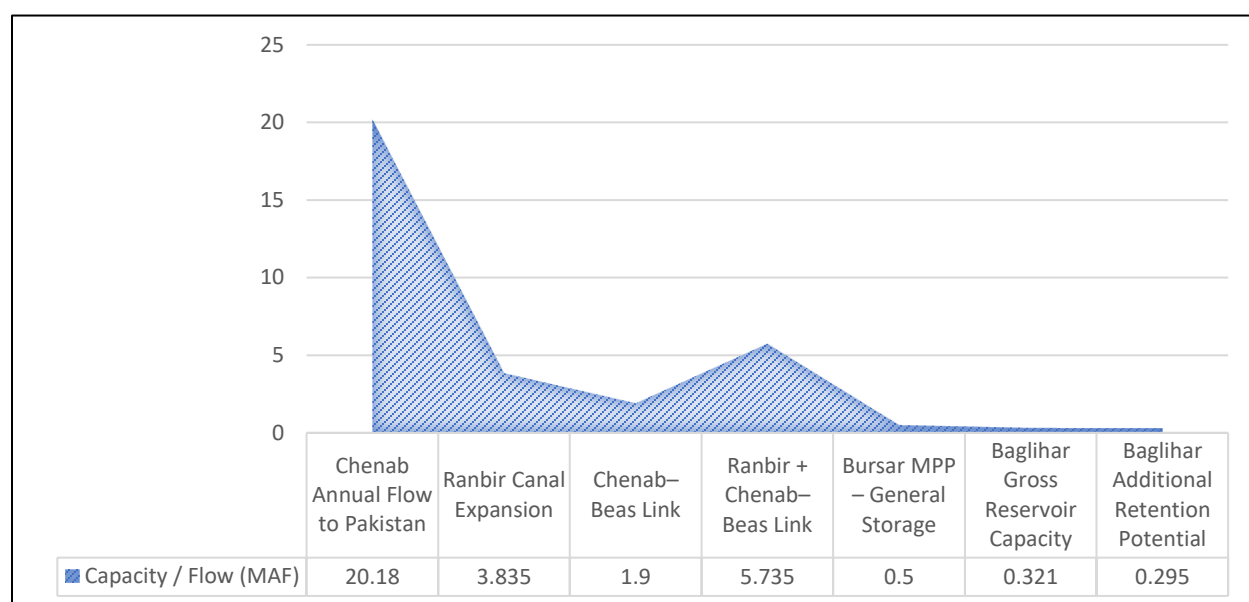
The significance of the post-April 2025 situation is the breakdown of the existing cooperative mechanism under the IWT and the subsequent accelerated diversion of water, hydropower, flow regulation and infrastructure restoration across Chenab, Jhelum and wider Indus Basin which carried a combined flow of 97.19 MAF in the year 2024-25 to Pakistan, comprising 20.16 MAF in the Chenab, 18.12 MAF in the Jhelum, and 58.91 MAF in the Indus.⁹⁸ The Baglihar (900 MW) reservoir has a gross capacity of 395.95 MCM (0.321 MAF), compared with only 32.56 MCM (0.026 MAF) of active operational storage under the 2007 restrictions under IWT. Therefore, if this constraint is removed, the potential retention of the Baglihar reservoir during the filling cycles could be raised by around 0.295 MAF. Along with this, the Pakal Dul and Salal reservoirs have gross storage capacities of approximately 0.102 MAF and 0.2303 MAF, respectively, and the proposed Bursar Multipurpose Project (MPP) on Marusudar River, a major tributary of the Chenab, would add about 0.500 MAF of live storage, making these four reservoirs of the Chenab system have a combined gross storage of approximately 1.153 MAF.

On the Jhelum, the proposed Tulbul/Wullar storage of 0.399 MAF would exceed by 0.387 MAF, more than the permissible limit of 0.012 MAF. The Ranbir Canal expansion, with an estimated annual diversion capacity of 3.835 MAF/year, and the proposed Chenab–Beas Link, with an estimated annual diversion capacity of 1.900 MAF/year, could together divert approximately 5.735 MAF annually, equivalent to 28.42 percent of the Chenab’s 20.18 MAF annual flow. Combined, these projects point toward a reduction of approximately 7.287 MAF, equivalent to 7.50 percent of the three rivers combined 97.19 MAF flow in 2024–25 flow to Pakistan, once fully operational.

The graph below shows the scale of proposed and existing water diversion, storage, and flow-regulation capacities in relation to the annual flows of the Chenab and Jhelum rivers, highlighting the potential expansion of India’s ability to regulate the timing and volume of water reaching Pakistan.

⁹⁸ *IRSA Annual Report 2024-2025* (IRSA), http://pakirsa.gov.pk/Doc/IRSA_Annual_Report_2024_25.pdf.

Graph 14. Potential Water Storage, Diversion and Flow-Regulation Capacity in the Chenab and Jhelum Basins



Source: NHPC, CVPPIndia

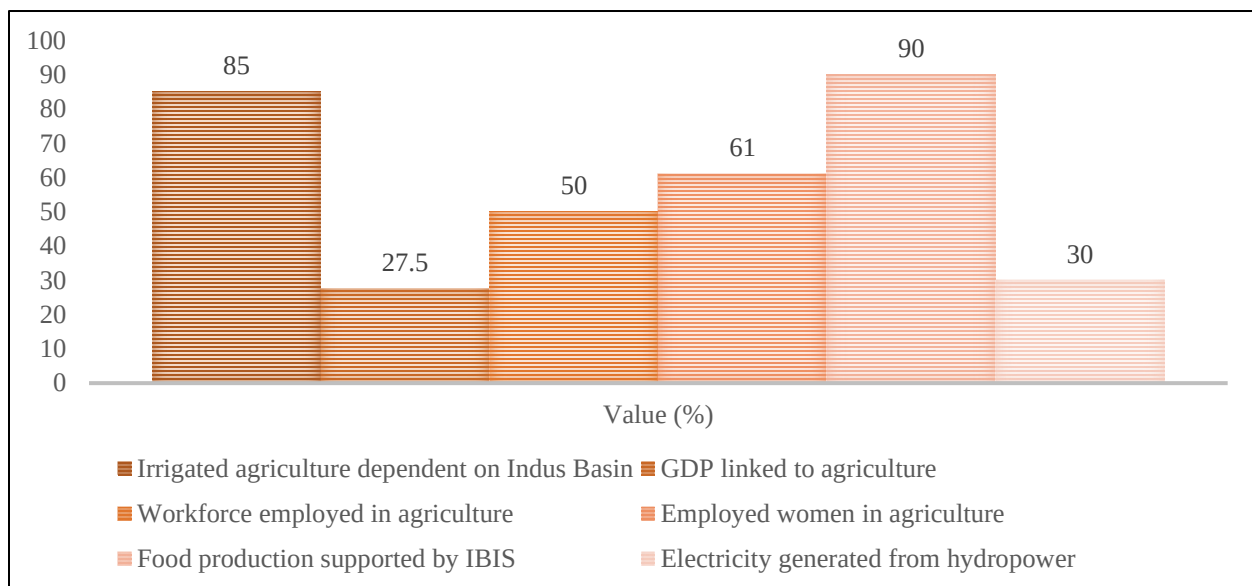
The Indus Basin: Backbone of Pakistan's Water, Food and Energy Security

India's upstream water regulation and diversion have the potential to affect Pakistan's water, food, economic, and energy security simultaneously because the Indus Basin underpins multiple interconnected sectors of the national economy. The following chart shows this dependency on six of these indicators. The Indus Basin contributes about 85 percent of the irrigated agriculture production in Pakistan,⁹⁹ agriculture generates about 23.54 percent of GDP and some 50 percent

⁹⁹ "IWT Lifeline of Pakistan's Agriculture." APP. <https://www.app.com.pk/national/iwt-lifeline-of-pakistans-agriculture/>.

of the jobs, making it an important sector of the national economy and employment.¹⁰⁰ The dependence is especially high in rural livelihoods, about 61 percent of the employed women are engaged in agricultural activities,¹⁰¹ reflecting the crucial role of water availability for gendered employment and livelihoods of households. At the food-security level, the Indus River system supports approximately 90 percent of Pakistan’s agricultural production,¹⁰² while hydropower accounts for approximately 30 percent of electricity generation,¹⁰³ linking river flows directly to the country’s energy security. Therefore, any persistent alteration, decrease or increase in control of flows in the Indus Basin may have impacts beyond water availability to agricultural production, food supply, employment, household incomes, economic activity, and electricity generation.

Graph 15. Pakistan’s Dependence on the Indus Basin



Source: United Nations Women, Ministry of Finance, Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA)

¹⁰⁰ *Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-25 (2025)*, https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_25/Highlights.pdf.

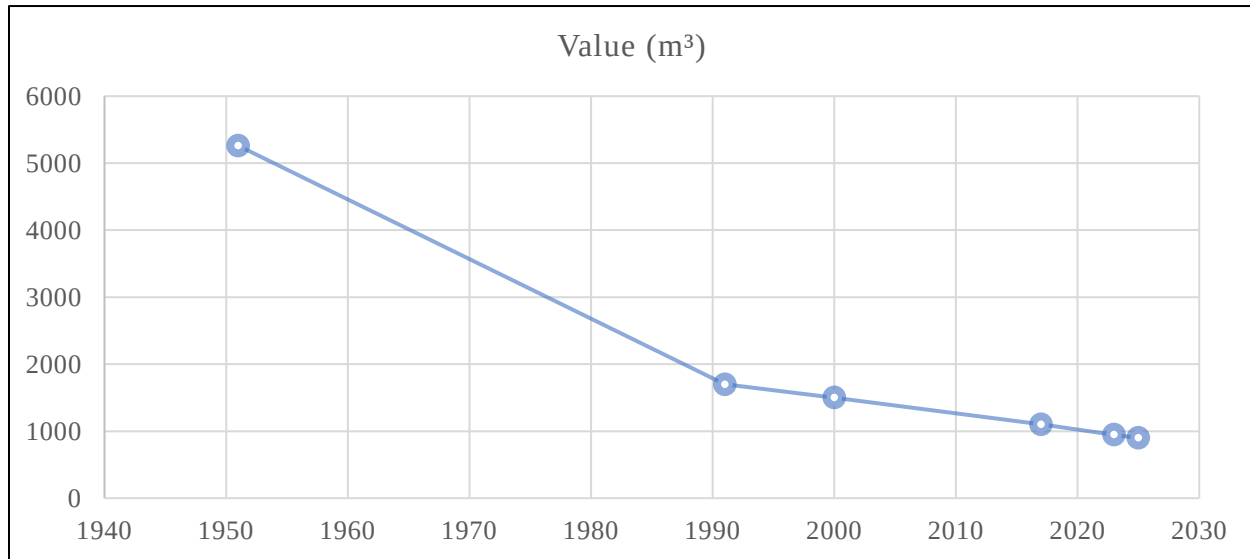
¹⁰¹ *Young Women in Pakistan - Status Report 2020* (UN Women, 2020), <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2020/11/pk-Young-Women-in-Pakistan-Status-Report-2020.pdf>.

¹⁰² Waseem Ishaque, Mudassir Mukhtar, and Rida Tanvir, “Pakistan’s Water Resource Management: Ensuring Water Security for Sustainable Development,” *Frontiers in Environmental Science* 11 (January 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2023.1096747>.

¹⁰³ Hira Bilal, “2025: WAPDA Generates 33.12 Billion Units Hydel Electricity. Rs. 3.83 Per Unit Hydel Electricity Subsidises Pakistan’s Entire Power Sector WAPDA Also Achieves Several Key Targets on Under-Construction Projects,” *Water and Power Development Authority*, December 30, 2025, <https://wapda.gov.pk/?p=3641>.

Water availability in Pakistan fell from 5,260 m³ per person in 1951¹⁰⁴ to 1,102 m³ in 2017, 948 m³ in 2023, and 899 m³ in 2025.¹⁰⁵ With a rapidly growing population and the strain on water resources, Pakistan is now in the water-scarce category. If the declining trend continues, per capita availability could fall further, indicating a severe deterioration in water security. The following graph illustrates the reduction in per capita availability of water in Pakistan over time.

Graph 16. Declining Per Capita Water Availability



Source: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Dawn, Business Recorder, WaterAid, Dunya News, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Pakistan

¹⁰⁴ Maqbool, Nazam. "Impact of Climate Change on Water in Pakistan." *The Pakistan Development Review*, November 29, 2023, 605–16. <https://doi.org/10.30541/v62i4605-616>.

¹⁰⁵ "Pakistan Enters Water Scarcity Phase as per Capita Availability Falls below 1000 Cubic Meters." *Dunya News*. Mar 26. <https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/938740-pakistan-enters-water-scarcity-phase-as-per-capita-availability-falls->.

Part 5

Strategic Dimensions of IWT

India's evolving negative stance on IWT has transformed what was essentially a technical water agreement into an issue with profound strategic and national security implications for Pakistan. Pakistan's heavy dependence on the western rivers for the agriculture gives the issue a direct national security dimension. Consequently, any abrupt or significant reduction in these flows would be perceived in Islamabad as an existential threat, thereby heightening tensions and increasing the risk of political and military escalation.

The suspension of the IWT has implications that extend beyond water security and bilateral treaty compliance. It introduces a new and potentially a volatile variable into the strategic stability equation in South Asia. In the following lines, we would discuss various aspects of this evolving dispute which is giving it a strategic dimension.

Firstly, the most immediate concern is the compression of the timeline available for crisis management. Unlike conventional India-Pakistan crises, which usually emerge from identifiable political or security events, changes in river flows can occur rapidly and may not immediately reveal their cause. For instance, an unexplained decline in the flow of the Chenab or Jhelum during a critical period of harvesting season could therefore generate political and military reactions even before technical investigations could establish whether the change resulted from rainfall patterns, reservoir operations, construction activity or deliberate manipulation. The shorter the time available for verification, the greater the risk that decision-makers may be compelled to act on assumptions rather than established facts.

The second and a slated and potentially more serious problem: "an attribution dilemma." The danger may not necessarily arise from an openly declared attempt by India to divert water, but from uncertainty over whether an unusual change in river flows is deliberate. In an environment of deep mistrust, uncertainty about intent could itself become a source of a serious misunderstanding. The problem will be further compounded in the absence of reliable and timely information. If India continues to withhold relevant data from Pakistan, the decision-makers may increasingly rely on worst-case assessments. Thus, the resulting information deficit could become almost as consequential for crisis stability as the physical reduction in water flows itself. The

strategic consequences of changes in river would also vary according to the agricultural seasons. An unexplained reduction during critical irrigation or harvesting periods could generate considerably greater political pressure than a comparable change at the other times, further complicating crisis management.¹⁰⁶

Third, the erosion of the IWT's institutional mechanisms would further aggravate this problem. The Treaty provided more than a framework for allocating river waters; it established procedures for information sharing, inspections, consultations and the resolution of technical disputes.¹⁰⁷ These mechanisms created a degree of predictability between two highly adversarial states—an important stabilising function in an otherwise deeply contested relationship. If these channels become dysfunctional, one of the few institutionalised forms of India-Pakistan engagement could weaken precisely when greater communication and technical verifications are most needed. The consequence would be greater dependence on intelligence assessments, diplomatic signalling and political interpretation, all of which can be particularly vulnerable to worst-case assumptions during a crisis.

Fourth, water could also increasingly acquire the characteristics of a grey-zone instrument. Upstream reservoir management, hydropower generation, construction activity and diversion infrastructure may produce significant downstream consequences without necessarily constituting an overt act of aggression. This creates a difficult distinction between legitimate development activity and perceived strategic coercion. Pakistan could interpret a series of Indian projects as an attempt to acquire greater leverage over downstream water security, while India could regard Pakistani objections as efforts to constrain its legitimate economic and energy development. Such divergent perceptions could produce a classic security dilemma in which measures taken by one side for legitimate purposes are interpreted by the other as instruments for coercion.

Fifth, the securitisation of water could extend beyond the flows themselves to the infrastructure that controls them. Dams, barrages, reservoirs, hydropower facilities and diversion structures may traditionally be viewed as civilian infrastructure, but their strategic importance increases once

¹⁰⁶ *Making Climate-Sensitive Investments in Agriculture Approaches, Tools and Selected Experiences* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021), <https://vepimg.b8cdn.com/uploads/vjfnew/6281/content/docs/1634804220fao-making-climate-sensitive-investments-in-agriculture-ndash-approaches-tools-and-selected-experiences-pdf1634804220.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ “The Indus Waters Treaty 1960 and the Role of the World Bank,” World Bank, June 11, 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/fact-sheet-the-indus-waters-treaty-1960-and-the-world-bank>.

water becomes securitised. The concern is not necessarily that either country would deliberately target such infrastructure during a conflict. Rather, the infrastructure controlling or regulating water flows could increasingly enter military and strategic calculations, particularly as both countries acquire long-range precision-strike capabilities.¹⁰⁸ The securitisation of water infrastructure would therefore add another layer of vulnerability to an already heavily militarised bilateral relationship.

Sixth, climate variability could further complicate the situation. As weather patterns and precipitation become less predictable, distinguishing natural hydrological fluctuations from upstream operations or deliberate intervention may become increasingly difficult. This would intensify what can be described as an attribution problem. A sudden change in river flows could therefore have multiple plausible explanations, but in an environment of deep mistrust, the most threatening interpretation may receive the greatest political attention. The combination of climate uncertainty and institutional uncertainty could therefore produce a particularly dangerous environment in which even genuine natural variations become a source of strategic suspicion.

Seventh, the securitisation of water could also create domestic political pressures that constrain diplomatic flexibility. Public perceptions about upstream infrastructure as an instrument of coercion could create expectations for retaliation, while strong national rhetoric could make direct dialogue politically more difficult. Military signalling, in turn, could reinforce these pressures, leaving governments with progressively less room for de-escalation. Water could consequently become embedded within nationalist narratives in both countries, transforming a technical dispute into an emotionally and politically charged strategic issue.

Lastly, the weakening of bilateral mechanisms could also encourage greater internationalisation of the dispute. If Pakistan concludes that existing treaty mechanisms are no longer sufficient to safeguard its interests, it may increasingly seek international monitoring, diplomatic support or third-party involvement. India, which has traditionally opposed internationalisation of bilateral disputes, could regard such efforts as unacceptable externalisation of a bilateral issue. The result could be an additional layer of diplomatic contention alongside the dispute over water itself.

¹⁰⁸ Devjyot Ghoshal et al., “India and Pakistan’s Drone Battles Mark New Arms Race,” *Aerospace & Defense, Reuters*, May 27, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/india-pakistans-drone-battles-mark-new-arms-race-asia-2025-05-27/>.

Ultimately, the strategic danger posed by the suspension of the IWT lies not simply in the possibility of water scarcity or deliberate water diversion, but in the interaction between uncertainty, mistrust and military capability. The weakening of institutional mechanisms could produce an information deficit; the information deficit could intensify attribution problems; attribution problems could encourage worst-case assessments; and such assessments could trigger political and military signalling. In a relationship between two nuclear-armed states with demonstrated conventional strike capabilities, this chain could have consequences far beyond the original water dispute.

The suspension of the IWT should therefore be assessed as a potential challenge to strategic stability in South Asia rather than merely as a bilateral water dispute. Strategic stability depends not only on nuclear deterrence, but also on communication channels, institutional predictability, reliable information and mechanisms that prevent conventional disputes from escalating. If water becomes another domain of strategic competition alongside Jammu and Kashmir dispute and other existing sources of India-Pakistan tensions, then the overall crisis architecture between India and Pakistan could become significantly more fragile and even an ambiguous hydrological incident could acquire strategic significance before diplomacy has sufficient time to establish what actually happened on the ground.

Part 6

Recommendations

The situation pertaining to the current impasse between India and Pakistan over the Indus Waters Treaty is fast-evolving. In the present scenario, the following measures in the legal, diplomatic and political, as well as technical domains can be useful for Pakistan at local, bilateral and global levels.

Legal Measures

- Pakistan should continue to document Indian announced and unannounced water diversions and water manipulation using legal mechanisms in order to maintain a clear record of treaty compliance.
- Pakistan must continue to explore all legal options under the IWT mechanisms, Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, and international law. The Permanent Indus Commission remains the key forum for technical issues and data collection. At the same time, the human rights issue cannot be ignored. According to a UN Special Procedures letter dated October 2025, the Indus rivers irrigate around 18 million hectares of farmland in Pakistan, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the country's total arable land. Any disturbance produced by pondage filling, sudden releases, or sediment flows has the potential to jeopardise millions of people's access to water, food, livelihoods, and development. This is a well-documented concern that has already been raised at the international level.
- The Indus Waters Treaty was concluded under the patronage of the World Bank. This gives this Institution an instrumental role in any key development with regard to the Treaty. Pakistan can reach out to the World Bank with a demand to mediate and facilitate in dispute resolution with India.
- Since Pakistan sees the Indian action as a *casus belli*, it can bring this issue to the agenda of the UN Security Council, citing it as a threat to global peace and an act of aggression. Pakistan can seek Chinese help to effectively internationalize this issue through the forum of the UNSC.

- Pakistan should seek international mechanisms for independent hydrological monitoring, because the absence of mutually accepted data could itself become a source of escalation.

Political and Diplomatic Measures

- While legal action is required, Pakistan must also use all available diplomatic channels. The Permanent Indus Commission should remain the key forum for technical discussion, information exchange, and early resolution of conflicts. At the same time, Pakistan must work with the World Bank, friendly countries, and the international community to highlight the importance of fulfilling treaty obligations for regional stability.
- Documented flow fluctuations at Marala, as well as the planned diversion of Chenab water into the Beas, have heightened the risk of triggering another wave of diplomatic tensions between the two nuclear armed South Asian states. Hence, India's actions have the potential to jeopardise regional peace. Pakistan must effectively and consistently articulate these concerns to international community.
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is another important forum where Pakistan can take up this issue. At SCO, Islamabad can refer to Article 3 of the organization's Charter, which calls for "sound environmental management, including water resources management in the region, and implementation of particular joint environmental programmes and projects". The Charter also demands cooperation among member states on "maintenance of peace and enhancing security and confidence in the region".¹⁰⁹ The presence of important members like China and Russia in the grouping can help Pakistan put significant diplomatic pressure on India.
- Pakistan should also launch a rigorous diplomatic campaign to unmask India's water weaponization and its grave implications for the people of Pakistan as well as for regional security. Delegations comprising serving and former diplomats, international law experts, political leaders across party lines, and technical experts should be sent to every important capital of the world with an aim to present Pakistan's case in front of global leaders,

¹⁰⁹ "Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 2001, https://eng.sectsc.org/images/07e8/0c/14/1625960.pdf?utm_source.

diplomatic figures, and representatives of intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and humanitarian organizations.

- Pakistan announced in the National Security Committee's meeting dated 24th April 2025 that any diversion of water flow will be considered an act of war. Pakistan must include this policy in its upcoming National Security Policy document to avoid any ambiguity which India could exploit in future.

Technical Measures

- Diplomacy and legal processes are important, but they cannot substitute national preparation. Pakistan must significantly accelerate the development of its own water resources. The Planning Commission's objectives provide a defined roadmap. These include raising national strategic storage capacity from 13.5 MAF to 23.5 MAF, increasing water availability at the farm gate from 64 MAF to 84 MAF, and improving irrigation water-use efficiency from 40 to 70 percent. To achieve these goals, consistent investments in storage infrastructure, irrigation modernisation are required.
- Geography prevents India from completely cutting off Pakistan's water supply. However, New Delhi has potential to enhance its water storage and water diversion capacity to restrict water flows to hurt Pakistan's agriculture sector during critical seasons. Pakistan's best safeguard is to increase its own resilience by improving water storage and irrigation efficiency mechanisms. Indian water coercion calls Pakistan for persistent effort on all three fronts including legal, diplomatic and domestic so that Pakistan may protect the water on which its people and economy rely.
- Pakistan must also focus on narrative building for the local audience. All public media should be used to expose India's unilateral and illegal posturing on the IWT and Pakistan's responsible response within available legal frameworks.
- Rigorous campaign must also be launched to spread awareness regarding the effective water conservation and better water management at public level. Practical measures should be taken to prevent the wasteful use of water.

Part 7

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the Indus Waters Treaty was deliberately designed to survive political tensions and security crises, a key reason it endured phases of conflict and several all-out wars. The Treaty intentionally misses out any explicit mechanism for withdrawal, suspension, or holding it ‘in abeyance’. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties also offers little support to the Indian action of April 23, 2025. In essence, New Delhi’s action carries no legal weight under the IWT framework. Nor does it stand any legal merit when it comes to existing doctrines under international law. What India portrays as a ‘fact’ with regard to terrorism is contested and therefore remains an allegation demanding thorough legal evidence. Instead of coming up with evidence on Pakistan’s purported involvement in ‘cross-border terrorism, India’s scraping of IWT has brought the two nations to a deadlock. This deadlock poses an existential threat to Pakistan’s security, peace, economic growth, and basic rights of millions of its citizens. Islamabad thus needs to vigilantly pursue diverse legal, political, and diplomatic options in orders to control the situation from converting into a humanitarian catastrophe for the region.

One year since India put the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance on 23 April 2025, New Delhi’s actions have progressed from diplomatic signalling to an ongoing expansion of water storage and diversion infrastructure on the Western Rivers, with major and pipeline projects generating a total of 7620.5 MW, an increase of 135.12 percent, with a 260.16 percent rise in the Chenab Basin, which is accompanied by an identified investment of approximately INR 41,403.92 crore. In parallel to this new capacity, India has also undertaken measures to restore and divert, such as sediment-management works at Salal, the Ranbir Canal Expansion Project, the proposed Chenab–Beas Link, the revived Tulbul Navigation Project, and the completed Shahpur Kandi Dam, which illustrates an integrated “divert–generate–regulate–restore–divert” strategy across the Chenab Basin.

Several aspects of this strategy are contrary to the technical provisions of the Treaty; the flushing at Salal and Baglihar in May 2025 violated the filling window and the limit of 55,000 cusecs; the recharging of the Ranbir Canal happened before the stipulated time; the proposed recharging of the Tulbul would cross the Pakistan limit more than 32 times, and the Chenab-Beas Link would divert water from a Western River to an Eastern River against Article III of IWT. Meanwhile,

Pakistan heavily relies on the Indus system, with 90 percent of food production, 85 percent of irrigated agriculture, 30 percent of electricity generation, and a drop in per capita water availability from 5260 m³ in 1951 to 899 m³ in 2025. The central concern is therefore not any single project but the cumulative effect of an increasingly interconnected upstream network on the timing, regulation, and utilisation of Western River waters before they reach Pakistan.

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