ISSUE BRIEF

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THE CHENAB RIVER UNDER IWT ABEYANCE: STRATEGIC RISKS TO PAKISTAN'S WATER SECURITY

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



On 23 April 2025, India unilaterally announced its decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 in abeyance, one day after the Pahalgam attack.[1] Following the announcement, India initiated reservoir-flushing operations at the Salal and Baglihar hydropower projects on the Chenab River in May 2025 against the IWT framework, marking a significant development in the management of the river's infrastructure. India's new and accelerated projects included the advancement of the 1,856 MW Sawalkote Hydroelectric Project (2025), environmental clearance for the 260 MW Dulhasti-II project in December 2025, and continued development of the Ratle (850 MW), Kiru (624 MW) and Kwar (540 MW) hydropower projects.[2] Further, reported measures included the Salal sediment-removal tender (July 2025), civil contracts for Uri-I and Dulhasti-II (March 2026), the Chenab–Beas Link-3 tender (March 2026), the Baglihar sediment-removal expression of interest (April 2026), and the Salal diversion-tunnel tender (May 2026). These developments raise questions about the cumulative implications of India's expanding infrastructure and reservoir operations for downstream water security, seasonal flow predictability and Pakistan's agricultural dependence on the Chenab River.

1 "Pahalgam Attack: India Suspends Indus Waters Treaty with Immediate Effect, Closes Attari Border Crossing," Dawn, April 23, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1906075.

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

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From Flushing to Bypass Tunnels and India's Changing Approach to the Chenab

In May 2025, India undertook sediment flushing at the Salal (690 MW) and Baglihar (900 MW) hydropower projects on the Chenab River, reportedly removing over 7.5 million cubic metres (MCM) of sediment. On 16 May 2025, the Central Water Commission of India recommended monthly flushing at both reservoirs.[3] The timing raised concerns under Annexure E, Paragraph 18 of the IWT, which specifies conditions for annual filling during 21 June to 31 August in the case of the Commissioners not agreeing on a filling schedule and require India to maintain a minimum flow of 55,000 cusecs in the Chenab Main River above Marala in Pakistan.

The above provision of IWT specifically requires that India carry out filling at a rate that does not reduce the Chenab's water flow below Marala as a result of the filling of Salal and Baglihar.[4] However, the Indian actions led to substantial reduction of inflows at Marala-reported inflows fell from 35,000 to 3,100 cusecs on 4–5 May and from 98,200 cusecs on 29 May to 7,200 cusecs by 31 May 2025.[5]

India is also looking to build longer-term sediment-management infrastructure. In 2026 it floated two tenders for a diversion tunnel and a sediment bypass tunnel valued at US$28.23 million (20 May)[6] and US$0.057 million (7 May)[7] respectively, in addition to a sediment-removal tender valued at US$0.661 million (6 April).[8] When taken together, these tenders account for around US$28.95 million in planned works, which reflect a greater move towards permanent sediment-management measures.

The proposed tenders could enhance India's capacity to regulate sediment movement, manage reservoir levels and control the timing of water releases from Salal Dam towards Pakistan. This may increase Pakistan's exposure to abrupt changes in Chenab flows, particularly during sediment-

3 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.

4 "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.

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

6 "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/assests/pzi_public/tender_tendermaster/6a0ea00b20b62.pdf.

7 "Hydrographic survey of Salal Dam reservoir at Dhyangarh for the year 2026." https://www.nhpcindia.com/welcome/tender_detail/index.php.

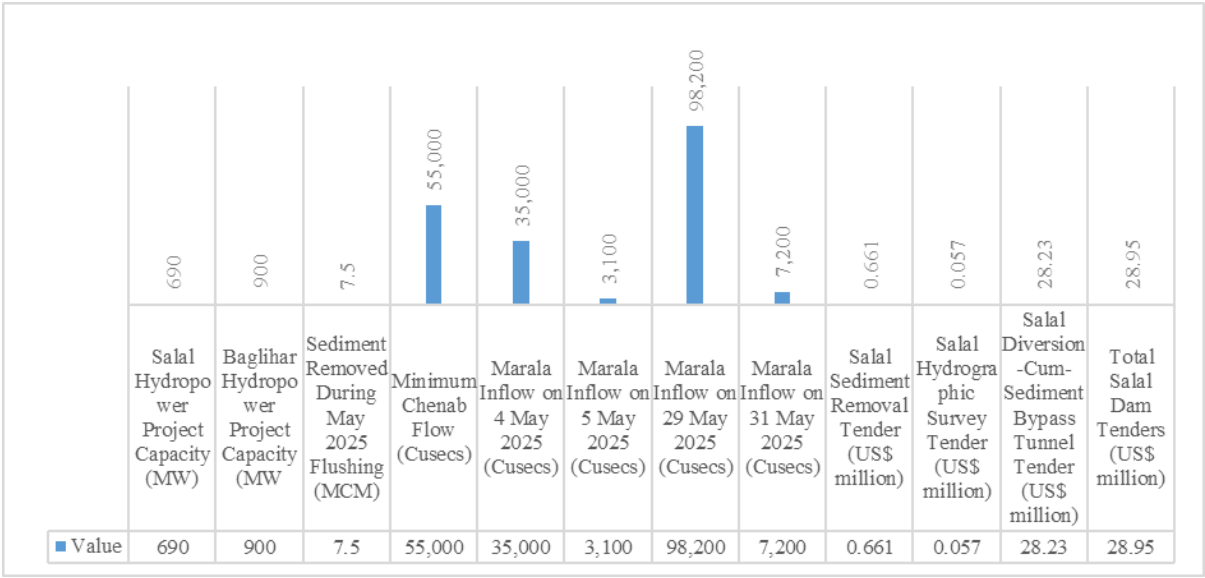
8 "eProcurement System Government of India." Eprocure. https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app?component=%24DirectLink&page=FrontEndLatestActiveTenders&service=direct&sp=SW%2FIld%2FdoBkwDJ4S15BMmjg%3D%3D.

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flushing and reservoir-management operations, creating uncertainty for downstream irrigation supplies.

The following graphs show hydrological fluctuations in the Chenab River at Marala, sediment flushing operations at the Salal and Baglihar dams, and the investment in sediment-management infrastructure in the Chenab Basin by India, in 2025–2026.

Sediment Flushing, Hydropower Expansion and Flow Variability in the Chenab Basin



Source: *NHPC, Press Information Bureau (PIB), Chenab Valley Power Projects Private Limited (CVPPPL), Eprocure India, Reuters, The Indian Express (TIE), NDTV, TRT World, JKTenders (Graph Prepared by the author)*

Ranbir Canal Expansion and Increased Diversion from the Chenab

The Ranbir Canal, located in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K), is an irrigation canal that draws water from the Chenab River to supply agricultural land. It serves approximately 16,460 to 38,600 hectares of arable land through an extensive network of smaller distribution channels spanning 400 kilometres.[9] Under the IWT, India is permitted to withdraw up to 1,000 cusecs from the canal between 15 April and 14 October each year and 350 cusecs during the rest of the year, with additional provisions for hydropower generation and silt disposal.[10] However, New Delhi recharged the canal in March 2026, ahead of the allowed withdrawal season.

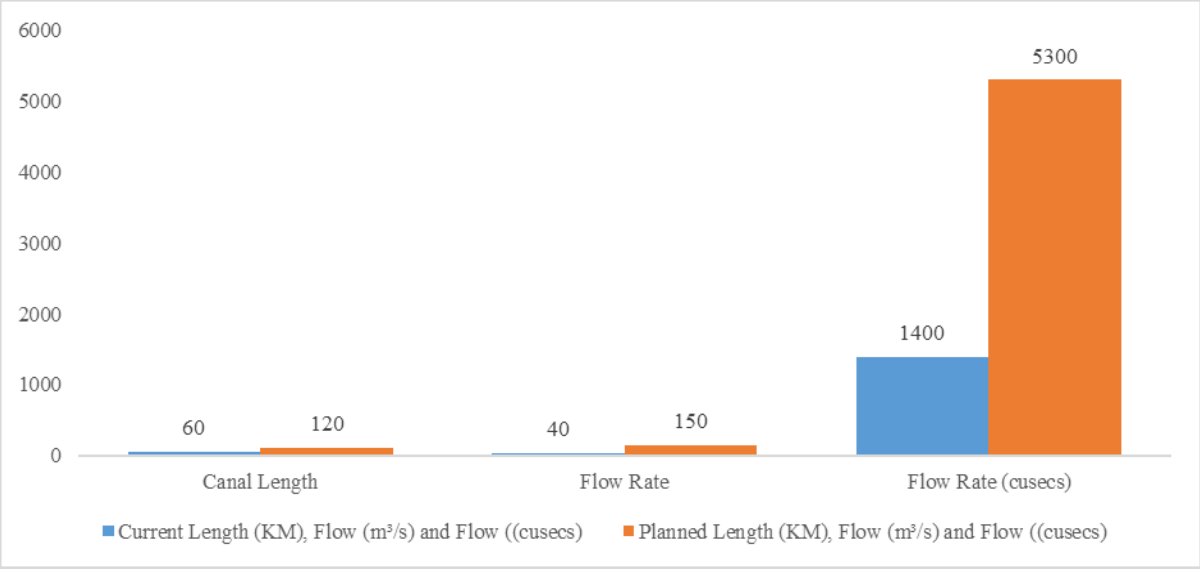
9 "Chenab Water Diversion: Increasing Ranbir Canal's Capacity Could Be The Solution," EtvB Harat, May 16, 2025, https://www.etvbharat.com/en/!bharat/chenab-water-diversion-increasing-ranbir-canals-capacity-could-be-the-solution-enn25051606831.

10 "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.

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India's Ranbir Canal Expansion Project reportedly aims to increase its capacity from approximately 1,400 to 5,300 cusecs, extend its length from 60 to 120 km, and divert an estimated 3.835 MAF (4.3 BCM) annually for IIOJK.[11] These proposed changes raise concerns about the scale of future withdrawals from the Chenab and their implications for Pakistan's downstream water security. The graph below illustrates the proposed expansion of the Ranbir Canal and its increased water-carrying capacity.

Ranbir Canal Expansion Plan and Projected Increase in Water Diversion from the Chenab River



Source: Reuters *(Graph Prepared by the author)*

Hydropower Expansion and Infrastructure Investment in the Chenab Basin

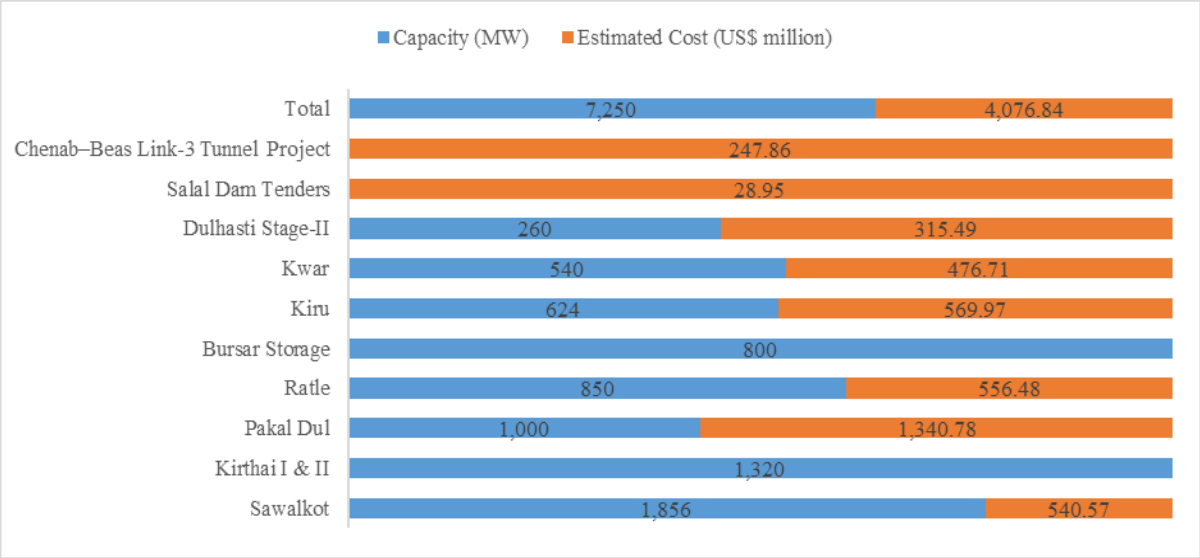
Following its decision to place the IWT in abeyance in April 2025, India has accelerated investment in hydropower and water infrastructure in the Chenab Basin. New Delhi's total planned and accelerated hydropower capacity surged by a massive 260.16 per cent of planned project capacities in the Chenab Basin, which went up from 2,013 MW to 7,250 MW. These include Sawalkot, Kirthai I and II, Pakal Dul, Ratle, Bursar Storage, Kiru, Kwar and Dulhasti Stage-II. The listed investments in Chenab-related infrastructure amount to over US$4 billion covering hydropower projects, Salal sediment-management works and the Chenab–Beas Link-3 project.

[11] 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, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-weighs-plan-slash-pakistan-water-supply-with-new-indus-river-project-2025-05-16/.

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India's rapid expansion of water infrastructure while keeping the IWT in abeyance raises concerns about Pakistan's water security.[12] The development of new hydropower projects and greater control over reservoir operations could affect the timing and availability of downstream flows, particularly during critical agricultural seasons, increasing pressure on Pakistan's water resources.

Graph 3. Chenab Basin Hydropower Projects and Estimated Investment



Source: NHPC *(Graph Prepared by the author)*

India's Narrative on IWT Suspension and Chenab River Projects

The BJP-led government in India is using the suspension of the IWT as a political instrument to project national strength, reinforce its hard-line stance towards Pakistan and portray itself as a defender of India's strategic interests. Following the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, New Delhi presented the Treaty as an outdated constraint on India's development and framed its suspension as the correction of a historical mistake. BJP President J. P. Nadda described the IWT as one of Jawaharlal Nehru's "biggest blunders", portraying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to place it in abeyance as the correction of a historical wrong.[13] The New Delhi justified the move in the

[12] "Special Report 'Weaponising Waters: Historical, Legal, and Strategic Dimensions of IWT Suspension,'" ISSI, September 30, 2026, https://issi.org.pk/special-report-weaponising-waters-historical-legal-and-strategic-dimensions-of-iwt-suspension/.

[13] "Indus Water Treaty One of the Biggest Blunders; PM Modi Corrected Historical Wrong: BJP Chief Nadda," The Economic Times, August 18, 2025, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/indus-water-treaty-one-of-the-biggest-blunders-pm-modi-corrected-historical-wrong-bjp-chief-nadda/articleshow/123366401.cms.

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national interest and in the interests of Indian farmers, declaring that "blood and water cannot flow together".[14]

On the Chenab, this political narrative accompanies efforts to accelerate the Sawalkote, Pakal Dul, Ratle, Kiru and Kwar hydropower projects, presented as priorities for energy security, regional development and greater utilisation of India's water resources. In July 2026, Indian government further maintained that the IWT could not function again in its existing form.[15] By linking the Treaty's suspension with national security and accelerated infrastructure development, the New Delhi presents its policy as correcting a historical strategic error while reinforcing its domestic political message of resolve towards Pakistan.

Pakistan's Position on the IWT and Indian Infrastructure on the Chenab River

Pakistan rejected the suspension of IWT and drew a strict "red line" against the weaponisation of water.[16] Pakistan maintains that the IWT remains a binding international agreement and cannot be suspended, modified or terminated unilaterally. Under Article III (1) and III (2) of the treaty, Pakistan is entitled to the waters of the western rivers, including the Chenab, while India is permitted only specified uses subject to the Treaty's restrictions. Annexure D of IWT allows India to construct run-of-river hydroelectric projects but imposes technical and operational conditions concerning pondage, power intakes, spillway gates, freeboard and reservoir operations. Annexure E limits India's aggregate storage capacity on the western rivers to 3.60 million acre-feet (MAF), including 1.70 MAF on the Chenab, 1.50 MAF on the Jhelum and 0.40 MAF on the Indus.[17]

Pakistan argues that these provisions do not grant India unrestricted authority to store, divert or manipulate downstream flows. This position received significant support from the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on 31 August 2026[18], when the Court unanimously ruled that none of the grounds advanced by India justified suspending or terminating the Treaty and declared that the IWT

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14 "Blood and Water Cannot Flow Together: PM Modi at Indus Water Treaty Meeting," *The Indian Express*, September 26, 2016, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/indus-water-treaty-blood-and-water-cant-flow-together-pm-modi-pakistan-uri-attack/.

15 "Indus Waters Treaty: Government Focus on Chenab Projects, Renegotiation," *The Indian Express*, July 21, 2026, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indus-waters-treaty-government-focus-on-chenab-projects-renegotiation-10795741/.

16 "Special Report 'Weaponising Waters: Historical, Legal, and Strategic Dimensions of IWT Suspension' | Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad," ISSI, September 30, 2026, https://issi.org.pk/special-report-weaponising-waters-historical-legal-and-strategic-dimensions-of-iwt-suspension/.

17 "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.

18 *PCA Press Release – PCA Case No. 2023-01: The Indus Waters Western Rivers Arbitration (Islamic Republic of Pakistan v. Republic of India) | PCA-CPA*, August 31, 2026, https://pca-cpa.org/news/pca-press-release-pca-case-no-2023-01-the-indus-waters-western-rivers-arbitration-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-v-republic-of-india-6/.

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remains fully in force, requiring India to continue observing its obligations, including those governing hydroelectric projects on the western rivers.

Potential Impact of Chenab River Flow Variability on Punjab

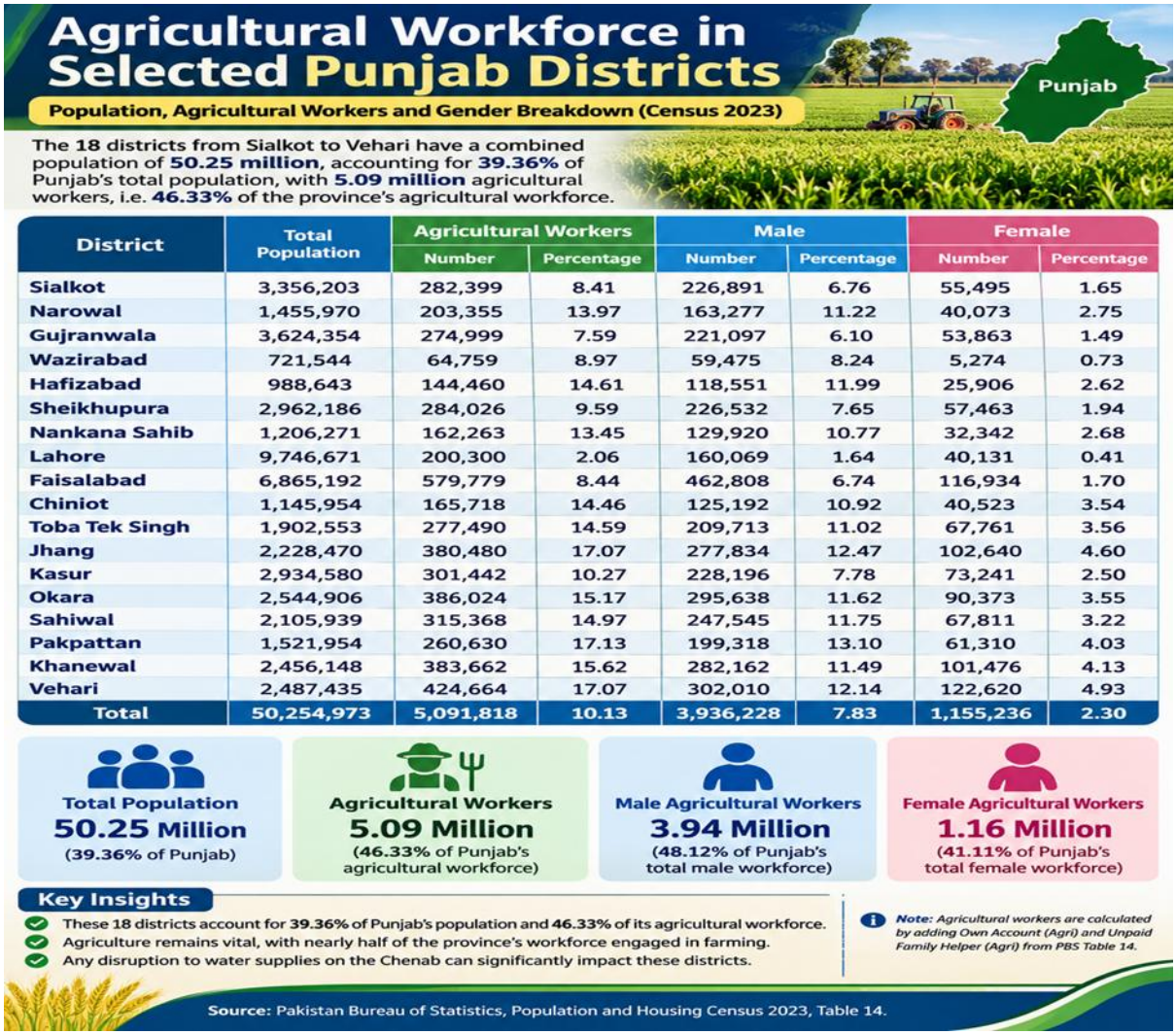
India's development and operation of water infrastructure on the Chenab River raises serious concerns about irrigation reliability and agricultural security in Pakistan. The Chenab feeds one of the largest canal networks in Punjab. At Marala Headworks it supplies the Upper Chenab Canal (UCC) and the Marala-Ravi (MR) Link. At Khanki Headworks it supplies the Lower Chenab Canal (LCC), the largest system on the river. At Qadirabad Headworks the Qadirabad-Balloki (QB) Link carries Chenab water into the Ravi, from where the Lower Bari Doab Canal (LBDC) takes off at Balloki.

Together, these canals and links directly or indirectly serve 18 districts of Punjab before the Chenab joins the Jhelum at Trimmu. These 18 districts are Sialkot, Narowal, Gujranwala, Wazirabad, Hafizabad, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Lahore, Faisalabad, Chiniot, Toba Tek Singh, Jhang, Kasur, Okara, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, Khanewal and Vehari. The first twelve are served mainly by the UCC, LCC and MR Link. The remaining six depend on the QB Link and the LBDC, where Chenab water mixes with Ravi flow and is mostly supplementary.

The 18 selected districts across Punjab, from Sialkot and Narowal to Khanewal and Vehari, have a combined population of approximately 50.25 million, representing 39.36 percentage of Punjab's total population of 127.69 million. These districts account for approximately 5.09 million agricultural workers, including 3.94 million males and 1.16 million females, representing an estimated 46.33 percentage of Punjab's agricultural workforce. Male agricultural workers constitute approximately 48.12 percentage of the provincial total, while female agricultural workers account for 41.11 percentage.[19] The graph below shows the agricultural workforce in selected 18 districts of Punjab.

[19] *Total Population and Employment by Gender and Rural–Urban Distribution (Census 2023)* (2023), https://www.pbs.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/census_tables/tables/table_14_national.pdf.

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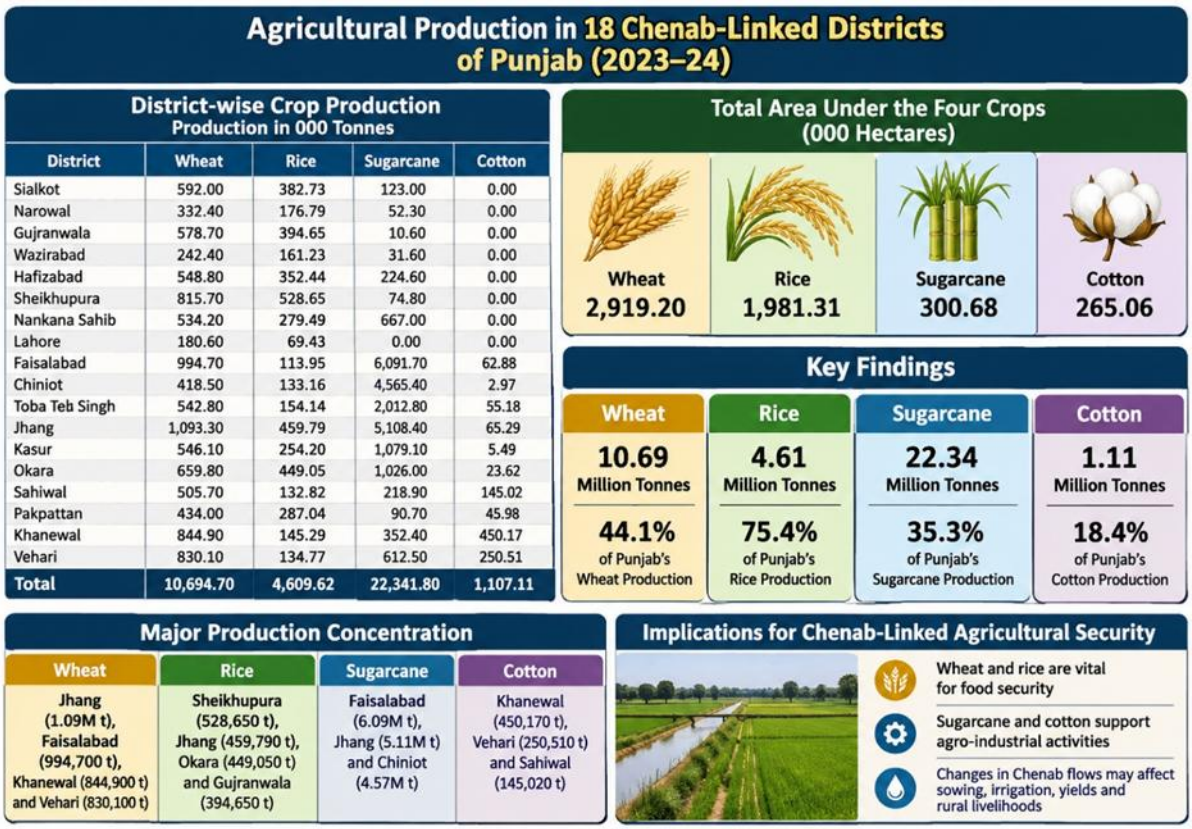
District	Total Population	Agricultural Workers		Male		Female	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Sialkot	3,356,203	282,399	8.41	226,891	6.76	55,495	1.65
Narowal	1,455,970	203,355	13.97	163,277	11.22	40,073	2.75
Gujranwala	3,624,354	274,999	7.59	221,097	6.10	53,863	1.49
Wazirabad	721,544	64,759	8.97	59,475	8.24	5,274	0.73
Hafizabad	988,643	144,460	14.61	118,551	11.99	25,906	2.62
Sheikhupura	2,962,186	284,026	9.59	226,532	7.65	57,463	1.94
Nankana Sahib	1,206,271	162,263	13.45	129,920	10.77	32,342	2.68
Lahore	9,746,671	200,300	2.06	160,069	1.64	40,131	0.41
Faisalabad	6,865,192	579,779	8.44	462,808	6.74	116,934	1.70
Chiniot	1,145,954	165,718	14.46	125,192	10.92	40,523	3.54
Toba Tek Singh	1,902,553	277,490	14.59	209,713	11.02	67,761	3.56
Jhang	2,228,470	380,480	17.07	277,834	12.47	102,640	4.60
Kasur	2,934,580	301,442	10.27	228,196	7.78	73,241	2.50
Okara	2,544,906	386,024	15.17	295,638	11.62	90,373	3.55
Sahiwal	2,105,939	315,368	14.97	247,545	11.75	67,811	3.22
Pakpattan	1,521,954	260,630	17.13	199,318	13.10	61,310	4.03
Khanewal	2,456,148	383,662	15.62	282,162	11.49	101,476	4.13
Vehari	2,487,435	424,664	17.07	302,010	12.14	122,620	4.93
Total	50,254,973	5,091,818	10.13	3,936,228	7.83	1,155,236	2.30

(Graph Prepared by the author)

Further, these selected Chenab-linked 18 districts also account for substantial agricultural production in Punjab. In 2023–24 crop production data shows that, these districts produced approximately 10.69 million tonnes of wheat, representing 44.1 percentage of Punjab's total wheat production, and 4.61 million tonnes of rice, accounting for approximately 74.5 percentage of the provincial total. They also produced 22.34 million tonnes of sugarcane (35.3 percentage of Punjab's output) and 1.11 million tonnes of cotton (18.4 percentage of provincial production). Faisalabad recorded the highest sugarcane production at 6.09 million tonnes, followed by Jhang (5.11 million tonnes) and Chiniot (4.57 million tonnes). Jhang recorded the highest wheat production at 1.09 million tonnes, while Sheikhupura led rice production with 528,650 tonnes. Khanewal was the

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leading cotton-producing district, with 450,170 tonnes.[20] The graph below shows the agricultural production in selected 18 districts of Punjab.



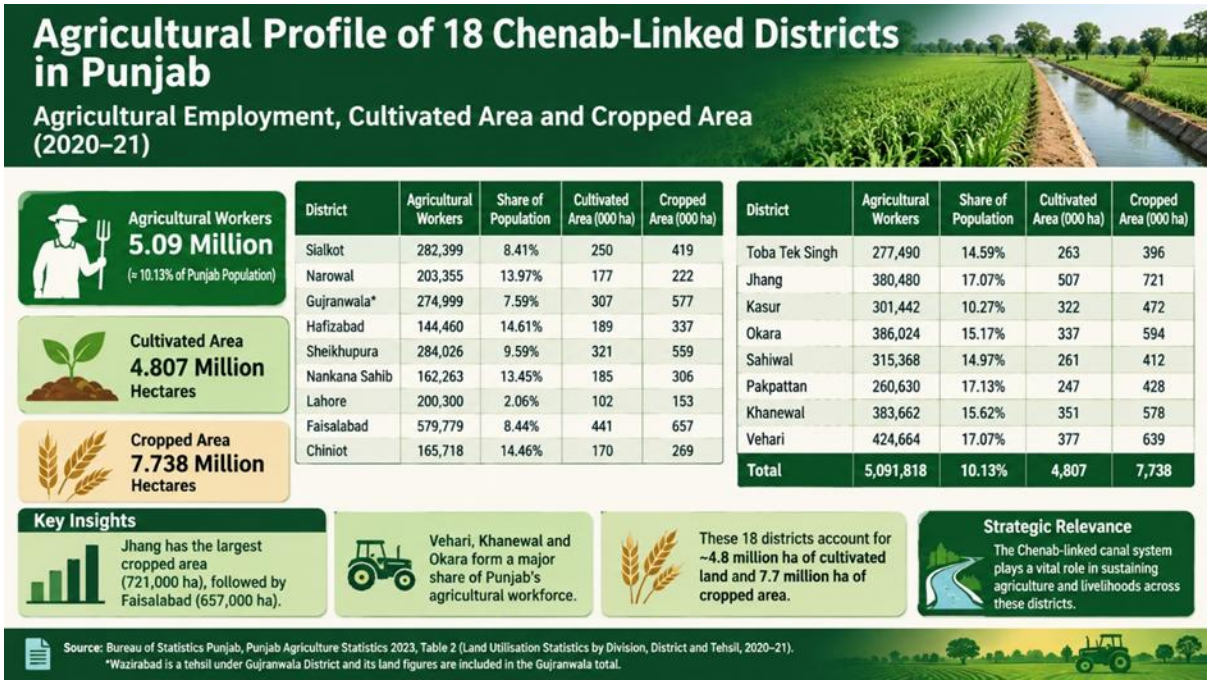
Source: Government of Pakistan Ministry of National Food Security &
(Graph Prepared by the author)

Moreover, as shown in the graph below, these districts represent a substantial agricultural base, with approximately 4.807 million hectares of cultivated land and 7.738 million hectares of cropped area.[21]

[20] *Crops Area & Production (Districts Wise)* (2025), https://www.mnfsr.gov.pk/SiteImage/Downloads/Cap_2024%20updated%20Final.pdf?utm.

[21] *Punjab Agricultural Statistics 2025* (2025), https://bos.punjab.gov.pk/sites/bos.punjab.gov.pk/files/PAS%202025.pdf.

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District	Agricultural Workers	Share of Population	Cultivated Area (000 ha)	Cropped Area (000 ha)
Sialkot	282,399	8.41%	250	419
Narowal	203,355	13.97%	177	222
Gujranwala*	274,999	7.59%	307	577
Hafizabad	144,460	14.61%	189	337
Sheikhupura	284,026	9.59%	321	559
Nankana Sahib	162,263	13.45%	185	306
Lahore	200,300	2.06%	102	153
Faisalabad	579,779	8.44%	441	657
Chiniot	165,718	14.46%	170	269

District	Agricultural Workers	Share of Population	Cultivated Area (000 ha)	Cropped Area (000 ha)
Toba Tek Singh	277,490	14.59%	263	396
Jhang	380,480	17.07%	507	721
Kasur	301,442	10.27%	322	472
Okara	386,024	15.17%	337	594
Sahiwal	315,368	14.97%	261	412
Pakpattan	260,630	17.13%	247	428
Khanewal	383,662	15.62%	351	578
Vehari	424,664	17.07%	377	639
Total	**5,091,818**	**10.13%**	**4,807**	**7,738**

(Graph Prepared by the author)

These above figures demonstrate the region's importance to Punjab's food security and agro-industrial economy. Disruptions to Chenab-related irrigation could expose agricultural production to delayed sowing, higher groundwater-pumping costs, reduced crop yields and declining farm incomes, particularly for water-intensive Kharif crops such as rice and sugarcane, as well as Rabi wheat during critical irrigation stages.

The resulting economic pressures could extend beyond the agricultural sector, leading to reduced demand for farm labour, seasonal unemployment, lower agricultural wages and income losses among rural households. Small farmers and landless agricultural workers would be particularly vulnerable, while declining farm incomes could increase household debt, deepen poverty and raise the social costs associated with livelihood insecurity and rural economic distress. These effects could also extend to agro-based industries, including sugar processing and textiles, through reduced raw material supplies, higher production costs and possible disruptions to employment across their supply chains.

Recommendations

Given the seriousness of the issue especially its socio-economic costs for over 50 million people dependent on Chenab waters, the following recommendations are suggested to counter India's unilateral actions concerning the Chenab River and safeguard Pakistan's water security:

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1. Use the Court of Arbitration's 31 August 2026 ruling to reinforce Pakistan's legal and diplomatic engagement under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). The unanimous ruling affirmed that the Treaty remains in force and cannot be unilaterally suspended or placed in abeyance by either party and rejected India's legal justification for suspension. Pakistan should use these rulings to pursue treaty-based proceedings, seek compliance with the ruling, document concerns regarding Indian projects on the Chenab and communicate its implications to international stakeholders.

2. Pakistan should appoint special envoys to brief key capitals, particularly major powers and influential international stakeholders, regarding the IWT suspension and the implications of India's unilateral actions for Pakistan's water security.

3. Expand hydrological monitoring at Akhnoor, Marala and downstream canal headworks by constituting a joint tracking system for river flows, reservoir levels, release timings and sediment movements by the Indus River System Authority (IRSA), Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and the Pakistan Commissioner for Indus Waters Regular monitoring would help Pakistan identify sudden changes in Chenab flows, distinguish seasonal variations from unusual fluctuations and maintain a reliable record of upstream water conditions. This information is essential for assessing downstream impacts, preparing for possible shortages, supporting timely irrigation decisions and providing technical evidence in discussions with India under the IWT.

4. Use satellite imagery and technical assessments to monitor Indian hydroelectric projects on the Chenab. Document potential violations and pursue specific concerns through the IWT's dispute-resolution mechanisms. Projects involving reservoir storage, pondage, sediment management and water releases can affect the timing and variability of downstream flows. Technical monitoring would enable Pakistan to assess whether project designs and operational practices comply with the Treaty. A consistent body of evidence would also strengthen Pakistan's position in legal and diplomatic proceedings and help address concerns through established dispute-resolution mechanisms.

5. Develop and implement water-efficiency projects across Chenab-dependent 18 districts, including the rehabilitation of irrigation canals and watercourses, modernisation of distribution systems, installation of flow-measurement infrastructure and improvements to water conveyance. These measures would help in efficient delivery of available water from headworks to agricultural fields, reduce avoidable conveyance losses, support more transparent water distribution across districts, sustain crop production, reduce pressure on

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groundwater and limit the economic consequences of water shortages across Punjab's Chenab-dependent agricultural districts.

6. Develop an early-warning system that links river and canal flows with crop calendars and district-level agricultural data. Provide farmers with timely information on potential water shortages so they can adjust irrigation schedules and sowing dates during critical crop stages. This would help minimise yield losses, protect farm incomes and reduce risks to rural livelihoods.

7. Expand laser land levelling, improve watercourses and introduce drip and sprinkler irrigation where technically and economically suitable. Provide subsidies and technical assistance, particularly to small and medium-sized farmers across the 18 districts. These measures would reduce water losses, improve irrigation efficiency, lower groundwater-pumping costs and help farmers sustain crop production despite uncertain canal supplies.

8. Promote suitable, less water-intensive crop varieties in Chenab-dependent districts, particularly in areas vulnerable to reduced or uncertain irrigation supplies. This would help farmers maintain agricultural production while reducing dependence on water-intensive crops and easing pressure on available water resources. Given the contribution of these districts to Punjab's wheat, rice, sugarcane and cotton production, suitable crop selection would also help reduce the risk of declining yields, farm incomes and agricultural output.

9. Encourage farmers to adopt efficient sowing schedules based on seasonal water availability and crop requirements. Timely sowing and irrigation during critical growth stages would help minimise yield losses and reduce exposure to water shortages. Better planning would also help farmers make more effective use of available water supplies.

10. Improve farmers' access to certified and high-quality seeds suited to local agro-climatic conditions and water availability. Better-quality seeds can support reliable crop establishment and yields, helping farmers reduce production risks and sustain agricultural productivity under uncertain irrigation conditions.

11. Expand access to affordable crop insurance for farmers in water-stressed districts, particularly small and medium-sized landholders. Insurance coverage would help compensate for financial losses caused by water shortages and crop damage, reduce farmers' vulnerability to income shocks and limit the risk of rising household debt and rural

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poverty. This would provide a degree of financial protection for agricultural households and help sustain rural economic activity during periods of water stress.

12. Commission a study of the 18 districts covering Chenab-fed canal networks, irrigated acreage, groundwater dependence, crop production, agricultural employment and the economic value of major crops. A district-level assessment would identify which areas, crops and communities are most exposed to changes in river and canal supplies. It would also help estimate potential losses in agricultural output, farm incomes, employment and agro-industrial activity. This evidence would allow federal and provincial authorities to prioritise vulnerable districts, allocate resources more effectively and develop targeted mitigation measures.

Conclusion

India's decision to suspend the IWT, its ongoing construction and utilization of hydropower on the Chenab river have serious implications for Pakistan's water security. The Chenab waters is a lifeline for the millions of the people living along the river and as demonstrated by the statistics given in this Brief, any extended disruption or uncertainty in water supplies, could impact their crops, lives and livelihoods.

Pakistan, while fighting its case on IWT, should particularly use Chenab's case and its, strategic, legal, economic and agricultural dimensions to strengthen its arguments. The 31 August 2026 PCA ruling offers a solid legal foundation for continuing engagement under the Treaty. Better monitoring, technical documentation and coordinated diplomatic and legal efforts would help bolster Pakistan's case internationally.

To mitigate vulnerability and possible impacts from India's activities, investments at the domestic level are needed in water-efficient irrigation, agricultural early-warning systems, and district-level economic assessments. In the end, Pakistan's efforts to protect its water rights will rely on continued international involvement and improved water governance and resilience in agriculture at home.

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