

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

“Despite the differences between India and Pakistan on various issues, Indus Water Treaty has stood the test of times.” In the light of this statement, discuss the recent developments over this issue.

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 1960, World Bank → basin divided, not shared → design built to keep water out of politics

R2 three wars, standoffs 1987–2019, treaty intact → durability came from institutional insulation, not goodwill

Body flow

eastern rivers India / western rivers Pakistan, ~20% non-consumptive → Permanent Indus Commission + neutral expert + arbitration → insulation from politics → **Drabu**: among the world's most successful → survived 1965, 1971, 1999 → strain both ways: Tulbul objections / 80% grievance / Article XII lock → **Ranjan**: water nationalism, militant pick-up → Uri 2016 “blood and water” → 2019 threat → 23 April 2025 suspension, Article 62 Vienna Convention

Counter-view

leverage limited → **Drabu**'s arithmetic: diversion or storage, thirty to fifty years, severe environmental cost → **Yaqoob**: treaty a “non-exit” partnership

Conclusion routes

R1 treaty lasted because water stayed out of politics → recent turn breaks that insulation

R2 suspension short of termination → **Chellaney**: renegotiate for changed realities as the steadier route

The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, brokered by the World Bank, divided the basin instead of sharing it. The eastern rivers went to India, the western rivers to Pakistan and allowed India about 20% of western-river water for non-consumptive use.

Its machinery of a Permanent Indus Commission, neutral expert determination and arbitration kept water insulated from politics. Iftikhar A. Droba calls it one of the world's most successful water-sharing arrangements. It survived the wars of 1965, 1971 and 1999 & the standoffs from 1987 to 2019.

Pakistan objected to Indian projects on the western rivers for example Tulbul was among them. India resented conceding nearly 80% of the flow. Article XII allows modification only if both ratify. Amit Ranjan argues how a widening supply-demand gap turned this into water nationalism that militant groups took up.

After Uri in 2016, Narendra Modi said "blood & water can't flow together". and in 2019 India threatened to stop every drop. On 23 April 2025, after Pahalgam, India suspended the treaty, invoking Article 62 of the Vienna Convention & a fundamental change of circumstances.

Drabu's arithmetic shows diversion or storage on the western rivers would take 30 to 50 years to affect Pakistan, at severe environmental cost. Asma Yaqoob calls the treaty as a "non-exit" partnership.

The treaty lasted because water stayed out of politics. Suspension stops short of termination, & Brahma Chellaney argues for renegotiating it on the basis of reality.