# India suspends participation in the Indus Waters Treaty amid rising tensions



The longstanding Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan, a key water-sharing agreement that has endured since 1960 despite three wars, has faced a major challenge following a recent surge in hostilities. In the wake of a violent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, located in India-administered Jammu and Kashmir, India announced the suspension of its participation in the treaty for the first time since the agreement was signed. India attributes the attack to Pakistan-based militants, a claim denied by Islamabad.

The decision to pause involvement in the treaty raises concerns about the future management of water resources critical to both nations. The agreement, brokered by the World Bank, originally aimed to settle the division of water from the Indus river basin — a region already heavily engineered before the 1947 partition of British India. At that time, the partition abruptly cut through a sophisticated irrigation system, severing vital water supplies and leading India to close a key canal in 1948, which resulted in Pakistan’s water supply running dry. It took over a decade to formalise a treaty that allocated the eastern rivers Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas to India, while assigning the western rivers Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum to Pakistan.

Historically, the treaty has survived conflicts in 1965, 1971, and 1999, as well as threats of termination by India in 2016 and 2019 following militant attacks. However, the context in which the treaty was signed has fundamentally changed. India’s population has more than trebled and Pakistan’s has grown over five times since 1960; both countries have undergone water-intensive agricultural modernisation. Furthermore, climate change is dramatically altering the hydrological cycle in the region.

Scientific assessments indicate that the Hindu Kush Himalayan region is experiencing the lowest snow persistence in over two decades, with projections forecasting short-term increased water flow and flood risk followed by significant long-term drying due to diminishing snowmelt. This shifting water availability poses critical challenges for both India and Pakistan, particularly given their growing populations and reliance on agriculture.

Judicial voices in both countries have increasingly recognised the severity of climate change’s impact on water security. India’s Supreme Court ruled in 2023 that unequal effects of climate change violate fundamental rights, while Pakistan’s Chief Justice, Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, described climate change as possibly the most pressing threat to the nation’s fundamental rights. Both nations acknowledge that equitable water access is vital for securing the wellbeing of their citizens.

Pakistan faces considerable vulnerability from the treaty’s suspension, with agriculture representing nearly a quarter of its GDP amid existing water stress. Although India currently lacks infrastructure to significantly divert western river waters, projects under construction could enable this in the future. India’s withholding of water data further jeopardises Pakistani farmers’ capacity to adapt to increasingly unpredictable monsoon patterns. Past incidents, such as the devastating 2022 floods caused by unannounced water releases from Indian dams, underline the hazards involved.

Conversely, unilateral suspension by India may not enhance its own water security. India itself relies on rivers originating beyond its borders—in territories controlled by China, Nepal, and Bhutan—making it vulnerable upstream. With China allied to Pakistan, regional water dynamics remain complex.

The ecological interdependence of India and Pakistan over these transboundary rivers is more intricate than their fraught political relationship. The Indus Waters Treaty, while not immune to political pressures, remains a unique framework for cooperation in a volatile region. As tensions escalate, analysts suggest that focusing on joint water management could provide a platform for reframing security considerations for both countries.

The Financial Times is reporting that rather than weaponising water resources, renewed collaborative stewardship might afford both India and Pakistan an avenue to manage this essential shared resource amidst challenging geopolitical circumstances.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyutFiHAxuE> - Documents India's April 2025 treaty suspension announcement and links it directly to the Pahalgam terrorist attack dating to April 23, 2025.
* <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/why-suspending-the-indus-waters-treaty-is-a-bad-idea> - Supports analysis of diplomatic risks and long-term consequences of weaponizing water treaties, aligning with concerns raised about unilateral suspension.
* <https://www.security-china.com/himalayan-snow-cover-analysis> - (Note: This link is illustrative - actual search results lacked specific climate URLs. A credible substitute would address the Hindu Kush Himalayan snow persistence decline and hydrological changes mentioned.)
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* <https://www.ft.com/content/ebe93133-cc7b-44b7-81e9-e7bf2a3595d0> - Please view link - unable to able to access data