# India’s suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty raises water security fears in Pakistan



In July 2023, tens of thousands of farmers in central-eastern Pakistan, including Ali Haider Dogar from Punjab, saw their crops submerged due to the release of water from the Sutlej River by India. This release was part of India's efforts to manage flash floods in its northern regions. Dogar, whose family suffered losses amounting to tens of thousands of pounds, expressed grave concern about the future, especially after India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty following a deadly attack on tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir, which India attributes to Pakistan.

The attack resulted in the deaths of 26 people, an act that Islamabad denies involvement in. In response, India has suspended the treaty, halted trade with Pakistan, expelled diplomats, and suspended visas for Pakistanis. Pakistan reciprocated by suspending trade and closing its airspace to Indian airlines. The Indus Waters Treaty, established in 1960 under World Bank mediation after protracted negotiations, governs the distribution of waters from the Indus River and its tributaries—resources that are crucial for Pakistan's irrigation and hydropower, supporting roughly 80% of its agriculture.

Dogar noted the treaty's suspension "sent shivers down our spines," fearing that India might manipulate water flow to create flash floods or withhold irrigation water, stating, "India can starve us. Because now India won’t be responsible to share any data about flash floods or dam projects with Pakistan."

The longstanding treaty has withstood three wars between the nuclear-armed neighbours and is regarded as one of the most successful water-sharing agreements worldwide. Pakistan’s economy, heavily reliant on agriculture, regards access to these waters as vital. Khalid Khokhar, president of the Farmers’ Association, said, "Water is our life. We can’t compromise on it." He emphasised the farmers' deep dependence, explaining that in times of crisis they often sell valuables or borrow money to sustain their farming activities. Khokhar lamented the low water levels due to insufficient rainfall and called for the issue to remain apolitical.

Expert analyses suggest that despite India’s suspension, immediate cessation of water flow to Pakistan is technically unfeasible due to treaty restrictions limiting India’s ability to build large storage dams on the rivers allocated to Pakistan. Himanshu Thakkar, coordinator of the India-based South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, told Agence France-Presse that any new infrastructure to significantly divert water would require more than a decade to materialise. Pakistani water expert Naseer Memon also stated, "India cannot immediately stop the flow of these rivers, as it is technically unfeasible and economically not viable." However, Memon warned that the humanitarian consequences could be severe if India ignores obligations to share information about river developments, potentially risking millions of lives.

India’s rationale for the suspension included references to “fundamental changes to the circumstances” since the treaty’s inception, citing increasing population pressures and the need to accelerate clean energy development. A senior Pakistani security official, speaking anonymously, alleged that India had long been planning to withdraw from the treaty and used the Kashmir attack as a pretext. He urged the international community to intervene, stating, "We can’t sit and allow India to do it."

The Guardian is reporting on the unfolding tensions that have emerged from the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, highlighting the intricate link between regional security, water resource management, and the livelihoods of millions in Pakistan. The current situation underscores the complexity of managing shared natural resources amidst enduring geopolitical conflicts.

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

## Bibliography

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