

Indus Water Treaty Talks between India and Pakistan

written by iasexam.com | 31/05/2022



[GS Paper 2 - Bilateral, Regional, Global Groupings and Agreements involving India]

Context - A five-member Pakistani delegation has arrived in India for talks over the ongoing water dispute under the Indus Water Commission between the two countries.

Why in the news?

India is building 10 hydro plant projects to cut excess water into Pakistan. Pakistan is expected to raise the projects being constructed by India under the Indus treaty.

About the Indus Water Treaty?

- The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank signed in Karachi in 1960.
- According to this agreement, control over the water flowing in three “eastern” rivers of India — the Beas, the Ravi and the Sutlej was given to India
- The control over the water flowing in three “western” rivers of India — the Indus, the Chenab and the Jhelum was given to Pakistan.

Present Developments

- To utilize the waters of the Eastern rivers which have been allocated to India for exclusive use, India has constructed following dams:
 - Bhakra Dam on Satluj,
 - Pong and Pandoh Dam on Beas and
 - Thein (Ranjit Sagar) on Ravi.
- Other works like Beas-Sutlej Link, Madhopur-Beas Link, Indira Gandhi Nahar Project etc have helped India utilize nearly the entire share (95 %) of waters of Eastern rivers.
- However, about 2 Million Acre Feet (MAF) of water annually from Ravi is reported to be still flowing unutilized to Pakistan below Madhopur.

Historical Background

- Back in time, partitioning the Indus rivers system was inevitable after the Partition of India in 1947. The sharing formula devised after prolonged negotiations sliced the Indus system into two halves.
- Equitable it may have seemed, but the fact remained that India conceded 80.52 percent of the aggregate water flows in the Indus system to Pakistan.
- It also gave Rs 83 crore in pounds sterling to Pakistan to help build replacement canals from the western rivers. Such generosity is unusual of an upper riparian.
- India conceded its upper riparian position on the western rivers for the complete rights on the eastern rivers. Water was critical for India's development plans.

Rights Accorded to India

- The treaty allowed India to use western rivers water for limited irrigation use and unrestricted use for power generation, domestic industrial and non-consumptive uses such as navigation, floating of property, fish culture, etc.

- It lays down precise regulations to build any water or hydel projects. India has been given the right to generate hydroelectricity through run-of-the-river projects on the western rivers subject to specific criteria for design and operation.
- The pact also gives the right to Pakistan to raise objections to designs of Indian hydroelectric projects on the western rivers.

Significance of the Treaty

- It is a treaty that is often cited as an example of the possibilities of peaceful coexistence that exist despite the troubled relationship. It has survived 3 crucial wars.
- It may be listed among the most successful international treaties as it has withstood the test of time.

Reasons behind Continuation of the Treaty

- It is for India's generosity towards Pakistan for sharing waters of its own rivers. India has refrained from weaponizing waters. Pakistan cannot survive without this treaty.
- About 80% of Pakistan's agriculture depends on Indus and the riparian rivers waters.
- Backtracking on the treaty could affect India's stand as a global reliable partner who disrespects bilateral agreements.
- Responding to state sponsor of terrorism by Pakistan, India can escalate a water war , which can kill the crippling economy of Pakistan.
- If India wants, it can either flood or drought-starve Pakistan by not obligating to this treaty.
- The Indian PM Shri Narendra Modi has clearly stated that "Blood and waters cannot flow together". There is no reason to believe that India could start a water war with Pakistan on humanitarian grounds.
- Floods and droughts will starve ordinary Pakistanis while their politicians would still live in luxury.

Way forward

The role of India, as a responsible upper riparian abiding by the provisions of the treaty, has been remarkable. However, India needs to rethink or re-negotiate this treaty. Just like water affects ordinary Pakistanis, so does terrorism affects Indians.