

INDUS WATER TREATY SUSPENSION: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

NEWS: What India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty means for Pakistan — and for itself

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

After the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, India's Cabinet Committee on Security implemented a 5-point action plan including suspending the Indus Waters Treaty and diplomatic downgrades, while Pakistan responded by suspending the Simla Agreement. These escalations mark a breakdown in bilateral ties, risking regional instability and weakening existing peace frameworks.


Context: Recent Escalation Post-Pahalgam Attack

- The terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir in April 2025 killed 26 civilians and was linked to Pakistan-based terror outfits.
- In response, India's Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) announced a 5-point action plan targeting Pakistan's diplomatic, water-sharing, and cross-border engagement.
- Pakistan retaliated by suspending the Simla Agreement, revoking visas under SAARC, and threatening retaliation over the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

- It is the apex decision-making body for national security and strategic affairs in India.
- Composed of the Prime Minister (Chairperson) and ministers of Home, Defence, External Affairs, and Finance.
- The NSA acts as a key advisor and coordinator for CCS decisions.
- The current structure was formalized post-Kargil War (1999), though similar setups existed since Nehru's tenure.

India will 'exploit to the maximum' the water of Pakistan-controlled rivers as per the water sharing pact




Decision to exploit to the maximum the capacity of three of the rivers that are under Pakistan's control - Indus, Chenab and Jhelum-- in the areas of hydro power, irrigation and storage

Unilateral suspension of 1987 Tulbul navigation project to be reviewed. The project was suspended in 2007

The decision to maximise the water resources for irrigation will address the 'pre-existing' sentiment of people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have complained in the past about the treaty not being fair to them

The meeting came as India weighed its options to hit back at Pakistan in the aftermath of the Uri attack, triggering demands that the government scrap the water distribution pact to mount pressure on Pakistan

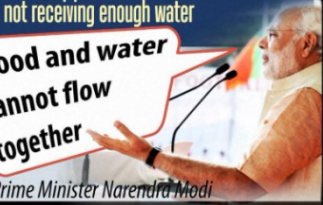
Indus water treaty



It was signed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan President Ayub Khan in **September 1960**, water of 6 rivers - Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum - were to be shared between the two countries

■ Pakistan has been complaining about not receiving enough water

Blood and water cannot flow together



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

PTI GRAPHICS

India's 5-Point Action Plan (April 2025)

- **Suspension of Indus Waters Treaty obligations** to Pakistan.
- **Closure of the Attari-Wagah border checkpoint**, halting cross-border movement and trade.
- **Cancellation of SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme** for Pakistani nationals.
- **Expulsion of Pakistani military attachés and advisors** stationed in India.
- **Reduction in diplomatic staff** in both Indian and Pakistani High Commissions.

Pakistan's Counter-Measures

- **Suspension of the 1972 Simla Agreement**, undermining the bilateral framework for peace.
- **Expulsion of Indian military attachés**, declaring them persona non grata.
- **Cancellation of SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme** for Indian officials.
- **Closure of Attari-Wagah trade route**, reciprocating India's move.

About the Simla Agreement (1972)

- Signed post the 1971 war to promote peaceful bilateral resolution.
- Key provisions:
 1. Commitment to resolve disputes bilaterally.
 2. Mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference.
 3. Recognition and respect for the Line of Control (LoC).
 4. Restoration of diplomatic and trade ties.
 5. India's release of 93,000 Pakistani POWs and captured territory as goodwill.

Implications of Simla Agreement Suspension

- Weakens India's consistent diplomatic position that **Kashmir is a bilateral issue**.
- Opens space for **third-party involvement**, including UN or OIC interference.
- Heightens risk of **ceasefire violations and military miscalculations** along the LoC.
- Symbolizes **breakdown of bilateral diplomatic channels**.
- Erodes decades of peacebuilding efforts post-1971 and may regress India–Pakistan ties to a pre-Simla hostility phase.

About the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)

- Signed in 1960 with World Bank mediation.
- **India gets control over eastern rivers** (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi); **Pakistan over western rivers** (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab).
- Dispute resolution includes three-tier mechanism: PIC → Neutral Expert → Court of Arbitration.
- India's projects like Kishanganga and Ratle have been legally contested by Pakistan under IWT.

Impact of IWT Suspension on Pakistan

- **Major water insecurity** as 80% of water used in Pakistan is from Indus basin.
- **Agriculture crisis**: 23% of GDP and 68% rural employment depend on irrigation.
- **Major food crops** (wheat, rice, cotton) will be hit; Punjab and Sindh worst affected.
- **Limited storage capacity** (14.4 MAF), and overuse of groundwater exacerbate crisis.
- Could lead to **rural unrest, economic slowdown, and inter-provincial tensions**.

- May push Pakistan toward diplomatic isolation as India invokes terror linkage as rationale.

Impact of IWT Suspension on India

- **Diplomatic blowback:** India risks being seen as undermining a successful water-sharing model.
- **Global criticism and Kashmir internationalization** could follow.
- India needs to **ramp up infrastructure** to fully utilize its share of western rivers (storage, dams, irrigation).
- Could increase **border tensions or proxy escalations** by Pakistan in response.

SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES)

- Initiated in 1992 for facilitating official and cultural travel among SAARC nations.
- Allows approved categories like officials, MPs, journalists to travel visa-free.
- Its suspension marks another blow to regional cooperation and diplomatic mobility.

India–Pakistan Border Overview

- **Total length:** 3,323 km, shared by 4 Indian states.
- **Segments:**
 1. International Border (IB): Gujarat to Jammu.
 2. Line of Control (LoC): Divides J&K and PoK.
 3. Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL): Siachen area.
- **Border security:** BSF guards IB, Army secures LoC and AGPL.
- **Major crossings:** Attari-Wagah, Munabao-Khokhrapar (Thar Express), Uri–Muzaffarabad, Poonch–Rawalakot.
- **Surveillance upgrades:** Fencing, floodlights, laser walls, drones, and night vision sensors deployed.

Historical Phases of India–Pakistan Relations

- **1947–2001:** Hostility phase — Partition, 3 wars, Kargil, and Parliament attack.
- **2001–2008:** Pacification phase — Dialogue resumed (Lahore, Agra Summits); ended after Mumbai attacks.

- **2008–2015:** Passive phase — Low-level interactions, PM visits, some symbolic engagements.
- **2015–Present:** Renewed hostility — Pulwama, Balakot strikes, and now Pahalgam attack escalating tensions again.

Major Issues in India–Pakistan Relations

- **Jammu & Kashmir Dispute:** Rooted in 1947's accession, remains unresolved. India opposes UN intervention; Pakistan demands plebiscite.
- **Cross-Border Terrorism:** Major attacks include 2001 Parliament, 2008 Mumbai, 2016 Uri, 2019 Pulwama, 2025 Pahalgam.
- **Water Sharing Disputes under IWT:** Projects like Kishanganga and Ratle contested.
- **Trade Restrictions:** LoC trade is symbolic and frequently suspended. MFN status revoked post-Pulwama.
- **Sir Creek & Siachen Disputes:** Unresolved boundary demarcation and glacier occupation issues.
- **China Factor:** China's CPEC project through PoK aggravates tensions; India opposes due to sovereignty violations.

People-to-People and Cultural Relations

- Despite hostility, deep **shared cultural roots** exist: language, religion, music, and cuisine.
- **Religious visits** (e.g., Nankana Sahib, Ajmer Sharif) continue under special arrangements.
- **Popular culture and media** remain influential across the border.
- **Track-II diplomacy** efforts like Aman ki Asha tried to revive people-level engagement.
- However, repeated terror incidents have diminished these connections over time.

Challenges to Peace

- Deep mistrust over **terrorism and proxy war strategies**.
- Breakdown of formal dialogue channels post-Pulwama.
- Militarized borders, ceasefire violations, and unstable diplomatic ties.
- Civil-military imbalance in Pakistan's governance hinders consistent peace policy.
- India's stand: Terror and talks cannot go together.

Way Forward

- **No Dialogue Without Accountability:** Terrorism must end for formal talks to resume.
- **Phased Dialogue Reboot:** If possible, revive Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue (CBD) and back-channel diplomacy.
- **Boost People-to-People Contact:** Religious, cultural, and academic exchanges could build grassroots trust.
- **Reform Indus Waters Framework:** If renegotiated, must address climate change, new infrastructure, and equitable usage.
- **Border CBMs:** Hotlines, early warnings, joint military observers could reduce risk of conflict.
- **Multilateral Engagement:** Platforms like SAARC, SCO can facilitate technical-level cooperation.
- **Encouraging Civilian Diplomacy in Pakistan:** Peace is more feasible with civilian-led foreign policy.

Conclusion

- The Pahalgam attack and India's retaliatory measures mark a turning point in bilateral ties, shifting from dialogue to deterrence.
- While peace remains ideal, national security and zero tolerance for terror have become India's new baseline.
- Any meaningful engagement in the future will require structural reforms in Pakistan's policy, sustained efforts for de-escalation, and verifiable confidence-building measures.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-indias-suspension-of-the-indus-waters-treaty-means-for-pakistan-and-for-itself-9962032/>