Geography · GS - I

Present an account of the Indus Water Treaty and examine its ecological, economic and political implications in the context of changing bilateral relations.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2016	GS - I	Geography

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Indus Water Treaty; World Bank; eastern and western rivers; water allocation; irrigation; hydropower; ecological flows; India-Pakistan relations

Model Answer

Introduction

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), signed by India and Pakistan in 1960 with the World Bank's involvement, established a framework for sharing the waters of the Indus river system despite persistent political tensions.

Key Provisions

- The treaty allocated the waters of the **eastern rivers—Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—primarily to India**.
- The **western rivers—Indus, Jhelum and Chenab—were allocated primarily to Pakistan**, while India retained specified uses, including domestic use, non-consumptive use, limited irrigation and hydropower development subject to treaty conditions.
- A Permanent Indus Commission was established to facilitate cooperation and exchange information.
- The treaty provided mechanisms for resolving differences, disputes and technical disagreements.

Ecological Implications

The river system supports wetlands, fisheries, floodplains and diverse ecosystems. Infrastructure development and altered flows can affect sediment transport, aquatic habitats and environmental flows. Climate change, glacier retreat, changing precipitation and rising water demand create additional uncertainties.

Economic Implications

- The treaty supports irrigation and agricultural production, particularly in Pakistan.
- India can utilise western rivers for permitted purposes, including hydropower projects that comply with treaty provisions.
- Cooperation is important for water security, food production and regional development.
- Disputes over projects can increase costs and delay infrastructure investment.

Political Implications

The treaty survived several periods of conflict and remained an important framework for technical cooperation. However, terrorism, cross-border tensions and disagreements over hydropower projects have strained bilateral relations. The treaty's dispute-resolution mechanisms have faced increasing pressure.

Way Forward

Both countries need transparent hydrological data exchange, scientific cooperation, effective dispute resolution and adaptation to climate change. Water security should be addressed alongside wider regional security concerns.

Conclusion

The treaty has provided a durable framework for transboundary water sharing, but changing ecological conditions and political relations make constructive, rules-based engagement increasingly important.

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