

MCQ Question · mcqquestion.com

The Indus Waters Treaty: From 1960 to Abeyance

Free · Share

The Indus Waters Treaty: From 1960 to Abeyance

The Indus Waters Treaty has lasted since 1960. In April 2025 India said it would hold the treaty in abeyance. On 31 August 2026 a Court of Arbitration said the treaty remains fully in force, and India rejected that ruling. This lesson covers the treaty, its dispute ladder and the case, as of 9 October 2026.

At a glance

Four key facts on this topic

01 **Signed**19 September 1960, at Karachi.

02 **Split**Ravi, Beas, Sutlej to India. Indus, Jhelum, Chenab to Pakistan.

03 **Ladder**Commission, Neutral Expert, Court of Arbitration.

04 **31 Aug 2026**Court: the treaty remains fully in force. India rejects it.

Must Know · The treaty

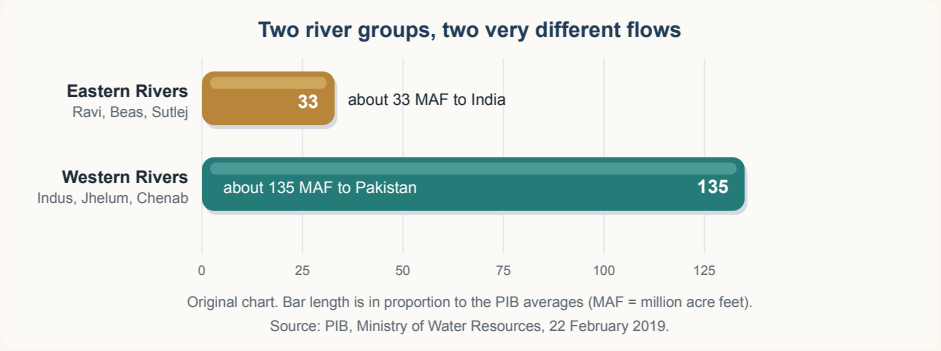
1 How was the treaty born?

1.1 Who signed the Indus Waters Treaty, and when?

The treaty text says it was done in English at Karachi on the nineteenth day of September 1960. It takes effect from 1 April 1960, once the ratifications are exchanged.

The World Bank says it was signed after nine years of talks between India and Pakistan, with the help of the World Bank. The Bank is also a signatory.

1.2 How were the six rivers split?



Original chart of the two PIB averages.

The treaty gives the Eastern Rivers to India and the Western Rivers to Pakistan. Article II makes the Eastern Rivers waters available for India's **unrestricted use**.

- **Eastern Rivers:** Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. PIB says they average around 33 million acre feet (MAF).
- **Western Rivers:** Indus, Jhelum and Chenab. PIB says they average around 135 MAF.

> 7. **Think it through:** Why is the split called lopsided? See answer ↓

1.3 How has India used its own share?



Bhakra Nangal Dam. Photo taken by Kawal Singh in 2008. Public domain. Credit: Wikimedia Commons. Resized.

PIB says India built Bhakra Dam on the Sutlej, Pong and Pandoh dams on the Beas, and Thein on the Ravi. It says India uses nearly 95% of its Eastern Rivers share.

PIB adds that about 2 MAF a year of Ravi water still flows to Pakistan below Madhopur. The figures are PIB’s, from February 2019.

> **Quick check 1.** True or false: The Western Rivers were allocated to India. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: treaties.un.org; worldbank.org; pib.gov.in

2 What does the treaty say?

2.1 What must India do on the Western Rivers?

Article III says India must **let flow** all the waters of the Western Rivers. It must not permit any interference with them.

There are four exceptions. They are listed in Article III(2).

- Domestic use.
- Non-consumptive use.
- Agricultural use, as set out in Annexure C.
- Generation of hydro-electric power, as set out in Annexure D.

PIB adds that this hydropower right covers run-of-the-river projects. Their design and operation must meet the treaty's criteria.

2.2 Who paid for Pakistan's replacement works?

Article V says India agrees to make a fixed contribution of 62,060,000 pounds sterling towards the cost of the works.

2.3 How is the treaty built, and how is it changed?

Article XII says the treaty consists of the Preamble, the Articles and Annexures A to H.

It can be modified only by a duly ratified treaty between the two Governments. It continues in force until terminated the same way.

8. **Think it through:** What does that mean for one side acting alone? See answer ↓

Quick check 2. True or false: Under Article XII, the treaty can be ended by a ratified treaty between both governments. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

3 How are disputes settled?

3.1 What is the three-step ladder?



Original diagram of the three steps.

The World Bank explains the ladder simply. Questions go to the Commission. Differences go to a Neutral Expert. Disputes go to a Court of Arbitration.

Article IX starts the same way. A question is first examined by the Commission, which tries to settle it by agreement.

3.2 What is the Permanent Indus Commission?

- Each country creates a permanent post of Commissioner for Indus Waters.
- The two Commissioners together form the Commission.
- It meets at least once a year, alternately in India and Pakistan.
- It makes a general tour of inspection once in every five years.

These points come from Article VIII.

3.3 What does the World Bank do?

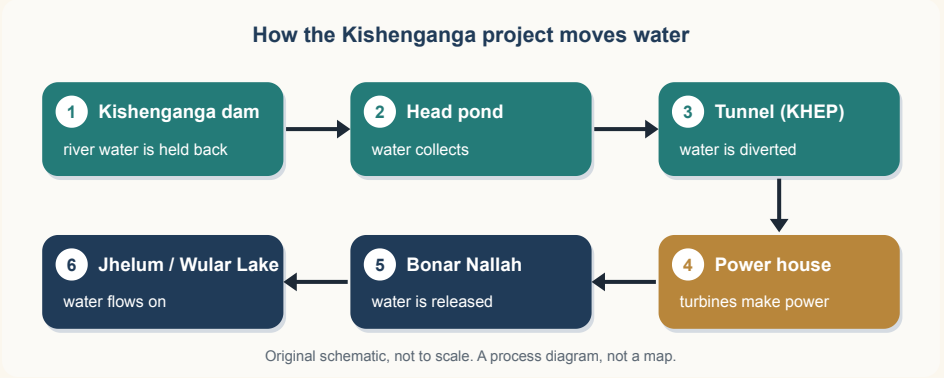
The World Bank calls its own role limited and procedural. It only designates people for Neutral Expert or Court of Arbitration roles, when a party asks.

In October 2022 it appointed Michel Lino as Neutral Expert and Sean Murphy as chairman of the Court. The Bank says the two mechanisms are independent.

> **Quick check 3.** True or false: A routine question under the treaty is first examined by the Court of Arbitration. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

4 The Kishenganga and Ratle case

4.1 What is the quarrel about?

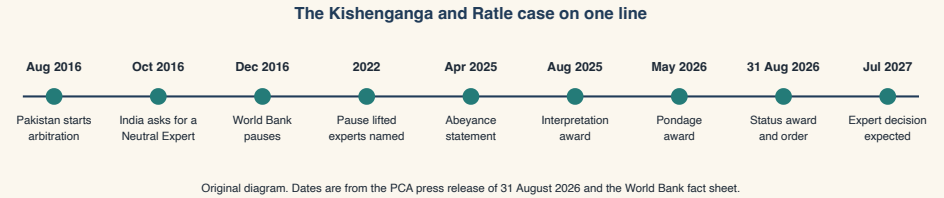


Original schematic of how the Kishenganga project moves water. It is a process diagram, not a map, and is not to scale.

The World Bank says the disagreement is about the design of two plants. They are Kishenganga (330 MW) and Ratle (850 MW). Both lie in India on tributaries of the Jhelum and Chenab.

The two countries disagree over whether the designs of these plants contravene the treaty.

4.2 Why are there two tracks?



Original diagram of the dates named in this lesson.

The Court's release gives the order of events. Pakistan began arbitration in August 2016. India asked for a Neutral Expert in October 2016.

The World Bank paused both processes in December 2016. The pause was lifted in 2022.

4.3 What has the Court decided so far?

- **6 July 2023:** Award on Competence. The Court rejected India's objections.
- **8 August 2025:** Award on Issues of General Interpretation.
- **10 November 2025:** decision on a request for clarification.
- **15 May 2026:** supplemental award on maximum pondage.

The Neutral Expert's own track is still running. His final decision is expected around 16 July 2027.

He had also ruled on 7 January 2025 on certain competence issues. The PCA released that decision on 20 January 2025.

> **Quick check 4.** True or false: The World Bank paused the appointments in December 2016. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: italaw.com; pca.int

5 What does "abeyance" mean?

5.1 What did India say in April 2025?

The Court's release says India issued a statement on 23 April 2025. It followed an attack in Jammu and Kashmir. All India Radio names the Pahalgam attack.

The statement said the treaty “will be held in abeyance with immediate effect” until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.

5.2 What did the Court say about the word?

On 31 August 2026 the Court said “abeyance” is not used in the treaty. It said the word has no technical meaning in international law.

In law the words for a treaty’s status are **suspension** and **termination**. So the Court proceeded as if India may be claiming one of those two.

5.3 Why did the Court say the treaty stays in force?

- The treaty does not let one party terminate or suspend it, or put it in abeyance.
- No rule allows a State to end a treaty on grounds of its “sovereignty”. Agreements must be kept.
- Three possible grounds were examined: material breach, fundamental change of circumstances, and armed conflict.
- On the terrorism claim, even if it were true, the Court found no material breach of the treaty by Pakistan.
- The Court noted the treaty had remained in force through multiple armed conflicts since 1960.

The decision was unanimous. The Court said none of the grounds could justify suspension or termination. In its words, the treaty remains **fully in force**, and India must observe its obligations.

> **Quick check 5.** True or false: The Court said “abeyance” is a technical term of international law. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: newsonair.gov.in

6 The 2026 ruling

6.1 What did the interim order say about Ratle?

The Court also issued an Order on Interim Measures. It bars India from concreting the Ratle dam wall and power intake above certain levels.

The bar lasts until 90 days after the Neutral Expert's final decision, which is expected in July 2027.

- India must also report changes to the Ratle construction schedule.
- The Court declined two other measures that Pakistan had asked for.

6.2 Who sat on the Court, and did India take part?

The Court is chaired by Professor Sean D. Murphy. India did not take part in this phase.

The Court says it still looked at India's position, as far as its public statements and letters showed it.

6.3 What did India answer?

All India Radio reported on 1 September 2026 that India strongly rejected the ruling. It said the Ministry of External Affairs called the Court unrecognised and said India would not be bound.

The report adds that the Ministry said the treaty remains in abeyance. It also said the panel has no jurisdiction over India's sovereign decisions.

The report says India argues the panel itself was set up in violation of the treaty. This is India's view, not the Court's.

Quick check 6. True or false: India accepted the 31 August 2026 ruling. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Practice

7 Exam traps

7.1 Which mix-ups does this topic invite?

- **Signed:** 19 September 1960 at Karachi.
- **Eastern Rivers:** Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, to India.
- **Western Rivers:** Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, to Pakistan, with India's four uses.
- **Ladder:** question, difference, dispute.
- **Abeyance:** 23 April 2025, not Uri in 2016.

- **31 August 2026:** the Court said the treaty remains fully in force. India rejects this.

Remember this

- **Signed:** Karachi, 19 September 1960, with the World Bank as co-signatory.
- **Split:** Eastern Rivers to India, Western Rivers to Pakistan.
- **Let flow:** Article III, with four uses for India.
- **Ladder:** Commission, Neutral Expert, Court of Arbitration.
- **Ending it:** only by a ratified treaty between both governments.
- **As of 9 October 2026:** the Court says the treaty is fully in force. India rejects the ruling.

Explain it back: Say in your own words why the Court said “abeyance” is not a legal status. Then name the three steps of the dispute ladder.

Practice MCQs

1. In what year was the Indus Waters Treaty signed?

A. 1947

B. 1972

C. 1950

D. 1960

See answer ↓

2. Which organization brokered the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan?

A. World Bank

B. United Nations

C. International Monetary Fund

D. World Trade Organization

See answer ↓

3. Under the Indus Waters Treaty, which three rivers are the Eastern Rivers allocated to India for unrestricted use?

A. Indus, Jhelum and Chenab

B. Ganga, Yamuna and Brahmaputra

C. Ravi, Beas and Sutlej

D. Indus, Ravi and Chenab

See answer ↓

4. On what date did India place the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, and following which attack?

A. 18 September 2016, after the Uri attack

B. 23 April 2025, after the Uri attack

C. 14 February 2019, after the Pulwama attack

D. 23 April 2025, after the Pahalgam attack

See answer ↓

5. Under Article IX of the Indus Waters Treaty, which body hears a routine question first?

A. Permanent Indus Commission

B. International Court of Justice

C. Court of Arbitration

D. Neutral Expert

See answer ↓

6. The 1960 Indus Waters Treaty gave the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to one country.

Which country got them, and which got the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej)?

A. The treaty covers only the Indus itself, not its tributaries

B. Western rivers to Pakistan, eastern rivers to India

C. All six rivers were allocated jointly to both countries

D. Western rivers to India, eastern rivers to Pakistan

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **D.** The treaty text says it was done at Karachi on the nineteenth day of September 1960. The World Bank fact sheet says it was signed in 1960 after nine years of talks. The other years are not given anywhere in the treaty. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** The World Bank fact sheet says the treaty was signed after nine years of negotiations with the help of the World Bank. It adds that the Bank is also a signatory. The Bank calls its own role limited and procedural. The Court's 2026 release also records the Bank's pause of 2016 and its restart in 2022. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** Article II makes the Eastern Rivers available for India's unrestricted use. The World Bank fact sheet names them as the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. The Indus, Jhelum and Chenab are the Western Rivers. PIB puts the Eastern Rivers at about 33 million acre feet and the Western Rivers at about 135. Our own arithmetic makes the Eastern share about one-fifth. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** The Court of Arbitration's press release quotes India's statement of 23 April 2025 that the treaty would be held in abeyance. It says the statement followed an attack in Jammu and Kashmir. All India Radio names the Pahalgam attack. The reports do not name Uri or Pulwama as the trigger. ↑ Q4
5. **A.** Article IX says a question about the treaty is first examined by the Commission. The Commission tries to settle it by agreement. If it cannot, a difference is deemed to arise, and some differences go to a Neutral Expert. The World Bank fact sheet adds that disputes go to a Court of Arbitration. The International Court of Justice is not part of this ladder. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** The World Bank fact sheet allocates the Western Rivers to Pakistan and the Eastern Rivers to India. Article III makes India let flow all the Western Rivers waters, apart from four listed uses. PIB agrees and adds that India may build run-of-the-river hydropower on the Western Rivers. So the other three options are wrong. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** The World Bank fact sheet allocates the Western Rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan and the Eastern Rivers to India. ↑ 1
2. **True.** Article XII(4) says the treaty continues in force until terminated by a duly ratified treaty concluded between the two Governments. ↑ 2

3. **False.** Article IX says a question is first examined by the Permanent Indus Commission. ↑ 3
4. **True.** The Court's release says the World Bank decided in December 2016 to pause the process, and the pause was lifted in 2022. ↑ 4
5. **False.** The Court said the word is not used in the treaty and has no technical meaning in international law. ↑ 5
6. **False.** All India Radio reported on 1 September 2026 that India strongly rejected it and said it would not be bound. ↑ 6
7. **Think it through.** Count the flows. 33 of 168 MAF is about one-fifth. So the Western Rivers carry about four-fifths. This is our own arithmetic from the PIB figures. ↑ 7
8. **Think it through.** On the plain words, the treaty names no route for one government to end it. The 2026 Court said the same. Read more in card 5. ↑ 8

Curated by Arsalan Zuberi · mcqquestion.com



Scan to read online

https://mcqquestion.com/articles/intlrel0083-the-indus-waters-treaty-from-1960-to-abeyance/