

After Pahalgam

The Pahalgam Attack and Its Aftermath: A Turning Point in India's Water Policy Towards Pakistan?

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- Indus Waters Treaty
- India-Pakistan Relations
- Water as Strategic Leverage
- Militarized Kashmir
- Security Failure
- Suspension of Indus Treaty

The Pahalgam attack of April 2025 has shocked the entire region. A militant assault in the heavily secured Baisaran Valley forced India to rethink not only its security policies but also its overall stance toward Pakistan. However, many questions have been raised by the public. Since Pahalgam is a highly militarized zone, people are questioning how such an attack could happen so easily. Some claim it was a major security lapse, while others suggest the attack might have been politically motivated. In this tense environment, India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) has gained major attention, with many seeing it as a significant shift in regional dynamics.

Signed in 1960 with World Bank assistance, the Indus Waters Treaty has been one of the most successful examples of international water cooperation. It divided control over the Indus river system between India and Pakistan, allowing India rights over the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) and Pakistan rights over the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab). Even during wars and diplomatic stand-offs, both countries honored the agreement. However, after the Pahalgam

incident, India signaled that maintaining normal treaties with a “sponsor of terror” was no longer acceptable.

By suspending the treaty, India is now treating water as a tool of strategic pressure. Officials are proposing ways to fully utilize India’s share of the rivers and restrict excess flows to Pakistan. Some experts argue that India might even maximize non-consumptive uses, like hydroelectric projects, on western rivers — still within treaty limits but putting new pressure on Pakistan. This represents a major policy change, where water, once treated separately from conflict, is now being linked to national security.

For Pakistan, this move is extremely concerning. Its economy and agriculture are heavily dependent on the Indus basin. Any disruption could worsen its already serious water shortages and economic problems. Pakistani officials have called the suspension a “violation” and warned of raising the issue at international forums like the UN and the World Bank.

At the same time, India’s decision carries risks. The Indus Waters Treaty was seen globally as a rare success between hostile neighbors. Suspending it could draw international criticism and possibly legal challenges. Also, building the infrastructure needed to fully divert and utilize India’s share of river water will require years of effort and massive funding.

In conclusion, the Pahalgam attack has clearly marked a new phase in India-Pakistan relations. Water, which was kept separate from politics for over six decades, has now become a strategic weapon. Whether this move strengthens India’s position, weakens Pakistan’s stability, or leads to bigger conflicts remains to be seen. What is certain is that after Pahalgam, the idea of keeping politics and rivers apart may no longer be possible.

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