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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Water as Leverage: On the Indus Treaty in Abeyance

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY



Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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Water as Leverage: On the Indus Treaty in Abeyance

 **The Indian Express**

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GS2
GS3

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Holding the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance gives India leverage, but building dams takes years. How does India convert a diplomatic posture into real capacity without harming its own people downstream?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Indian Express](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources**
HOW

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

India is fast-tracking the **930 MW Kirthai-II** project on the **Chenab**, part of a wider push on western-river hydropower now that the **Indus Waters Treaty** is held **in abeyance** after the Pahalgam terror attack. The move turns water into strategic leverage. For an aspirant, this is a GS2 (India-Pakistan, treaties) and GS3 (energy, water) case on how a diplomatic posture must be matched by real capacity, with the Government of India's stand on J&K front and centre.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

With the **Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance**, India is accelerating **Chenab hydropower** (Kirthai-II), asserting its rights and gaining **strategic leverage** against cross-border terrorism, while serving **energy security**. But hydropower takes years, so the leverage is long-term, and haste risks ecological harm. The fix: build with **safeguards and federal coordination**, and keep open the option to renegotiate, not just abandon, the treaty.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
Indus Waters Treaty (1960)	World Bank-brokered water-sharing pact	Gives India run-of-river rights on western rivers
Abeyance	Treaty suspended in operation by India (2025)	Frees India from procedural constraints
Run-of-river	Hydropower using river flow, minimal storage	The permissible project type on western rivers
Kirthai-II	930 MW Chenab project, Kishtwar, J&K	The flagship of the accelerated push

THE ANALYSIS: POSTURE AND SUBSTANCE

- ❶ **The leverage is real.** Abeyance lets India fast-track projects long held up by the treaty's process, asserting its rights.
- ❷ **But it is slow.** Hydropower projects take years; the pressure on Pakistan builds over time, not overnight.
- ❸ **It doubles as energy security.** The western rivers hold large untapped potential for power-deficit northern India.
- ❹ **It must be done responsibly.** Building in a fragile, seismic Himalayan zone demands ecological and safety safeguards and federal coordination.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Indus Waters Treaty, 1960, signed by Nehru and Ayub Khan, brokered by the **World Bank**; eastern rivers (**Ravi, Beas, Sutlej**) to India; western rivers (**Indus, Jhelum, Chenab**) largely to Pakistan; India holds **in abeyance** since 2025. **The project: Kirthai-II**, 930 MW, run-of-river, Chenab, Kishtwar, J&K; developer **CVPPL** (NHPC 51% + JKSPDC 49%); other Chenab projects: Pakal Dul, Kiru, Kwar, Ratle.

Dispute mechanism: the treaty's **Permanent Indus Commission**, *Neutral Expert*, and *Court of Arbitration*. **GoI stand:** J&K, including illegally occupied areas, is an integral part of India; Pakistan must vacate occupied territory.

THE DEBATE

Argument that abeyance is mostly symbolic: Hydropower takes years, so the leverage is long-term, and rushing risks ecological and downstream harm within India.

Argument that it is a real lever: Abeyance removes treaty constraints, lets India assert its rights, and signals resolve after cross-border terrorism.

The balanced verdict: The posture is justified but must be **converted into capacity**. Accelerate within India's rights, build with safeguards, address federal concerns, and keep the option to **renegotiate** the treaty rather than abandon it outright.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A bold diplomatic move (suspending a treaty, announcing a target) is a signal; its value depends on the capacity to follow through. The strong answer asks: what must be built, funded or reformed to make the signal real? Posture without capacity is bluff. This applies to water leverage, defence pledges, and economic targets alike.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Pahalgam attack -> India holds Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance -> fast-track Chenab projects (Kirthai-II) -> leverage + energy security. The condition: construction capacity + ecological/seismic safeguards + federal coordination + option to renegotiate -> posture becomes strength.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Accelerate run-of-river projects** within India's rights on the western rivers.
- ② **Build with ecological and seismic safeguards** in the fragile Himalayan zone.
- ③ **Address federal and local concerns** around displacement and benefit-sharing.
- ④ **Keep open the option to renegotiate** the treaty, not merely discard it.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

“India’s decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance is a strategic signal that must be backed by capacity and prudence.” Critically examine. (250 words)

“Water can be leverage, but a treaty suspended is only a signal; it becomes strength when matched by the capacity to build and the prudence to build responsibly.”

Indus Waters Treaty 1960 (Nehru-Ayub, World Bank) · eastern rivers Ravi/Beas/Sutlej; western Indus/Jhelum/Chenab · Permanent Indus Commission · Kirthai-II (930 MW, CVPPL) · in abeyance since 2025.

Is using a water treaty as strategic leverage against terrorism justified, and where are its limits?

Connects to GS2 PYQs on India-Pakistan relations and trans-boundary rivers; probable forward question is the signal-versus-capacity framing above.

today’s Kirthai-II article; static GS2 on India-Pakistan and GS3 on water resources and hydropower.

Sources: Indian Express, MEA, Ministry of Jal Shakti

Source: Water as Leverage: On the Indus Treaty in Abeyance — Ujjiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

India’s acceleration of Chenab hydropower projects like Kirthai-II, with the Indus Waters Treaty held in abeyance after the Pahalgam attack, turns water into a form of strategic leverage against cross-border terrorism, but the posture must be matched by real construction capacity, ecological care and federal coordination to be more than symbolic.

✓ SUPPORTING

- Holding the treaty in abeyance frees India to fast-track previously constrained run-of-river projects on the western rivers, asserting its legitimate rights.
- The western rivers hold large untapped hydropower potential for power-deficit northern India, aligning strategy with energy security.

- India's sovereign position is that Jammu and Kashmir, including illegally occupied areas, is an integral part of India, framing the water question within territorial integrity.

COUNTER

Some caution that hydropower projects take years to build, that the leverage is therefore long-term, and that haste risks ecological and downstream harm within India itself.

WAY FORWARD

Convert the posture into capacity by accelerating run-of-river projects within India's rights, ensure ecological and seismic safeguards, address federal and local concerns, and keep open the option of renegotiating rather than abandoning the treaty.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance is a strategic signal that must be backed by capacity and prudence." Critically examine. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

After the Pahalgam terror attack, India placed the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, a decision that turns a 1960 water-sharing arrangement into an instrument of strategic signalling. The question is whether the signal can become substance.

BODY

The Indus Waters Treaty (1960), brokered by the World Bank, gave India the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) and Pakistan the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab), with India retaining limited non-consumptive and run-of-river rights on the western rivers. By holding the treaty in abeyance, India has freed itself from the treaty's procedural constraints to accelerate projects like the 930 MW Kirthai-II on the Chenab, developed by CVPPL (NHPC and the J&K power corporation).

The leverage is real but slow: large hydropower projects take years to build, so the pressure on Pakistan

is long-term rather than immediate, and the gains are as much about energy security for power-deficit northern India as about coercion. India's sovereign frame is clear: Jammu and Kashmir, including areas under Pakistan's illegal occupation, is an integral part of India, and Pakistan must vacate the territory it illegally occupies.

But a posture is only as strong as the capacity behind it. To make the abeyance meaningful, India must build, with ecological and seismic safeguards in a fragile Himalayan zone, with federal and local concerns addressed, and while keeping open the option to renegotiate the treaty rather than simply discard it.

CONCLUSION

Water can be leverage, but only if backed by the capacity to build and the prudence to do so responsibly. India's abeyance is a strong signal; turning it into strength is the harder task.

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