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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Next India-Bangladesh Ganges Treaty Must Also Protect the River

 INDIAN EXPRESS

13 August 2026 ·

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ENVIRONMENT

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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The Next India-Bangladesh Ganges Treaty Must Also Protect the River

 The Indian Express

13 August 2026

GS1

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The editorial argues the next Ganga treaty must protect ecological flow, not just allocate water quotas. If ecological flow guarantees reduce the water available for either country's allocation, how should negotiators resolve the trade-off between a healthy river and each side's consumptive needs?"

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A treaty that only divides the water says nothing about whether there will be enough water left to divide the next time it comes up for renewal.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This editorial connects a **bilateral** treaty renewal to a substantive shift in how transboundary river governance should be conceived, from pure water-quantity allocation to ecological flow and basin resilience. This distinction is directly relevant to India's other transboundary river negotiations and is a recurring theme across GS1 (river systems), GS2 (bilateral treaty frameworks) and GS3 (water resource management).

GS Paper 1: Important geophysical phenomena, river systems and their distribution.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood relations; bilateral, regional agreements involving India.

GS Paper 3: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; water resource management.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
1996 Ganga Waters Treaty	The India-Bangladesh dry-season water-sharing agreement at Farakka	The specific treaty nearing renewal
Ecological flow	The minimum river flow needed to sustain hydrological and ecological function	The editorial's central proposed addition
Basin resilience	Accounting for climate variability, sedimentation, and long-term sustainability in river governance	The broader negotiating objective distinct from allocation
Farakka Barrage	The structure regulating the water-sharing arrangement's operational point	Key geographic/institutional anchor

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The **Ganga Waters Treaty, 1996**, signed between India and Bangladesh, established a formula for sharing the Ganga's dry-season flow at the **Farakka Barrage**, addressing decades of prior dispute over water allocation, particularly during the critical January-to-May low-flow period affecting agriculture, navigation and salinity intrusion in Bangladesh's delta region. The treaty has a defined term nearing expiry, prompting renewal negotiations between the two governments.

THE ANALYSIS

- 1. The allocation-versus-protection distinction is the editorial's core analytical contribution.** A treaty focused purely on dividing water quantity between two parties treats the river as a resource stock to be shared, while a treaty incorporating ecological flow guarantees treats the river's own functioning as a value to be protected, a meaningfully different negotiating frame.
- 2. Basin resilience broadens the negotiation beyond a bilateral quantity dispute into a shared sustainability problem.** Sedimentation, climate variability and upstream withdrawal pressures affect both countries' long-term water security regardless of how any given year's quota is divided, making resilience a genuinely shared interest rather than a zero-sum allocation question.
- 3. Omitting ecological flow risks a renewal treaty that manages decline rather than prevents it.** If dry-season flows continue to decline and the treaty's framework does not address the underlying causes, future renewals will negotiate over an increasingly diminished resource, a long-term risk the editorial argues the current renewal moment should address.
- 4. The complexity counter-argument is a genuine practical constraint, not a dismissible objection.** Adding ecological and resilience provisions to an already time-pressured bilateral negotiation increases the technical and political complexity of reaching agreement, a real trade-off between comprehensiveness and negotiating feasibility.

5. This has broader relevance to India's other transboundary river arrangements. The same allocation-versus-protection tension applies to India's river-sharing arrangements with Pakistan (Indus Waters Treaty) and Nepal, making this a transferable framework for assessing transboundary water governance generally, not a Bangladesh-specific issue alone.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

Ganga Waters Treaty: signed 1996, India-Bangladesh, governs dry-season sharing at Farakka Barrage

Critical low-flow period addressed: January to May

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT DESCRIBE THE 1996 TREATY AS ALREADY INCLUDING ECOLOGICAL FLOW GUARANTEES. ITS ORIGINAL FRAMEWORK ADDRESSED WATER-QUANTITY ALLOCATION ONLY; ECOLOGICAL FLOW IS THE EDITORIAL'S PROPOSED ADDITION FOR THE RENEWAL NEGOTIATION, NOT AN EXISTING TREATY PROVISION.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR incorporating ecological flow and basin resilience. A treaty silent on the river's own ecological sustainability risks managing an increasingly degraded resource, and basin resilience is a genuinely shared interest between India and Bangladesh regardless of how allocation is divided.

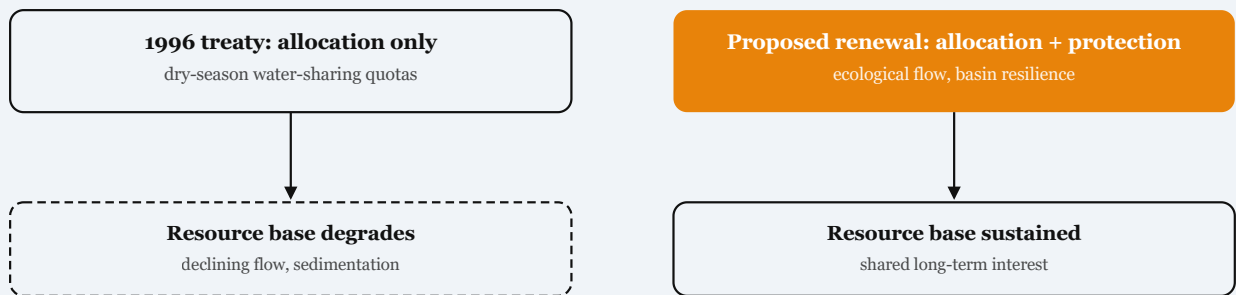
Argument AGAINST adding this complexity now. A time-pressured renewal negotiation risks delay or failure if scope expands significantly beyond the original allocation framework, and either country's domestic water-security priorities may resist provisions perceived as reducing available consumptive allocation.

Balanced verdict. The long-term risk of a purely allocation-focused renewal, managing a shrinking resource rather than protecting a sustainable one, outweighs the short-term negotiating complexity cost, making ecological flow and basin resilience provisions a justified, if practically challenging, addition to the renewal agenda.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: **when renewing or negotiating a transboundary resource-sharing agreement, distinguish allocation questions (how is the resource divided) from protection questions (is the resource itself being sustained), and check whether the negotiation addresses both.** An agreement that resolves allocation while ignoring protection risks producing diminishing returns for all parties over successive renewal cycles.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



An allocation-only renewal risks managing a degrading resource, while incorporating ecological flow and basin resilience protects the river's long-term sustainability for both countries.

TAKEAWAY BOX

A treaty that only divides the water says nothing about whether there will be enough water left to divide the next time it comes up for renewal.

Ganga Waters Treaty, 1996; Farakka Barrage; critical dry-season period January-May.

when two countries share a river under ecological stress, does either have a stronger claim to prioritise its own consumptive needs, or does the river's own sustainability create a shared obligation that supersedes either country's individual allocation interest?

UPSC has repeatedly tested transboundary river agreements (Indus Waters Treaty, Ganga Waters Treaty) and India's neighbourhood water diplomacy (GS1/GS2/GS3); this editorial's allocation-versus-protection framework transfers directly to any such question.

"Transboundary river treaties that focus only on water allocation risk managing a degrading resource." Examine this claim with reference to the renewal of the India-Bangladesh Ganga Waters Treaty.

Sources: Indian Express, Ministry of Jal Shakti

Source: The Next India-Bangladesh Ganges Treaty Must Also Protect the River — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The Indian Express argues that with the 1996 Ganga Waters Treaty between India and Bangladesh nearing expiry, its renewal negotiation must go beyond replicating the old allocation-only quota framework to include ecological flow guarantees and basin resilience measures, treating the river's health as a negotiating objective in itself, not merely a resource to be divided.



SUPPORTING

- The 1996 treaty's framework focused primarily on dry-season water-sharing quotas at the Farakka Barrage, without binding provisions ensuring a minimum ecological flow needed to sustain the river's own hydrological and ecological functions.
- Declining dry-season flows, sedimentation and upstream withdrawal pressures have intensified since 1996, meaning a renewed treaty based solely on the old quota logic may allocate water shares from a resource base that is itself deteriorating.
- Basin resilience, accounting for climate variability, sedimentation management and ecological flow requirements, is a distinct negotiating objective from water-quantity allocation, and a treaty that addresses only the latter leaves the underlying resource unprotected.



COUNTER

Introducing ecological flow guarantees and basin-resilience provisions adds negotiating complexity and could complicate or delay a renewal process already under time pressure as the current treaty approaches expiry, and either country's domestic water-security needs may resist commitments that appear to reduce their available consumptive allocation.



WAY FORWARD

The editorial calls for the renewal negotiation to explicitly incorporate ecological flow guarantees and basin-resilience measures as co-equal objectives alongside water-sharing quotas, rather than treating the 1996 framework's allocation-only approach as a template to be simply extended.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

With the 1996 Ganga Waters Treaty nearing expiry, examine why its renewal negotiations should incorporate ecological flow guarantees and basin resilience alongside traditional water-sharing quotas. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

With the 1996 Ganga Waters Treaty between India and Bangladesh nearing its expiry, the Indian Express argues the renewal negotiation must move beyond the original treaty's allocation-only framework to explicitly incorporate ecological flow guarantees and basin resilience.

BODY

The 1996 treaty established a dry-season water-sharing formula at the Farakka Barrage, addressing the quantity of water each country could draw, but did not bind either party to maintaining a minimum ecological flow sufficient to sustain the river's own hydrological functions, sediment transport, aquatic ecosystems, and downstream freshwater-saline balance in the delta. In the decades since, declining dry-season flows, increased sedimentation, and growing upstream withdrawal pressures across the broader Ganga basin have intensified concerns that a renewed treaty modelled purely on the 1996 quota framework would be allocating shares of an increasingly degraded resource rather than a genuinely sustainable one.

The editorial's argument is that ecological flow and basin resilience are distinct negotiating objectives from water-quantity allocation, protecting the river system itself, not merely dividing what remains of it between the two countries, and that a renewal treaty silent on these dimensions would repeat the original framework's central limitation rather than correct it.

CONCLUSION

The counter-argument, that adding ecological and resilience provisions increases negotiating complexity under time pressure, is a genuine practical concern, but the editorial's position is that omitting these dimensions risks a renewed treaty that manages a shrinking, degrading resource rather than protecting a sustainable one, making the added complexity a necessary cost rather than an avoidable one.

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