



Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal Dispute

For Prelims: [Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal Dispute](#), [Indus Water Treaty](#), [Supreme Court \(SC\)](#), [Article 143](#).

For Mains: Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal Dispute, and its Implications, Changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes, Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies.

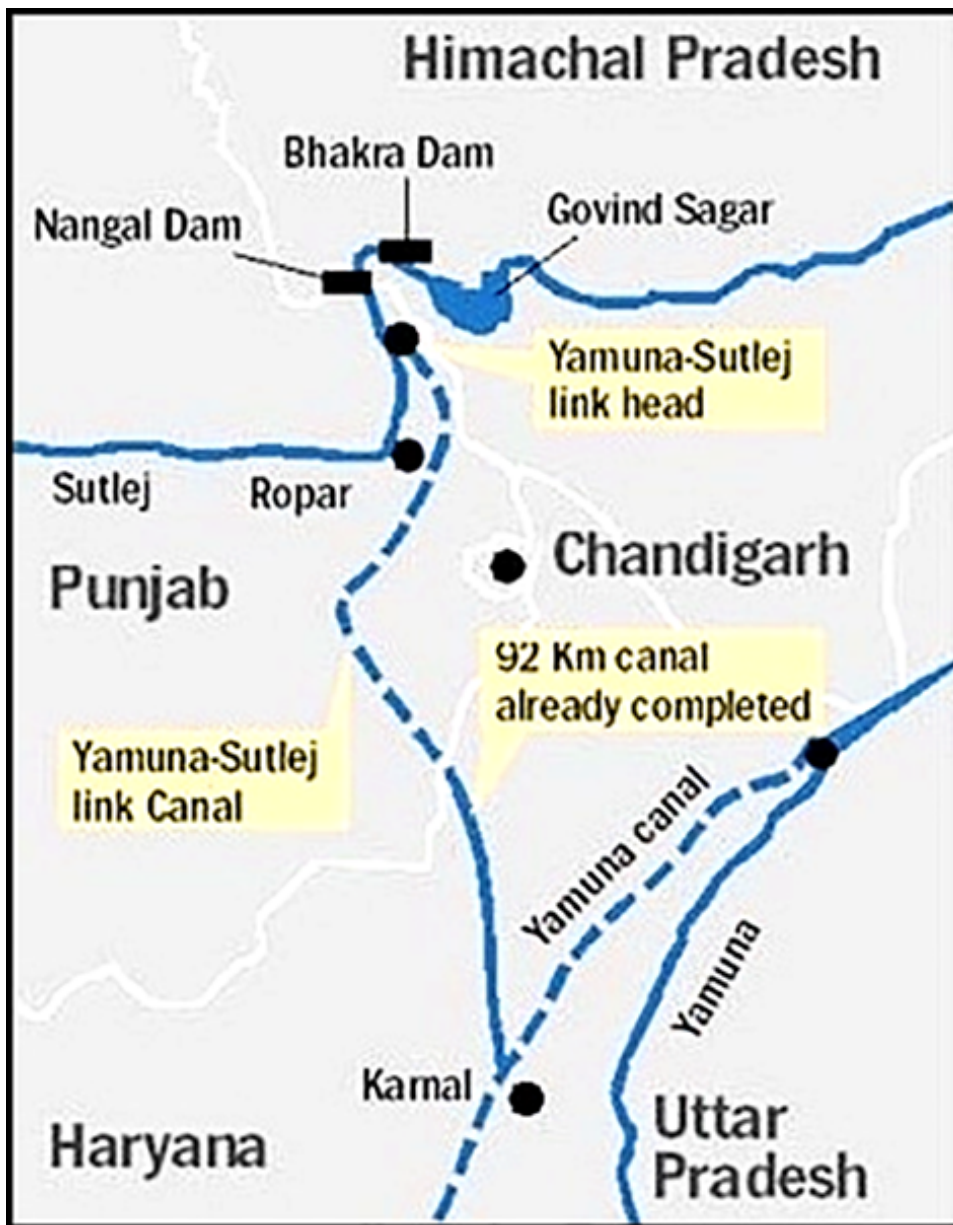
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Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court has ordered the Punjab Government to complete [Sutlej-Yamuna Link \(SYL\) canal](#), warning the Government to comply with **its orders**.

- The court directed the Union Government to oversee **talks between Punjab and the Haryana governments** on this topic; the Haryana government has completed construction of its half of the canal.
- The Issue stems from a controversial 1981 water-sharing agreement drawn up when Haryana was carved out of Punjab in 1966.

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What is the Background?

- **1960:**
 - The dispute can be traced back to the [Indus Water Treaty](#) between India and Pakistan, allowing the former 'free and unrestricted use' of Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.
- **1966:**
 - Creation of Haryana from the **old (undivided) Punjab** presented the problem of giving Haryana its share of river waters.
 - For Haryana to get its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas, a canal linking the **Sutlej with the Yamuna was planned (SYL Canal)**.
 - Punjab refused to share waters with Haryana stating it was against the riparian principle which dictates that the water of a river belongs only to the State and country or States and countries through which the river in question flows.
- **1981:**
 - Both states mutually **agreed for the re-allocation of water**.
- **1982:**
 - Construction of the **214-km SYL was launched in Kapoori village**, Punjab.
 - Agitations, protests and assassinations were carried out in protest creating the environment of terrorism in the state and making the issue of national security.
- **1985:**

- Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and **then Akali Dal chief Sant signed an accord agreeing for a new Tribunal** to assess the water.
- The Eradi Tribunal headed by Supreme Court Judge V Balakrishna Eradi was set up to reassess availability and sharing of water.
- In 1987, the tribunal recommended an increase in the shares of Punjab and Haryana to 5 MAF and 3.83 MAF, respectively.
- **1996:**
 - Haryana moved the **Supreme Court (SC)** seeking directions to Punjab to complete the work on the SYL.
- **2002 and 2004:**
 - SC directed Punjab to complete the work in its territory.
- **2004:**
 - Punjab Assembly passed the **Punjab Termination of Agreements Act**, terminating its water-sharing agreements and thus jeopardizing the construction of SYL in Punjab.
- **2016:**
 - SC started hearings into a **presidential reference (Article 143)** to decide on the legality of the 2004 Act and declared that Punjab backed out of its promise to share the waters of rivers. Thus, the **act was termed constitutionally invalid**.
- **2020:**
 - SC directed the **Chief Ministers of both states to negotiate and settle the SYL canal issue at the highest political level to be mediated by the Centre**.
 - Punjab has asked for a tribunal for fresh time-bound assessment of the water availability.
 - Punjab holds that there has been no adjudication or scientific assessment of river waters in the state till date.
 - The **availability of Ravi-Beas water has also come down** from the estimated 17.17 MAF in 1981 to 13.38 MAF in 2013. **A fresh tribunal would ascertain all this.**

What is the Argument of Punjab and Haryana?

- **Punjab:**
 - Punjab vehemently **opposes sharing any additional water** with neighboring states. They stress that Punjab lacks surplus water and highlights the reduction in their water allocation over the years.
 - Many areas in Punjab may **go dry after 2029** and the state has already **over-exploited its groundwater** for irrigation purposes as it fills granaries of the Centre by growing wheat and paddy worth Rs 70,000 crore every year.
 - Water in about **79% of the state's area is over-exploited** and in such a situation, the government says sharing water with any other state is impossible.
- **Haryana:**
 - Haryana strongly advocates for the canal's completion, **citing a looming water crisis and asserting that Punjab** has been utilizing Haryana's share of water.
 - It says that providing irrigation is tough for the state and there was a problem of drinking water in **southern parts of Haryana**, where groundwater has depleted up to 1,700 feet.
 - Haryana has been **citing its contribution to the central food pool** and arguing that it is being **denied its rightful share in the water as assessed by a tribunal**.

What is the Significance of Satluj Yamuna Link Canal?

- **Facilitating Equitable Water Sharing:**
 - The SYL Canal aims to **facilitate the equitable sharing of river waters** between Haryana and Punjab. Once completed, the **canal would enable the distribution of waters from the Ravi and Beas rivers**, which are vital water sources in the region. This is crucial for both states to ensure fair access to water resources and prevent potential conflicts arising from unequal distribution.
- **Addressing Historical Water Disputes:**
 - It can address long standing water disputes **between Haryana and Punjab**. By providing a defined pathway for water transfer, it aims to settle disagreements related to water allocation and usage, which **have persisted for decades and at times led to legal**

battles and political tensions.

▪ **Enhancing Agricultural Productivity:**

- The SYL Canal, by facilitating better water distribution, **can contribute to enhanced agricultural productivity** and sustainability.
- It can support farmers in cultivating their lands effectively, leading to better yields and socio-economic development.

▪ **Socio-Economic Development:**

- The SYL Canal can play a **significant role in promoting overall socio-economic development** in both states.
- Reliable access to water is fundamental for industrial development, urbanization, and overall growth, benefiting various sectors and improving the quality of life for the residents.

What are the Reasons of Water Sharing Issues Among Various States?

- Water sharing issues among various states, **not only in India but in many parts of the world**, are complex and multifaceted, often involving several factors. Some common reasons that contribute to water sharing issues among states:
 - **Geographical Variation in Water Availability:** Different states have varying levels of access to water resources due to their geographical location, topography, and proximity to rivers, lakes, or other sources of water.
 - Some states may naturally have more abundant water resources, while others may face water scarcity.
 - **Climate Change and Global Warming:** Climate change and global warming are altering weather patterns and affecting precipitation levels, leading to changes in **the availability and distribution of water**.
 - Erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and changing monsoon patterns can exacerbate water scarcity issues and create conflicts over water sharing.
 - **Unequal Distribution of Rivers and Water Sources:** The distribution of rivers and other water sources across states is often unequal, causing disputes over access and utilization.
 - **States located upstream may have control over the source of a river**, while downstream states may face challenges in securing their fair share of water.
 - **Construction of Dams and Reservoirs:** The construction of dams and reservoirs for various purposes can significantly alter the flow of rivers and affect water availability downstream.
 - **Population Growth and Increased Demand:** Rapid population growth in certain states increases the demand for water for various purposes, including agriculture, industry, and domestic use.
 - This heightened **demand puts pressure on available water resources**, leading to conflicts over allocation and sharing.
 - **Political and Inter-State Relations:** Political factors, interstate relations, and differing priorities among states can influence negotiations and agreements related to water sharing.
 - Political considerations, power dynamics, and electoral interests can complicate the resolution of water disputes.

What are the Sustainable Solution for Water Sharing Issues?

▪ **Water Conservation and Efficiency Measures:**

- Implementing **water-saving technologies** and promoting water conservation practices in agriculture, industry, and households can significantly reduce water demand.

▪ **Modernizing Irrigation Systems:**

- Upgrading irrigation infrastructure to more **efficient systems like drip irrigation** can minimize water wastage in agriculture, a sector that consumes the majority of water resources.

▪ **Real-time Monitoring and Forecasting:**

- Utilizing technology for **real-time monitoring of reservoir levels**, river flows, and weather patterns can aid in effective water management and timely decision-making, especially during climatic uncertainties.

▪ **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:**

- Establishing efficient conflict resolution mechanisms, **possibly outside the legal framework**, can help states resolve water-sharing disputes more expediently and collaboratively.
 - An atmosphere of cooperation and understanding among neighboring states is necessary to address water disputes amicably.

▪ **River Basin Ecosystem Restoration:**

- Focusing on restoring and preserving river basin ecosystems **can enhance the sustainability of water resources**. Healthy ecosystems contribute to the quality and availability of water.
- Ensuring comprehensive [EIAs \(Environmental Impact Assessment\)](#) before initiating any water-related project can **prevent or mitigate adverse effects on water sources and ecosystems**.

Way Forward

- The water disputes can be **solved or balanced by having a permanent tribunal established** with appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court established over the tribunal's decision.
- The immediate target of any Constitutional Government should be **amendment to [Article 262](#)** (Adjudication of disputes relating to waters of inter State rivers or river valleys) and amendment to [Inter-State Water Disputes Act](#) and its implementation at the equal note.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Recently, linking of which of the following rivers was undertaken? (2016)

- (a) Cauvery and Tungabhadra
- (b) Godavari and Krishna
- (c) Mahanadi and Sone
- (d) Narmada and Tapti

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. Not many years ago, river linking was a concept but it is becoming a reality in the country. Discuss the advantages of river linking and its possible impact on the environment. (2017)

Q. In what way can floods be converted into a sustainable source of irrigation and all-weather inland navigation in India? (2017)

Q. How will the melting of Himalayan glaciers have a far-reaching impact on the water resources of India? (2020)

Q. The interlinking of rivers can provide viable solutions to the multi-dimensional inter-related problems of droughts, floods, and interrupted navigation. Critically examine. (2020)

Q. Suggest measures to improve water storage and irrigation system to make its judicious use under depleting scenario. (2020)

