

# Floods devastate Pakistan as New Delhi scraps Indus Water Treaty

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Pakistan has been severely affected in recent weeks by devastating monsoon floods, with over 800 lives lost and millions of people affected. While the floods have impacted all four of Pakistan's provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab have been hit particularly hard, suffering high casualties. Punjab has experienced the most severe flooding, even as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has experienced the highest death toll.

The floods are the worst since 2022, when 8 million people were forced from their homes and 2 million dwellings were destroyed.

The current floods have also affected India, especially its Punjab state. More than 350,000 people across 1,400 Indian villages have been rendered homeless, with 46 deaths reported.

As in 2022, the flood waters have caused significant damage to crops, livestock, schools, health facilities and critical infrastructure such as bridges, roads and power grids.

The disaster has been compounded by Glacier Lake Outburst Floods, related to the rising temperatures and extreme weather events associated with climate change, in the remote Gilgit-Baltistan region.

Health services in the flood-affected areas are overwhelmed by rising cases of diseases such as malaria, skin infections and fever. Many communities remain isolated due to blocked or damaged roads, making it difficult to deliver aid to vulnerable populations.

With monsoon rains expected to persist, the situation threatens to grow still worse. Floodwaters are projected to pour into the Indus River, threatening large areas in Pakistan's southern Sindh province.

In Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, more than 3.3 million people across 33,000 villages have been directly affected by the flooding. Since the Ravi, Sutlej and Chenab rivers—tributaries of the Indus River—overflowed their banks two weeks ago, flooding has affected 3,900 villages in Muzaffargarh District, one of Punjab's worst-hit areas.

Last Thursday, as the flood threat mounted in Pakistan's Punjab province, officials claimed more than half a million people had been relocated in the previous 24 hours.

Thousands of rescuers using boats are taking part in the relief and rescue operations, while tens of thousands have sought refuge in relief camps. Conditions in the camps are described as dire. According to an *Al Jazeera* report published last Wednesday, a displaced homeowner named Malik Ramzan preferred to stay near his waterlogged home rather than enter a relief camp because they lack basic utilities. “Food isn’t delivered on time, and we are treated like beggars,” said Ramzan.” According to the report, the camps’ facilities “are very poor, with no clean drinking water, no proper toilet facilities, plus the fact that it’s very hot and humid,” contributing to dehydration. All of this adds to the threat of an epidemic of waterborne infections.

Marriyum Aurangzeb, who holds multiple portfolios in Punjab's Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) government, including Planning & Development and Environment Protection and Climate Change, told a press conference August 31, “This is the biggest flood in the history of the Punjab. It’s the first time that the three rivers—Sutlej, Chenab, and Ravi—have carried such high levels of water.”

With a population of about 128 million, Punjab is Pakistan's agricultural hub and its principal wheat producer. Muhammad Amjad, 45, a rice and potato farmer in Chiniot told Reuters on September 1, “Thirteen of my 15 acres are gone, and our rice is completely destroyed. Women and children have evacuated. Men are left guarding what remains.” Some have lost their only source of income. Amish Sultan, 50, said: “I have 10 buffaloes. They’re so weak there’s no milk left for my children, let alone to sell. I used to earn 100,000 to 150,000 rupees a month. That stability is gone.”

Pakistani authorities have responded lethargically to the disaster, revealing yet again their indifference and disregard for the lives of workers and the rural poor. Although major floods are occurring ever more frequently, successive governments at the national and provincial level have done next to nothing to improve Indus Valley watershed control measures.

The 2022 Pakistan floods were among the deadliest and most extensive in the country's history, affecting around 33 million people and displacing over 8 million. The floods killed more than 1,700, caused economic losses exceeding \$30 billion and contributed to an eight-percentage point rise between 2020 and 2024, from 17.1 percent to 25.3 percent in the proportion of Pakistanis living in poverty. In 2010, floods similarly devastated Pakistan, killing nearly 2,000 people, affecting about 20 million, and triggering a major humanitarian crisis.

Showing the government's complete unpreparedness, Wasim Hamad Sindhu, the deputy commissioner in Multan, a major city along the eastern bank of the Chenab River in Punjab, said, “The water is coming in large quantities—we cannot fight it; we cannot stop it.” While ignoring the flood preparations needed to save the lives and livelihoods of working people, the Pakistani government has prioritized military spending. It recently announced a 20 percent increase in the defense budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year, raising it to 2.55 trillion rupees (\$9 billion).

Indian media has reported that in recent weeks, New Delhi has given Islamabad three flood warnings via diplomatic channels as a “humanitarian gesture,” despite it having suspended India's participation in the Indus Water Treaty (IWT).

The 65-year-old treaty was suspended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP) government as part of their bellicose response to an April 22 terrorist attack in Indian-held Kashmir, which killed 26 tourists. While Pakistan denied any involvement in the attack and called for an international investigation, India declared Islamabad responsible. On May 7, it launched missile strikes deep inside Pakistan, triggering a four-day cross-border war that brought the two nuclear-armed nations to the brink of all-out war.

Pakistani officials are alleging that New Delhi's failure to pass them information about water levels in the Indus River's tributaries quickly enough and in sufficient detail have crippled their flood control efforts. Pakistan's Planning Minister, Ahsan Iqbal, told Reuters, "We could have managed better if we had better information."

The floodwaters' breach of two barrage gates on the Ramjit River has also led to suggestions India may have deliberately exacerbated the crisis. New Delhi has emphatically denied this, saying surging water broke the barrages and that it is now trying to control water flow further upstream via the Ranjit Sagar Dam.

Whatever New Delhi says, if the IWT were still in active operation, it would ensure close collaboration and continuous information exchange between India and Pakistan in the face of surging water levels that threaten lives and livelihoods in both countries. The now suspended Permanent Indus Commission, composed of commissioners from both countries, provided for the regular sharing of data and discussion of water management issues. This information exchange has in the past helped to manage the Indus' water levels—for flood prevention, irrigation and electrical-power generation—even under tense situations.

Although India and Pakistan came to a shaky truce on May 10, India has continued its suspension of the Indus Water Treaty, and both Modi and his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, have repeatedly vowed that New Delhi will not return to it, without—at the very least—a renegotiation to make it more favorable to India.

Threats against Pakistan and boasts of India's military prowess were key themes of Modi's August 15 Independence Day address. From Delhi's Red Fort, he declared India had achieved a great victory in Operation Sindoor—its illegal, four-day aerial war in Pakistan; proclaimed that India will henceforth make no distinction between "those who nurture and harbor terrorism, and those who empower terrorists"; and vowed India will not be intimidated by "nuclear blackmail." That is, it will aggressively pursue its interests, even at the risk of provoking all-out war.

This was combined with the declaration that the Indus Water Treaty is effectively dead. Modi called the treaty "unjust," and proclaimed "India's waters belong to India, and India's farmers. Nobody can take away our waters." Further underlining India's bellicose intentions, Modi declared, "Blood and water cannot flow together."

Acting on a complaint from Pakistan, the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), found in a ruling issued August 8 that India cannot unilaterally suspend or hold the Indus Water Treaty "in abeyance." It also reaffirmed, per the 1960 treaty, Pakistan's right to the unrestricted use of waters from the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers—collectively known as the western rivers. Pakistan is highly reliant on these rivers, which originate in China but run through Indian-held Kashmir, for both irrigation and power generation. India, affirmed the PCA ruling, must allow these waters to flow as per the treaty's terms and cannot pursue hydroelectric projects based on its own interpretation of "ideal" engineering practices.

New Delhi has angrily rejected all of this, insisting that India is acting in its national security interests and has never agreed to the

PCA's jurisdiction. Foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal asserted that New Delhi has "never accepted the legality, legitimacy, or competence" of the PCA in this matter—making clear that the Modi government is adamant in pressing forward even in the face of bellicose warnings from Pakistan's government and military that India's attempt to use the headwaters of the Indus to throttle Pakistan's economy will end in war.

These developments underscore the completely reactionary nature of the 1947 communal partition of then British India into an avowedly Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India. Any rational solution to the floods and to water distribution—problems that are becoming ever more acute due to rising temperatures, drought and other impacts of climate change—require subcontinent-wide planning, which is rendered impossible by the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan's venal capitalist elites.

Tensions between India and Pakistan remain on the boil as both countries extend bans on commercial flights in each other's airspace until September 24, first imposed after the April 22 attack in Pahalgam. Meanwhile, the arms race is intensifying. On August 20, India successfully test-fired the Agni-V, an intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of carrying over 1,000 kg of nuclear or conventional payloads across 5,000 km at hypersonic speeds near 30,000 km/h. This development came exactly one week after Pakistan announced the formation of a new Army Rocket Force Command to address "strategic gaps," in particular its ability to "strike the enemy from every direction," before resorting to tactical and strategic nuclear weapons.

The two countries exchanged verbal attacks during last week's meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Targeting Pakistan without mentioning it by name, Modi vowed that India would never rest until "terrorism" was eradicated, adding that the Pahalgam attack "was not just an assault on India's soul, but also a challenge to those who believe in humanity." Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, speaking in the same session, said, "We expect SCO member countries to follow all bilateral treaties," including "uninterrupted access to due share of water as per existing treaties."



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