

## Chapter 9: Options

As the abrogation of the Indus Water Treaty is impossible, it is necessary to identify other options to resolve the conflict of interest between Pakistan and Kashmir over water resources. Pakistan's response is to seek the physical control of the entire state of Jammu & Kashmir. While the ostensible reason for Pakistan's interest in Kashmir is support for self-determination, the discussion so far clearly proves its real interest in Kashmir's rivers.

### Chenab Formula

Pakistan has directly or indirectly emphasised the Chenab Formula as the most preferred option. It is based on the 'Dixon Plan', proposed in 1950 by Sir Owen Dixon, who came as a United Nation's representative for India and Pakistan; assigned Ladakh to India, the Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir to Pakistan, split Jammu between the two and envisaged a plebiscite in the Kashmir valley. The proposal, though accepted by Pakistan, was rejected by India.

As per this formula, the city of Jammu and some districts of Jammu province would go to India, while the city of Srinagar and most parts of the Kashmir valley as well as parts of Jammu region would be transferred to Pakistan. This division would be based on the flow of the Chenab, but it would to some extent coincide with religious demography.

Why is then Pakistan interested in the Chenab formula that includes parts of Jammu? With a small twist to this proposal, consider the hypothetical situation, as suggested by many experts, of only Kashmir being a part of Pakistan, and entire Jammu province and Ladakh under India. One evident outcome of such an arrangement would be the dissolving of the Indus Waters Treaty, as the political status of Kashmir would change. The distribution of water resources would be altered. Pakistan would then have complete control over only the Indus, Jhelum, and some of their tributaries. The Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej rivers would fall under India's jurisdiction.

This arrangement would be detrimental to Pakistan, as it would lose a major water source the Chenab. This implies a 30 billion cubic metre or 17 per cent reduction in water flows in the Indus System in Pakistan, provided, of course, that India is able to block the Chenab completely. The incumbent major water resources for Pakistan Indus and Jhelum have already been exploited to the maximum in Pakistani Punjab itself where over half their water flows is diverted for irrigation. The Chenab also is a major source of water to Punjab. Moreover, the Chenab-Jhelum combine is the only tributary of the Indus that enhances the latter's flow downstream Punjab. Losing Chenab to India would mean drastic reduction in water supplies to Sindh, which is already on the brink of a water crisis. It is imperative to note here that the location where the eastern tributaries merge to join the Indus River is at a point just prior to entering Sindh. Moreover, Sindh receives water only from the Indus River. Losing Chenab would also warrant a major rearrangement of the irrigation network in Punjab.

This clearly explains Pakistan's insistence on making Chenab the basis of the international border and including parts of Jammu and not merely the Kashmir valley, under its jurisdiction.

Furthermore, accepting the Chenab Formula implies that India would have to part with approximately 32,000 sq km of area, which includes the districts of Anantnag, Baramulla, Budgam, Doda, Kupwara, Pulwama, Poonch, Rajouri, Srinagar, and the Gool Gulabgarh and Reasi tehsils of Udhampur that is giving away 57 per cent of the total land area of Jammu & Kashmir, excluding Ladakh and the area under China and Pakistan.

An interesting aspect of Pakistan's claim over these districts is that the catchment areas of all the rivers important to Pakistan Indus, Jhelum and Chenab would come under Pakistan's jurisdiction. Evidently, issues of Kashmir and Indus are intertwined, as General Pervez Musharraf revealed in his dissertation at the prestigious London College.

The physical control over the Chenab valley is being sought, as it would help Pakistan build dams upstream and regulate the river flows to Punjab and Sindh, as discussed earlier in the Chapter *Crises in Provinces*. Moreover, it provides strategic depth for the Mangla Dam and the Pothohar region. While Mangla is an exclusive dam for Punjab, Pothohar provides the Pakistani army with more than half of its recruits. However, this proposition is a zero-sum game from the perspective of Indian security.

Foremost, India would have to part with the strategically vital Akhnoor area in Jammu, which is the only all-weather route available to India. To the south of Akhnoor lies the 'Chicken's Neck' a narrow strip of Pakistani territory. It is interesting to note that during the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971, Pakistan had launched attacks to capture Akhnoor and the strategic bridge across the Chenab, which clearly highlights Akhnoor's significance.

The Akhnoor Bridge is currently India's sole link to Poonch valley. Besides, the area around Akhnoor is of primary strategic importance as it provides the best terrain for inter-border movement and is most conducive for large-scale operations.

Worse, Ladakh's accessibility will be compromised, with India turning dependent on Pakistan to access supply routes to Ladakh. Thus, based purely on military considerations, India cannot accept Chenab as the basis of the new international border. Moreover, losing Chenab would not bode well for parts of Jammu the districts of Jammu, Kathua, Kargil and parts of Udhampur that would remain with India.

Thus, if hostility reaches a degree where Pakistan formally proposes the Chenab Formula, and not merely as a suggestion in track-two diplomacy, India's response will be in the negative and belligerent.

### **Kashmir in Chenab Formula**

The Chenab Formula appears to be Pakistan's desired solution to the Kashmir issue. Acquiring the territory of Kashmir, including parts of Jammu, can provide Pakistan with the opportunity to tap rivers in the present Indian Kashmir. Storage facilities that it is unable to develop within its own territory can then be constructed in Kashmir.

A major benefit of tapping the rivers would be the increased hydropower generation, which to a great extent can help electrify Kashmir under its jurisdiction, as well as regulate supplies to Punjab. The construction of canals and watercourses can also bring better irrigation to Kashmir, and regulate water flows to Punjab.

However, a caveat to this proposal cannot be overlooked. Once Pakistan takes control of Kashmir as another federating unit of the country, its development needs and demands will have to be on par with the other provinces in the country. Bringing it into the mainstream will entail a cost in terms of pumping in funds and at the same time attracting investments for developing the water resources of the region. However, once irrigation canals are constructed, Kashmir being an agricultural region, itself will begin demanding its share of waters. This would imply having another contending recipient to the already controversial water sharing formula.

Further, diverting waters to irrigate Kashmir's lands would mean reducing flows to Punjab and Sindh, which will never be acceptable to the two leading provinces of the country. Moreover, Sindh, which is already suffering the consequences of reduced water flows, will witness a further decline and erosion of its economy. This will add another dimension to the protracted water dispute in Pakistan with Punjab and Sindh joining hands to resist Kashmir. Under such circumstances, Pakistan will be caught in a perennial web of provincial disharmony.

By this, clearly it will be in Pakistan's interest to not make Kashmir another federating unit of Pakistan, but rather have it as an 'independent' state sub-let to Pakistan.

### **Vale as the Base**

Since Chenab Formula and the consequent division of Jammu portends war, consider an alternate solution, put forward by some experts, of handing over the Vale of Kashmir to Pakistan. Pakistan's ISI acts on the belief that it can conquer the Vale of Kashmir by low intensity insurgency. If indeed we envisage a situation whereby terrorist groups manage to control the Vale through hostile means, the consequence could be worse.

India's immediate response would be to block the flow of the Chenab. Pakistan would be deprived of a major tributary for the Indus. Chenab is the most vulnerable among the western rivers given to Pakistan considering that it flows hardly

50 km away from Ravi River in the Indian plains. It is technically feasible to divert the Chenab through the Marhu tunnel and join with the Ravi, thus retaining Chenab for India's sole use.

Under such circumstances, Pakistan would head for disaster, foremost because the water flows in the Indus River would drastically reduce, as the Jhelum would be the only main tributary. The Indus River could dry up even before reaching the Arabian Sea.

This would have serious repercussions on Pakistan's economy, especially Sindh, an agriculturally important province in the country. Sindh would not only suffer devastation of agriculture, but also acute water shortages and an ecological imbalance.

Punjab would also be affected, though not severely, as it would still continue to draw waters from the Indus and Jhelum and the tributaries of all the eastern rivers flowing in Pakistan, which are its main source of water supply even now. The central and southern parts of Punjab depend on the Jhelum for irrigation. On losing the waters of Chenab, Punjab would increase diversions of Jhelum to the eastern parts of the province and draw more waters from the Indus as well. However, Punjab would witness a rise in arid zones in certain portions of the eastern parts of the province. Drawing more from the waters of the Jhelum and Indus would considerably reduce the flow of the Indus downstream Punjab.

Conflicts between Sindh and Punjab would aggravate. Punjab, being the more dominant province in Pakistan, would try to capture the waters of the Indus entirely. Sindh being the lower riparian, would helplessly remain at the mercy of Punjab.

As for India, such a situation would be propitious, as it would get access to an additional river, Chenab. Further, it would no longer remain under any obligation to allow rivers to flow into Pakistan. It can pursue unrestrained harnessing of the rivers under its control for the benefit of even those states that do not form part of the Indus Basin. India can begin to exploit Chenab's hydroelectric potential of 3,000 MW, which currently is largely untapped, directly or indirectly, due to restrictions imposed by the treaty.

Even if for topographic reason, India is unable to completely block the flow of the rivers in its control, Pakistan would still be at a loss. Though the Chenab will continue to enhance the Indus, the flows of the river would be erratic, and the overall flows into Pakistan will reduce, as India will be free to tap the river for economic use. During heavy rains, the rivers, including the eastern rivers would cause heavy floods and during dry spells the flow would be a trickle. As India would stop providing any data regarding the flow of the rivers, as is being done under the treaty, it would become difficult for Pakistan to pre-empt any adversities. Here, Pakistan would be completely at the mercy of India. In the absence of cooperation and goodwill, India, being the upper riparian state, will always enjoy the strategic advantage.

India could perhaps be constrained by the implementation of another treaty, which restricts it from exhibiting its upper riparian status. Nevertheless, the fact that India would be free to use the waters of the Chenab adds to India's advantage. At the same time, Pakistan would be unable to plan any future projects owing to the unpredictable flows of the Chenab and the other eastern rivers.

The extreme consequence of the scenario of losing Chenab to India, and the Vale of Kashmir becoming the base for redrawing the map, would be the entire reworking of the canal and irrigation system in Pakistan.

It is thus clear that merely capturing Kashmir would not ensure Pakistan's water security. It would also need that part of Jammu where the Chenab flows an area strategically too important for India to give up.

Thus, the option of controlling only the Vale of Kashmir is futile for Pakistan, while the Chenab Formula is an invitation to war with India.

### **Integrated Development Approach**

Both the above options discussed above are extreme and bound to invoke hostilities.

The option of the Chenab formula benefits Pakistan, but it inflicts heavy costs on the people of Jammu & Kashmir and security costs on India

The option of the Vale as the Base is destructive for both India and Pakistan

A sustainable solution is possible only if it is based on a win-win formula. Currently, the root of the problem lies in the lack of harmony between the interests of Pakistan and Jammu & Kashmir. Pakistan needs Jammu & Kashmir to build dams to divert water flows to Punjab and Sindh. On the other hand, Jammu & Kashmir needs to come out of the Indus Waters Treaty to improve its own irrigation, hydro-electricity and employment prospects. The irony is that deeper the conflict grows between Punjab and Sindh in Pakistan, the greater would be the desperation of Pakistan's military to annex Kashmir, resulting in increase in terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir and all over India. More the tensions mount, greater are pressures on New Delhi to take a hard line against Pakistan.

An alternative approach to the Indus treaty issue could be an integrated development plan for the conservation of the Indus Basin. The plan, to be jointly developed by India and Pakistan, would involve a creative solution to the political dimension of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir.

It is imperative for both India and Pakistan to envisage comprehensive development and planning in the River Basin. A holistic approach to water resources recognizing the interaction and economic linkages between water, land, the users, the environment and infrastructure is necessary to evade the impending water crisis in the subcontinent.

Water needs to be managed as an economic good. It is essential to jointly set up an organisation with representatives from both countries whose functions would entail identifying short term and long term supply capacity of the basin and its integrated development, setting up infrastructure and coordinating activities of the different technical agencies of the respective governments.

A set of specific goals needs to be identified which formally defines a joint management programme and also provides for a stable funding source. This approach will give due consideration to both water quantity and the quality aspects. At the same time, explicit mechanisms defining ownership of resources of either country should be put in place based on requirements. The primary objective should be towards fostering cooperation in the management of shared water resources. The infrastructure developed in the basin and shared by both countries can be under the supervision of a joint authority. The development of such a plan would require vast amount of financial and technical resources. It should be possible to mobilise such resources from around the world, perhaps with the World Bank agencies playing the lead role.

The integrated development approach is Utopian. It is only possible with a paradigm shift in mindset and complete end to hostilities, both physical and psychological.

The prerequisite of such an approach would be the following:

Complete end to terrorism and brutal counter-terrorism measures

Change in mindset in Pakistan about using Kashmiri youth as a tool to ensure Punjab's prosperity and consolidate control over an increasingly alienated Sindh

Acceptance by both, India and Pakistan, to treat Kashmir for the good of the Kashmiri people, and increase efficiency in domestic water management

Restoration of mutual trust and confidence between both countries.

The integrated water development approach can only be an outcome of a change in mindset, not its cause. It is a question of politics. It is a question of values. India and Pakistan have to decide if they want to coexist on the basis of civility and cooperation or in fear and terror. They have to choose between politics of division and the arithmetic of multiplication. If the two states rise above their rivalries, a final settlement can be sustainable.