

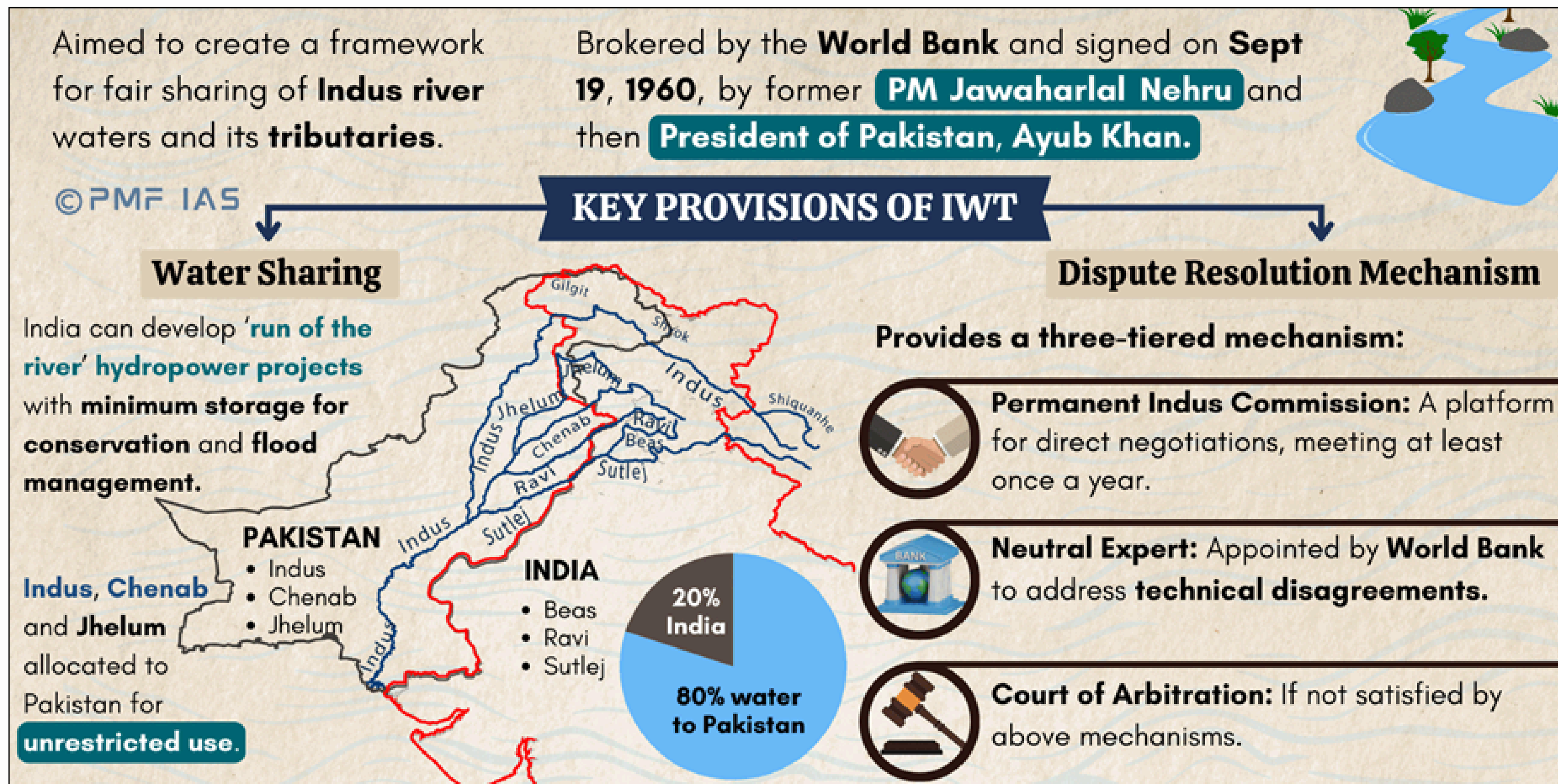
Insights Unwrapped

Water-as-Weapon: Indus Water Treaty



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What is Indus Water Treaty (IWT)?



Source: PMF IAS

The treaty allocated the three eastern rivers – the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej – of the Indus basin to India, while 80% of the three western ones – the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab – to Pakistan.

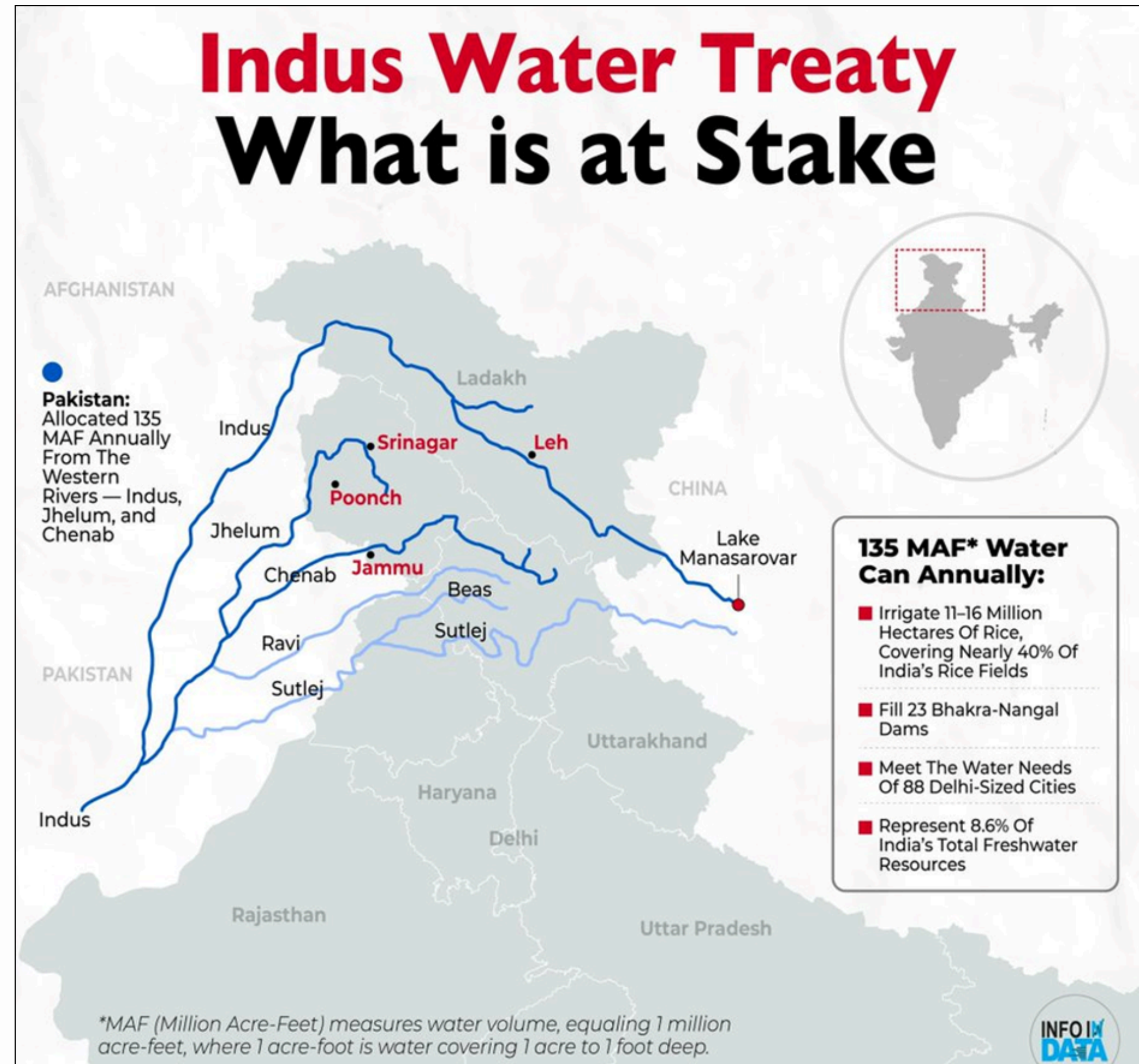
What Would Treaty Suspension Mean?

A Tactical Economic War...

- Suspending the Indus Water Treaty would **disrupt Pakistan's agriculture and energy sectors**, worsening the PKR 5.4 trillion (~USD 20Bn) circular debt*.
- **Hydroelectricity, accounting for 25%** of Pakistan's 42,131 MW capacity (10,681 MW), **depends on the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers**, hosting key plants like Tarbela, Neelum-Jhelum, and Mangla. Pakistan's Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) aims to boost renewable energy from 33% to 62% by 2031.
- Treaty suspension would heavily hit Pakistan's **textiles, sugar, and cotton production** industries as major urban centres such as Karachi, Lahore and Multan draw their water directly from these rivers. (Source: India Today)

* Circular Debt is public debt in the power sector caused by unpaid government subsidies and financial obligations, creating a cascading debt cycle within the energy supply chain.

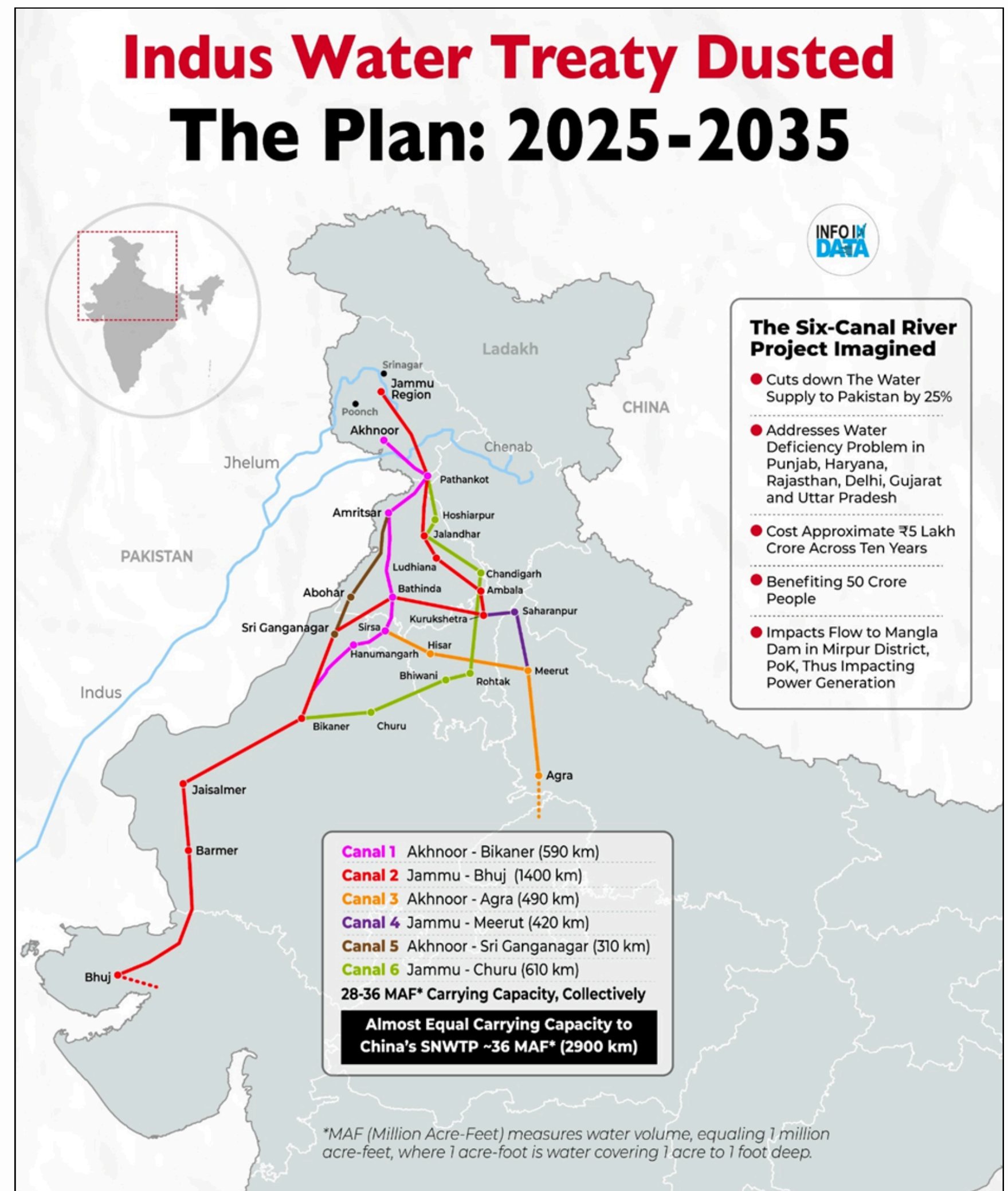
- Annually, 135 Million Acre Feet (MAF) of water from the Chenab, Jhelum, and Indus rivers flows into Pakistan, enough to fill India's Bhakra-Nangal Reservoir 23 times.
- India could restrict this flow by building storage dams or developing canal diversion projects for use within its borders, though such measures would take 8–10 years to implement.
- Currently, India's hydropower projects lack sufficient storage capacity.



Major Infrastructure Projects That Limit Water Flow

Project	River	Purpose	Status
Kishanganga HEP	Jhelum tributary	Hydropower + diversion via tunnel	Completed (2018)
Ratle HEP	Chenab	850 MW hydroelectric project	Revived (2021)
Tulbul Navigation Project	Jhelum	Flow regulation + navigation	Revived post-Uri (2016)
Shahpurkandi Dam	Ravi	Stops surplus water to Pakistan	Completed Feb 2024
Ujh Multipurpose Project	Ravi tributary	Storage, irrigation, hydroelectric power	In planning stage
Sutlej-Beas Link	Sutlej/Beas	Diverts water within India	Stalled – land issues

Options of restricting water include constructing storage dams and developing canal diversion projects to conserve this water within India, which could take 8-10 years to implement.



Operational Measures: Leveraging Treaty Suspension

With the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) on hold, India can adopt tactical and strategic measures-

- ***Reservoir Flushing:*** India can flush silt from reservoirs like Kishanganga at strategic times, potentially disrupting Pakistan's irrigation cycles.
- ***Data Withholding:*** India is not required to share real-time hydrological data, affecting Pakistan's flood forecasting and crop planning.
- ***Inspection Ban:*** Pakistani teams are barred from inspecting hydropower projects in Jammu & Kashmir.
- ***Autonomous Operations:*** India can proceed with dam construction, flow regulation, and tunnel usage without addressing Pakistan's objections.

Can India Abrogate the IWT?

Under Article XII of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), India cannot unilaterally terminate the treaty; cancellation requires mutual consent. India's suspension indicates a functional withdrawal, not a legal termination.

India's Legal Shield:

India is not a signatory to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), which governs treaty withdrawal. However, India selectively invokes its clauses as customary international law to maintain legal defensibility while prioritizing national interests.

Dispute Resolution via World Bank

- Through the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) → Neutral Expert → Permanent Court of Arbitration.
- But India's current stand may disregard the arbitration process, as done with the Kishanganga and Ratle disputes.

International Pressure

- Pakistan may appeal to global institutions like the UN, World Bank, or ICJ.
- However, international legal bodies have no jurisdiction over the treaty unless both nations agree.

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