UPSC Mains practice – reference note

GS-II · 09-11-2026 · 15 marks · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-mains-practice/2026-11-09-ganga-waters-treaty

The 30-year Ganga Waters Treaty between India and Bangladesh expires on 12 December 2026. Discuss the significance of transboundary river cooperation for India–Bangladesh relations. What issues should a new water-sharing arrangement address?

1. The news (as of 6 November 2026)

- The India–Bangladesh Ganga (Ganges) Waters Treaty, signed on 12 December 1996, expires on 12 December 2026.
- Bangladesh has sought talks since June 2026 and wants a long-term treaty with a guarantee clause; Water Resources Minister Md Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee hopes for an agreement before expiry.
- MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal: river issues are discussed through the structured bilateral mechanism, the Joint Rivers Commission; technical-level meetings are continuing.
- In Bihar, the JD(U) has called for fresh negotiations, blaming the Farakka Barrage for floods and siltation.

2. The 1996 Treaty – numbers to remember

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Item	Provision	Source
Signatories, place	PMs H.D. Deve Gowda (India) and Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh), New Delhi, 12.12.1996	Treaty text
Season and measurement	Dry season 1 January – 31 May; water shared in 10-day periods; daily flows recorded jointly at Farakka and Hardinge Bridge (Art. IV); schedule based on 40-year (1949–1988) average flows	Treaty text; Outlook (04.08.2026)
Sharing formula	70,000 cusecs or less: 50 : 50 · 70,000–75,000: Bangladesh 35,000, India the balance · 75,000 or more: India 40,000, Bangladesh the balance	Treaty, Annexure I
Assured flow	Each country guaranteed 35,000 cusecs in alternate three 10-day periods, 11 March – 10 May	Treaty, Annexure I
Low-flow clause	Upper riparian (India) to make every effort to protect flows at Farakka at the 40-year average; immediate emergency consultations if the flow falls below 50,000 cusecs in any 10-day period (Art. II)	Treaty text
Review and life	Review at five-year intervals or earlier (Art. X); in force for 30 years, renewable by mutual consent (Art. XII); no arbitration clause	Treaty text

3. Background and related agreements

- Joint Rivers Commission – set up in 1972; India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers.
- Farakka Barrage – commissioned in 1975 to divert water to the Bhagirathi–Hooghly and keep Kolkata port navigable.
- 1977 Agreement (5 November 1977) – had a guarantee clause protecting Bangladesh's share; the 1996 Treaty instead assures 35,000 cusecs to each side in alternate 10-day periods.
- Teesta – a draft agreement of 2011 was not signed after objections from West Bengal.
- Kushiyara MoU – signed 6 September 2022; each side may withdraw up to 153 cusecs in the dry season.
- Indus Waters Treaty (1960) – held "in abeyance" by India from 23 April 2025 after the Pahalgam terror attack.
- China – began construction of the lower Yarlung Tsangpo (Medog) hydropower project in July 2025; India has voiced concern as a lower riparian.

4. Value-add terms

- Upper and lower riparian, lean (dry) season flow, cusec, guarantee clause, burden-sharing of shortfalls, basin approach, hydro-diplomacy, Neighbourhood First, data sharing, equitable and reasonable utilisation.

Official sources

- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) – India–Bangladesh bilateral relations – https://www.mea.gov.in/
- Department of Water Resources, RD & GR (Ministry of Jal Shakti) – Joint Rivers Commission – https://jalshakti-dowr.gov.in/
- Text of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, 1996 (ADB Law and Policy Reform repository) – https://lpr.adb.org/sites/default/files/resource/1610/ganges-water-sharing-treaty-1996.pdf

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