Ganga Water Treaty: Expiry on 12 December, New Terms Ahead

Mains · 14 November 2026 · pcsmantra.com



Published: 14 November 2026Mains: international

Original symbolic image: pcsmantra.com

December 2026: The 1996 Ganga Water Sharing Treaty between India and Bangladesh completes its 30-year term and expires on 12 December 2026. Reports say the Centre plans to let the treaty expire; however, water supply will continue in the same proportion for now while fresh terms are negotiated.

What the treaty says

Subject: The treaty sets the formula for sharing the Ganga's dry-season (1 January - 31 May) flow at the Farakka Barrage in West Bengal. Farakka lies about 20 km upstream of the Bangladesh border; the water flows to Bangladesh up to the Hardinge Bridge.

History: Signed in 1996, it is the only formal water-sharing treaty between the two countries, which share 54 rivers.

Renewal terms: Under Article XII, renewal is possible only with the consent of both governments. The treaty has no guarantee clause for lean flows - the sharing formula in low-flow conditions has remained a point of contention.

Current position

India's stance: Reports say India plans to let the treaty expire in December and seeks fresh terms suited to the needs of Kolkata Port, the NTPC plant and the Sundarbans; water supply will continue meanwhile. The MEA has said a "structured mechanism" exists for treaty-related matters and technical-level talks continue.

Bangladesh's concern: Dhaka publicly sought a new deal with better guarantees in September, arguing that political commitment is needed beyond the Joint Rivers Commission's technical talks.

Diplomatic backdrop: The talks come as Bangladesh's extradition request for Sheikh Hasina remains pending with India and bilateral ties are strained. India has invited Bangladesh PM Tarique Rahman to visit New Delhi.

Not just about water quantity

Experts note the question is not merely keeping the treaty alive, but whether its provisions remain adequate for today's needs - climate change altering flows, rising demand on both sides, and the Sundarbans' ecology.

Separating water security from political distrust is a test of diplomacy for both countries.

Quiz: Test your knowledge

Q1: When does the 1996 Ganga Water Sharing Treaty expire, and what does it govern?

(a) 12 December 2026; dry-season flow sharing at the Farakka Barrage(b) 1 January 2027; monsoon flood control(c) 31 May 2026; navigation rights(d) It has already been renewed

Answer and explanation: (a) It expires on 12 December 2026 and governs 1 January - 31 May dry-season flow sharing at Farakka, up to the Hardinge Bridge in Bangladesh.

Q2: How can the 1996 treaty be renewed?

(a) India alone can extend it(b) Only with the consent of both governments under Article XII(c) With United Nations approval(d) It renews automatically

Answer and explanation: (b) Article XII requires both governments' consent. It is the only formal water-sharing treaty between the two countries, which share 54 rivers.

Mains Practice Question

The expiry of the Ganga water-sharing treaty presents which opportunities and risks for India-Bangladesh relations and regional water governance? Comment. (Answer in 250 words - 15 marks)

Answer outline:

Introduction: Reference the 1996 treaty and its expiry date of 12 December 2026.

Main body: The treaty's achievements - 30 years of institutionalised sharing, the JRC mechanism. Shortcomings - no minimum-flow guarantee, limited to the dry season. Opportunities - a new compact covering climate change, the Sundarbans and basin-level management; a comprehensive framework for the 54 shared rivers. Risks - mistrust, politicisation of water, entanglement with issues like the Hasina extradition. India's stakes - Kolkata port, NTPC; Bangladesh's stakes - irrigation and protection from salinity.

Conclusion: Turning technical cooperation into political commitment is the mutually beneficial path for both neighbours.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

In short: The 1996 Ganga Water Sharing Treaty expires on 12 December 2026 after 30 years; reports say India plans to let it lapse and negotiate fresh terms, while water supply continues for now.

Question: What does the treaty regulate?

The 1 January - 31 May dry-season flow at the Farakka Barrage, which reaches Bangladesh up to the Hardinge Bridge.

Question: How is renewal possible?

Only with the consent of both governments under Article XII; no renewal or replacement has been announced so far.

Question: Why does India want fresh terms?

As per reports, the changing needs of Kolkata Port, the NTPC plant and the Sundarbans; Bangladesh wants a new deal with better guarantees.

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