India's Water Diplomacy

Why in the News?

India's has been revisiting water-sharing agreements and analysing the complexities of water diplomacy due to ongoing disputes and negotiations with neighbouring countries over water-sharing agreements.

What are the elements of water diplomacy?

- **Water diplomacy** – It is an approach that enables a variety of stakeholders to assess ways to find solutions for joint management of *shared freshwater resources*.
- **Water-sharing mechanism** – It is a dynamic process that seeks to develop reasonable, sustainable and peaceful solutions to water management.
- **Promoting cooperation** – It seeks to promote cooperation and collaboration among riparian stakeholders.
- **Sustainable water management** – Integrates scientific, economic and policy perspectives to ensure long-term water security.
- **Technology and data sharing** – Encourages nations to share hydrological data to make informed decision making.

India's water-sharing treaties
India – Pakistan • **Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)** – It was signed in 1960 and brokered by the World Bank, governs the distribution of the waters of the Indus and its tributaries. • **Features**: - India controls the *eastern rivers* (Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej). - Pakistan has exclusive access to the *western rivers* (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab), with India allowed non-consumptive use (hydropower projects). • - **Three-step dispute resolution framework** ■ Permanent Indus Commission – To exchange information and data, and settle minor disputes. ■ World Bank-appointed Neutral Expert ■ Permanent Court of Arbitration
India – Bangladesh • **Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC)** – It began its operations in 1972 as a bilateral mechanism to address issues of mutual interest on common/border/trans-boundary rivers. • India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers. • **Ganga Water Treaty (1996)** – It ensures fair distribution of Ganga waters after the construction of the Farakka Barrage. • **Teesta water-sharing treaty** – The talks on the agreement remained stuck since 2011.

India - Nepal • **Sarada Agreement (1920)-** It allowed India to build the Banbassa barrage on the Mahakali River. • **Koshi Agreement (1954)** – It facilitated the construction of the Hanuman Nagar flood control barrage • **Gandak Agreement (1959) –** It allowed India to construct the Bhaisalotan Barrage. • **Mahakali Treaty (1996)** – It led to the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project for power generation and flood control.
India-Bhutan hydropower cooperation • **Jaldhaka Project** – It was developed in 1961 jointly by both countries. • **Chukha Hydropower Project** – It was entirely funded by India on a 60:40 grant and remained a milestone for both the countries. • **Tala Hydroelectric Project** – It is a 1,020 MW Project, which is ranked as one of the biggest joint ventures. • **2006 Agreement on Hydropower Cooperation** – It laid the framework for future bilateral cooperation in hydropower development.

The Helsinki Rules of 1966 on the "Uses of the Waters of International Rivers" provide guidelines for the use of transboundary rivers.

What are the challenges in India's water diplomacy?

- **Hurdles in development projects** – Pakistan raised objections to India's Kishanganga and hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Regional issues** – The talks on the Teesta river agreement with Bangladesh remained stuck since 2011 because of the opposition from West Bengal.
- **Water-access concerns of Nepal** – It remains unresolved because political challenges delayed Pancheshwar Multipurpose project execution.
- **Dominance of China** – India as a lower riparian state faces serious challenge as China plans to build the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra by ignoring international water-sharing norms.
- It will affect north-eastern states and Bangladesh, increasing risks of floods and droughts.
- **Environmental impacts** – Rivers courses have been continuously changing mostly due to natural causes and due to water diversion of trans-boundary Rivers at upstream.

What Can Be Done?

- India needs to Strengthen Regional Water Diplomacy to promote cooperation, sustainability and peace.
- Existing frameworks with its neighbours can be strengthened in order to maintain a stable regional order.
- Diplomatic efforts shall be initiated to negotiate Brahmaputra water-sharing mechanism with China to prevent future conflicts.

Reference

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