

One Day National Conference on “Pakistan’s Water Security Policy: Famine Threat and Future Challenges”

One-day international conference on “Pakistan’s Water Security Policy: Famine Threat and Future Challenges” was organized by Pakistan House on Monday, April 23, 2018 at a local hotel in Islamabad. The conference mainly focused to explore the extent to which Pakistan is affected by droughts and famines, and, their causes and effects. The conference also aimed to review the state of water security knowledge in Pakistan; and to design new approaches to sustainably deliver water security for millions of people.

The dignitaries of the conference included, Lt. General (Retd.) Asif Yasin Malik HI(M), Ambassador (Retd.) Salman Bashir, former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Engr. Shamsul Mulk, PhD, HI, former Chairman Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel (Retd.), Chairperson of the Board, SDPI and former Assistant Secretary General of UN, Dr. Ghulam Rasul, Director General, Pakistan Meteorological Department, Islamabad, Engineer Naseer Ahmed Gilani, Chief Environment, Ministry of Planning Development & Reforms, Islamabad, Dr. Muhammad Ashraf, Chairman Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director SDPI, Ms. Simi Kamal, Senior Group Head – Grants Operation, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, Dr. Muhammad Abid, Director IRC / Chairman & Professor Mechanical Engineering Program, COMSATS, and Dr. Rasool Bakhsh Mahar, Deputy Project Director and Professor, U.S.- Pakistan Center for Advanced Studies in Water, Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro, Sindh.

Lt Gen Asif Yasin Malik HI (M) (Retd.), former Defence Secretary, in his welcoming remarks said that water security has new dimensions and it has impacts beyond borders. India is choking our resources by limiting our water resources. No single reservoir was constructed and political interests have ganged up against the future and survival of the country. He opined that Kala Bagh should be an election issue in the coming elections and we should hold a national referendum for Kala Bagh Dam as it is the quickest and surest solution to the problem.

Ambassador (Retd.) Salman Bashir said that every citizen has right to get safe and adequate water and we should work towards sensitizing politico spectrum towards water security for a sustainable future. There is also the need to look at water issue as a critical issue and it should receive critical attention in South Asian Region as it is most densely populated and primarily agrarian and it is impacted by ecological shifts and it is water stressed.

He remarked that there is need for developing regional approach to resolve water issue. SAARC could be such a vehicle. Pakistan and India can both benefit from regional initiatives like SAARC and it should not be politicized. Dispute resolution should be focused and International Community should persuade India for resolving Indus water Treaty. India should refrain from using water as a tool for coercing and propaganda against Pakistan and any other country. To minimize the impact of climate, preservation and equitable sharing of water resources in our national water policy. The parliament of Pakistan should undertake legislative measures and factor in water development policies. Building water storage capacity should be a top priority. Water is both a federal and provincial subject but it should be treated as a federal subject. Water distribution network issues should be addressed and should be given due priority. Pakistan and china should collaborate in terms of technology.

Engineer Shams-ul Mulk reiterated that there is no water policy in Pakistan and the authorities appeared to lack political will to tackle the problem. He stressed the need for initiating construction work on Kala Bagh Dam without delay. In the absence of Kala Bagh Dam, Pakistan is paying 102 billion rupees every year for not building Kala Bagh Dam.

Ambassador (Retd.) Shafqat Kakakhel added that the gravity of Pakistan's water problems can be easily gauged by looking at per capita water availability that has declined significantly. Climate change will result into to drying up of water reservoirs and droughts, heatwaves and hurricanes that will diminish the supply of water. Consorted efforts must be made to increase supply and promote water conservation. These efforts should be conducted under the framework of integrated water management. Pakistan has delayed national water policy which has been prepared should be approved as soon as possible which should respond to need to all provinces, Effective participation of the private actors should be ensured water related initiatives must respond to internal and external dimensions of water. Pakistan must continue and redevelop efforts to protect the Indus water treaty. The water policy should be finalized as soon as possible and it should clearly define the mandate of Federal water ministry. It should provide a framework for policy intervention addressing key water issues. Pakistan should explore the possibility of diverting and storing flood water. The rehabilitation of water infrastructure should be conducted at all levels that causes loss of 50% canal water.

Talking about National Water Policy, Ms Simi Kamal said that Government needs to get serious, provide clear leadership and put up a well-resourced permanent water commission (that could be an empowered existing water institution or a new one) led by people of integrity and knowledge that can deliver the intent of rational use of water in Pakistan. It is essential that a well-resourced, autonomous, empowered and functioning

local government is in place to deliver the intent of water policy.

Dr Muhammad Ashraf stated that it is now the time to manage the available water resources in Pakistan. Government should improve the conveyance efficiency by using high efficiency irrigation systems. There is also need to change the existing cropping pattern.

Dr Abid stated that Sedimentation Issue needs Serious Consideration as these can result in delta initiation for movement and suction of sediments. Inlets on Tunnels need to be raised to control sediments. Dredging of sediments needs to be considered critically but through Simulations first. Life prediction of Dams, Tunnels, Turbines need careful studies. Most barrages are suffering by sediments reducing their capacities. A comprehensive integrated plan for power generation, water management considering sediments needs attention.

Dr Naseer Gilani remarked that water and health are interconnected. One of the examples is the spread of waterborne diseases including Hepatitis-C, that has become one of the killers in both rural and urban areas. The issue of water is considerably mentioned by Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who from the start emphasized the need to prioritize water as the central to every issue in the post-1947. Calling Kashmir as the jugular vein of Pakistan reflects the importance of water flow toward Pakistan. The other issue is about the threat of drought and famine. Principally, both factors can occur due to lack of clear water policy. Inter-provincial water accord is really well debated and does not required restructuring as it may bring more internal fragmentation.

Dr Rasool Bux emphasized the need to improve water quality and quantity mechanism.

To conclude the speakers agreed that a comprehensive water policy is the need of the hour, and in order to create consensus over dam building, a committee must be formed. Most importantly, Pakistan should not only continue to engage India on protecting its water rights, but also implement a strategy to manage rainwater and promote water conservation.

Deadline looms for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

by Asad Hashim

A deadline on the validity of legal refugee status for many Afghan residents in Pakistan is due to expire, throwing into doubt the futures of more than a million refugees, many of whom have lived in the country for decades.

The deadline is due to expire on Wednesday, with Pakistan's federal cabinet expected to discuss the matter during a weekly meeting.

Separately, Afghan Interior Minister Wais Ahmad Barmak and intelligence chief Mohamed Masoom Stanekzai also arrived in the Pakistani capital Islamabad for talks on Wednesday.

Pakistan has extended the validity of Afghan refugees' 'Proof of Registration' (PoR) cards at least six times in the past, but the last extension – granted on January 3, days after the refugees' status expired – was for only a month, the shortest ever awarded.

"Pakistan's economy has carried the burden of hosting Afghan refugees since long and in the present circumstances cannot

sustain it further," read a government statement released after that extension.

The refugees have become a bone of contention in the increasing souring diplomatic relations between Pakistan and the United States, with the South Asian country accusing them of being a "security risk".

On Thursday, following a US drone strike in the northwestern Pakistani district of Kurram, Pakistan's military said that the target had been hiding in an Afghan refugee camp.

"This validates Pakistan's stance that left over terrorists easily morph into Afghan refugees' camps/complexes," the military said in a statement.

"Thus their early and dignified return to Afghanistan is essential."

Refugee push factors

Pakistan is home to at least 1.38 million registered Afghan refugees, according to the UNHCR. There are at least another million refugees estimated to be outside the formal refugee registration system.

"The 2.3 million refugees in Pakistan, it is impossible for all of them to go back immediately," says Baryali Miankhel, the president of an Afghan refugee welfare organisation in the northwestern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where most reside. "We have told the Pakistani government this."

Last year, more than 150,000 refugees left Pakistan to return to their native Afghanistan. Of those, more than 59,000 were registered refugees assisted by the UNHCR, while the rest either spontaneously returned or were deported by Pakistan.

UNHCR says it is concerned at the increasingly shorter durations of extensions being offered to Afghan refugees

regarding their legal status in the country.

“In terms of the length of time for the PoR extensions, the deadlines that are created for those registered Afghan refugees do create some uncertainty for refugees,” Dan McNorton, the UNHCR spokesperson in Pakistan, told Al Jazeera. “That is certainly something that UNHCR has been concerned about in the past, and [...] that remains the case.”

Refugees themselves testify that the shorter extensions have been leading some to choose to leave the country, despite an uncertain security situation in their home country.

“Refugees are leaving because of the shorter extensions from the government of Pakistan, that is one of the reasons,” said Miankhel. “Because there is no peace in Afghanistan, there are no opportunities for employment or even a place to live.”

Deteriorating security situation

The security situation in Afghanistan, where US-led coalition forces and the Afghan army continue to battle the Afghan Taliban for control of areas of the country, has been deteriorating in recent weeks.

On Sunday, at least 103 people were killed in a suicide attack in the heart of the capital Kabul.

A day later, at least 11 soldiers were killed when gunmen attacked a military academy, also in Kabul.

Afghanistan and the United States have regularly blamed Pakistan for allegedly providing safe havens to elements of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network armed groups. Pakistan denies the charge, alleging that it is Afghan forces that offer sanctuary to elements of the Pakistani Taliban.

In a rare development, Pakistan’s foreign ministry on Tuesday announced that it had handed over 27 individuals suspected of

having links to the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban in November.

“Pakistan continues to push any suspected [Afghan Taliban] and [Haqqani Network] elements to prevent them from using our soil for any terrorist activity in Afghanistan,” said Muhammad Faisal, the foreign ministry spokesperson.

Asad Hashim is Al Jazeera's Web Correspondent in Pakistan.

Courtesy: *Al Jazeera*

China, Russia to 'veto any US move at UN to slap sanctions on Pakistan'

China and Russia have assured Pakistan at the diplomatic level that they would veto any US move in the United Nations to slap economic sanctions on Islamabad, *Daily Express* has learnt from credible sources.

The roller-coaster relations between Washington and Islamabad have frayed since President Donald Trump last month unveiled a new Afghan policy and hit out at Islamabad, accusing it of giving 'safe haven to agents of chaos' by harbouring the Afghan Taliban and other militants.

The United States has already begun conditioning future aid to Pakistan on progress Islamabad makes in tackling the Haqqani Network militants. It has also hinted at imposing sanctions on Pakistani officials allegedly having links with militants.

However, Premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi warned the US on Monday

that any targeted sanctions by Washington against Pakistani officials would not help US counter-terrorism efforts. "We are fighting the war against terror, anything that degrades our effort will only hurt the US effort," he said in an interview with Reuters.

Islamabad-based diplomatic sources told *Daily Express* that foreign policy wizards, security officials and top government functionaries have been brainstorming since the unveiling of Trump's strategy in an effort to chart out new policy vis-à-vis Washington.

It has been decided that Pakistan would phase out its dependence on the United States. And high-level contacts with Washington would be restored only after the Trump administration acquiesced to assuage Pakistan's legit concerns on the new US strategy for Afghanistan and beyond.

For future dealings, the United States would be asked to stop its relentless 'do-more mantra' and maintain ties with Pakistan on the basis of sovereign equality, sources say.

There has been no top level contact between Trump's aides and Pakistani officials since the inauguration of the new US strategy, though US Ambassador David Hale has met senior Pakistani civil and military leaders in an attempt to soothe frayed tempers in Islamabad.

According to sources, the Trump administration has conveyed through diplomatic channels that Washington wants to resolve all contentious issues with Pakistan through dialogue in order to further strengthen bilateral relations.

However, Pakistan has made it clear that bilateral ties could be strengthened only if the US gave up its consistent policy of pressing Pakistan to do more in the fight against terrorism.

Islamabad has also reiterated its willingness to continue

playing its role for a peaceful Afghanistan and to fight the menace of terrorism, but it would never allow the Afghan conflict to spill into Pakistan.

Pakistan has started approaching key international and regional players to garner their support in the wake of scathing criticism from President Trump. In this context, Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif has already launched a diplomatic offensive on the instructions of Premier Abbasi.

Asif toured China, Iran and Turkey this week where he won unequivocal support for Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts.

Pakistan has been in contact with two veto-wielding powers – China and Russia – who have opposed the American policy of putting undue pressure on Pakistan. The two key world players have assured Islamabad of every possible support at all forums. Pakistan would also approach other Western nations, especially France and the United Kingdom, to drive home its viewpoint.

Pakistan Tells US to Eliminate Terror Safe Havens in Afghanistan

Pakistan, in its formal comprehensive response to U.S. President Donald Trump's South Asia strategy, rejected allegations it is harboring Taliban insurgents who are staging deadly attacks against American forces in Afghanistan.

The rebuttal was issued Thursday after a meeting the National Security Committee of top civilian and military leaders

chaired by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi in Islamabad.

“The Afghan war cannot be fought in Pakistan... To scapegoat Pakistan will not help in stabilizing Afghanistan,” Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif said while reading the statement to the Senate, the upper house of parliament.

Trump’s speech

President Trump in his policy speech Monday said that Pakistan is taking billions of dollars from the United States but housing the very terrorists attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Pakistani security forces have taken “indiscriminate actions” against all terrorist networks and sacrificed tens of thousands of troops and civilians in this fight, Minister Asif said. In turn, he asked the United States to move against fugitive anti-state militants hiding in Afghanistan.

“We would like to see effective and immediate U.S. military efforts to eliminate sanctuaries harboring terrorists and miscreants on the Afghan soil including those responsible for fomenting terror in Pakistan,” said the foreign minister.

Instead of any financial or material assistance, there should be understanding and recognition of Pakistan’s efforts, contributions and sacrifice of thousands of its citizens and over 120 billion U.S. dollars of economic losses, Asif said.

“The claims of billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan are also misleading to the extent that the reimbursements to Pakistan since 2001 only account for part of the cost of ground facilities and air corridors used by the United States for its operations in Afghanistan, rather than any financial aid or assistance,” the minister explained.

He said that Islamabad has consistently worked with both Washington and Kabul to promote a negotiated settlement of the

Afghan conflict to bring an end to years of bloodshed in the neighboring country.

India's role

Foreign Minister Asif also took aim at the Trump administration's attempt to give India, archrival of Pakistan, a role in regional security efforts.

"India cannot be a net security provider in the South Asia region when it has conflictual relationships with all its neighbors and is pursuing a policy of destabilizing Pakistan from the east and the west," he said.

Pakistani leaders have consistently maintained that the Indian intelligence agency is using its growing influence with Afghan counterparts to sponsor terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Kabul and New Delhi deny the charges.

Meanwhile, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan said Thursday the new war strategy Trump announced earlier this week will result in an increase in train, advise and assist efforts as well as stepped up air power to Afghan security forces battling the Taliban.

General John Nicholson told reporters in Kabul U.S. and NATO are determined to enable Afghan forces defeat Taliban, and terrorists linked to Islamic State and remnants of al-Qaida. He also asked the Taliban to quit violence and enter into peace talks with the Afghan government.

"I say you have a simple choice: Stop fighting against your countrymen. Stop killing innocent civilians. Stop bringing hardship and misery to the Afghan people. Lay down your arms and join Afghan society. Help build a better future for this country and your own children," Nicholson said.

But a Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, swiftly rejected the general's call, saying the insurgent group is determined

to continue fighting until the last soldier of the “foreign occupation” forces left Afghanistan.

Courtesy: Voice of America