

# **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 at 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.