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Pakistan's Water Woes: Don't Blame India

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Dr. S.Chandrasekharan

Daily Pakistan of July 29, 2018 carried a very detailed article on the water crisis in Pakistan and it said that the challenges faced by Pakistan in the shape of water scarcity and absence of clean water pose a threat to the very survival of the country and its people. It also said that rapid growth in population, extensive urbanization, traditional agricultural practices and industrialization all have put Pakistan on the path of drought, hunger and instability.

Water storage has been reduced drastically to 30 days from the minimum of 120 days required for any country. This shortage of water has earned Pakistan, a name in the list of 15 most water scarce countries. The per capita availability of water is said to be 908 cubic meters now from 5200 cubic metres it had seven decades ago!

Instead of looking at the mismanagement of water internally, Pakistani press and politicians have continued to blame India for its "water woes." India has been accused of violating provisions of Indus Water Treaty and the LET in their election campaign focussed on the water problem and accused India of stealing the waters of Pakistan. One of the analysts had even gone to the extent of declaring that Pakistan not only risks water shortage but is vulnerable to a war.

In an earlier paper of ours- 6327 dated 11 December, we had quoted the findings of Dr. Daniel Mustafa, a Pakistani Professor teaching in UK and a distinguished expert on Water issues who said - "There is no shred of evidence that India has violated the Indus Water Treaty or that it is stealing Pakistan's water. India has to date not violated any of the clauses of Annexure D that was jointly written by Pakistani and Indian Engineers."

In none of the findings of arbitrators or neutral experts on disputes that had arisen between the two countries on Indus Waters there is any

mention that India was using Indus water unauthorizedly and in fact they have never even questioned India's right to develop run of the river projects on the rivers allotted to Pakistan under the treaty.

While harping on the violation of the treaty by India on Kishenganga and Rattle projects in the east, Pakistan has opened a new front on water wars with Afghanistan on sharing the waters of Kabul River.

The 700 Km long Kabul River is a tributary of the Indus system and a large part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is covered by the Kabul River. Most of the areas in Peshawar, Charsakka and Nowshera are irrigated by the river Kabul. Yet there has been no bilateral treaty between Kabul and Afghanistan on sharing of the waters of the Kabul river. The two countries will have to go by international rules like the Helsinki rules or the Berlin Rules of 2004. For this there has to be a mutual trust that is lacking. And India is once again being accused of building dams in Afghanistan to the disadvantage of Pakistan!

Afghanistan still lacks a modern water infra structure for its agricultural and urban needs. Its needs have increased only recently. For the first time, it made out a development agenda that included building of dams as an integral part of its development in 2008. Despite the absence of a treaty, Pakistan has started accusing Afghanistan of denying them the water.

Pakistan's ills on water resources are not because of India or Afghanistan, but because of total mismanagement of water resources internally. Water is getting scarce day by day. While the public, and technocrats are becoming aware of the seriousness of the situation, the Government appears to be in a denial mode and are satisfied in accusing India of violating the Indus Treaty and nothing else. There is a hope in some quarters that the new Regime under Imran Khan would give it a priority but one cannot be sure.

Internally, the first major problem of Pakistan is the inequitable distribution of water among the States in Pakistan. Pakistan is governed by the "Pakistan Water Apportionment Accord 1991" by which Punjab gets the maximum of 49 percent(almost half), Sind with 43 percent, and the rest of the two provinces Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa get three and five percent respectively.

The second is the problem of storage facilities- While Pakistan receives 145 million acre feet of water, only 13.7 million acre feet of water is being stored, resulting in an enormous wastage of water.

Third, is the acute shortage of drinking water and in one estimate, by 20125 fresh water shortage should be around 31 million acre feet of water. The quality of water is another major concern. Industrial runoffs and sewage have immensely polluted the available water specially in urban areas that are heavily industrialised. Consequently cities like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad among other cities are already facing clean water crisis with no end in sight. Biological contamination is the major cause for health issues resulting in even deaths.

Fourth, is the enormous wastage of water in agricultural operations. Estimates vary but it is generally agreed that over 90 percent of water is being used in agriculture. Inefficient and injudicious use of water, non availability of modern techniques, failure to select crops that could maximize production with less water and above all lack of awareness of the need to conserve water, have all contributed to deficiency of water.

Fifth, is the indiscriminate use of ground water. Absence of ground water regulations has only complicated the situation. This has resulted in the shrinkage of this valuable alternate source of water. Existing laws are being flagrantly violated. For example even in Islamabad where extraction of water is prohibited, people openly pull ground water blatantly! Major cities are getting more dependent on ground water pushing the water table further downwards!

Finally, as Ahmed Kazi has pointed out- the immense rise in water scarcity demands rapid development in population control. Rising population as he said, would affect adversely the availability of food, access to education and health.

As a development Researcher has pointed out, "crying for water scarcity should be replaced with finding ways for using water in a more efficient manner.

It should be clear that Pakistan is climbing the wrong tree in accusing India of stealing its water- Rather it should look itself in the mirror and see what has gone wrong in the management of its water resources. International agencies like IMF, Asia Foundation and the UNDP have all pointed out to a drastic drop in water availability in Pakistan and the considered view of many is that the new Government in Pakistan should make it a priority in dealing with this crisis.

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