

**Water storage depleting at alarming level**

LAHORE: Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) Chairman retired Lt-Gen Muzammil Husain says that per capita water availability in Pakistan has squeezed to an alarming 908 cubic meter per annum from 5,260 cubic meter, pushing Pakistan towards water scarcity fast.

It also recommends a sustainable long-term plan to thwart the looming water crisis and improve the ratio of low-cost hydel electricity in Pakistan.

“It is a matter of grave concern that per capita water availability in the country has come down from 5,260 cubic meter as was in 1951 to an alarming level of 908 cubic meter per annum, pushing us to the stage of water-scarce country. So we need a sustainable long-term plan to thwart the looming water crisis and improve the ratio of low-cost hydel electricity in Pakistan,” Mr Husain said while giving a briefing a delegation of the Command and Staff College Quetta that visited the authority’s office here on Monday.

At present, Pakistan can store only 10 per cent of its annual river flows against the world average of 40 per cent. Ironically, instead of increasing water storage capacity, the country has lost about one-fourth storage of the dams. The live water storage capacity that used to be 16.26 million acre feet (MAF) in 1976 has reduced to 13.68 MAF, which equals to only 30 days carry over capacity. India has carry over capacity of 170 days, Egypt 700 days and America 900 days.

“A major paradigm shift to the existing development mechanism in Pakistan is direly needed to improve the water situation and handle the monster of circular debt. There has to be a home-grown engineering expertise coupled with innovative financial models with less dependence on the government and efficient yet swift planning and approval processes for implementation of the project,” he explained. “The carry over water storage capacity has to be increased from 30 days to 120 days. Likewise, the ratio of low-cost hydel electricity also requires to be drastically improved,” he said.

The delegation was briefed about the water scenario and development projects of Wapda in the water and hydropower sectors. It was also briefed over the challenges and issues faced by Pakistan in water sector.

The Wapda chief, while talking about his vision for construction of dams and hydropower projects, said the Wapda plans to add two MAF to water storage capacity and 828 megawatt (MW) hydropower generation capacity up to 2025 in short term, another eight MAF water storage and 5,653 MW power generation up to 2030 in medium term and 28 MAF water storage and 6,245 MW generation capacity up to 2,050 in long term with completion of its various projects.

“Contract for Mohmand Dam Hydropower Project has been awarded and construction work on the project is about to start, while work on Diamer Basha Dam will also commence this year,” he added.

He also briefed the delegation about impact of climate change on water resources, water management challenges, water conservation and hydropower potential of the country. He also responded to the queries raised by the delegation during question-answer session.

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter