

PER CAPITA WATER AVAILABILITY COMES TO DANGEROUSLY LOW LEVEL, SENATE TOLD

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ISLAMABAD: The Upper House of Parliament was informed Friday that per capita water availability last year stood at 908 cubic metres, whereas it was 5,260 cubic metres back in 1951.

During the question hour, the government told the Senate if the same trend continues, water availability would further reduce to 800 cubic metres per capita by 2025, a severe shortage with serious impacts on socioeconomic life.

The House was told that a storage capacity of 4.965 million acres feet (MAF) of existing reservoirs has been lost owing to sedimentation and studies showed that an additional 0.75 MAF would be lost due to sedimentation by 2025, further reducing per capita water availability.

Senators Mushtaq Ahmad, Sirajul Haq and Nauman Wazir Khattak agitated on what they alleged denial of due share of net hydel profit to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and put aside Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Azam Swati's arguments that arrears to the tune of Rs 137 billion had been paid to the province whereas Rs 37 billion are yet to be cleared.

They contended that power theft amounts are also being deducted from the province's share, which is unfair and questioned the logic behind selling electricity to the province at Rs 17 per unit whereas its generation cost was Re 1 per unit.

Senator Mushtaq claimed that Rs 500 billion arrears are payable from the Centre to the province, which the minister rejected and said when the formula agreed upon between the province and WAPDA, Sirajul Haq was KP finance minister and this was done in his presence.

However, as the senators continued pressing the matter, Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani referred the matter to the House standing committee concerned. But not before Federal Minister for Power Omar Ayub said that there is no dispute between the Centre and the provinces, insisting there is no issue from the federation towards the provinces.

The House was also informed that during the last five years, Rs 1469.085 million were spent on advertisement by the Power Division.

Accepting a challenge from JI Senator Sirajul Haq, Swati said that Haq should move a fresh question and he would get names of all the 350 dams built in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the last five years. Senator Haq had asked him to share names of 50 dams instead of the ex-KP government's promised 350 dams.

Omar Ayub said that under the net hydel profit, Rs 20 billion had been paid to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the remaining amount would be cleared by May-June.

He explained the government is taking concrete measures to have control over energy security, which is presently not with Pakistan, as power generation relies 60 per cent on imported resources, including oil and LNG.

He continued the government plans to increase share of renewable energy from 4 per cent to 20 per cent by 2025 and enhancing nuclear energy share from 6 per cent to 10 per cent.

Through a written reply to a question by Senator Mushtaq Ahmad of JI, Faisal Vawda, Minister for Water Resources, said that Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower project (NJHP) has been substantially completed with all the four units in commercial operation and over 2400 GWh energy had been inducted into the national grid up to April 11, 2019.

Answering a supplementary question, Swati said that a total of Rs 64.838 billion were collected under NJHP surcharge by April 30 this year and the surcharge would not be collected after June 30, 2019.

Opposition Senators Mushtaq Ahmad, Javed Abbasi and Sirajul Haq alleged that instead of being used for the objectives for which it was enacted, the Anti-Terrorist Act is being applied on political workers and journalists and even those who agitated against electricity load shedding.

In a written question, Senator Mushtaq had asked about the number of persons who were awarded capital punishment under ATA during the last one year.

Law Minister Dr Muhammad Farogh Naseem replied that two ATA courts are functioning under the Ministry of Law and Justice, as other courts are under respective provincial governments and that three persons had been awarded life imprisonment in Islamabad.

PPP Senator Sassui Palijo agitated on not finding an answer to her question, which she claimed to have asked four to five times but either she got incomplete reply or no reply at all.

She had sought details of land lost due to sea intrusion in different coastal areas of Sindh and the steps taken or being taken by the government to prevent sea intrusion. On her request, the matter was referred to the House committee concerned.

To another question by Chaudhry Tanvir Khan, Omar Ayub said that a total of 160 oil and gas discoveries had been made during the last ten years and of these, 131 are in Sindh, 13 in Punjab, 03 in Balochistan and 13 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

About the much-discussed offshore oil and gas reserves prospects, he said that in next two weeks, it would be established whether or not there is oil and gas found, but added it is a high risk activity.