

Economic Survey depicts dismal picture of climate change impacts

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Survey of Pakistan 2020 sketched a dismal picture when it quoted international studies saying Pakistan has lost 0.53pc per unit GDP, suffered economic losses worth \$3.8 billion and witnessed 152 extreme weather events from 1999 to 2018.

The Economic Survey shared data from the Global Climate Risk Index annual report for 2020.

It also quoted German Watch, which ranked Pakistan globally in the top 10 countries most affected by climate change in the past 20 years owing to its geographical location.

The survey said according to another analysis by Asian Development Bank, the socioeconomic costs of environmental degradation were considerable with climate adaptation needs ranging between \$7 billion and \$14 billion per year.

However, the survey said the government was cognizant of the situation and taking measures at policy, management and operational levels to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change in the country.

Pakistan suffered economic losses worth \$3.8bn and witnessed 152 extreme weather events from 1999 to 2018, survey quotes international studies

“By launching the Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (ESRI), the government intends to facilitate the transition towards environmentally resilient Pakistan by mainstreaming adaptation and mitigation through ecologically targeted programmes. Afforestation, biodiversity conservation and attaining Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) are some of the initiatives besides the approval of National Electric Vehicle Policy targeting a 30pc shift to electric by 2030, and the world’s “first zero emissions” metro line project launched in the city of Karachi.” The “Clean-Green Cities Index” has been initiated in 20 cities to trigger a shift towards improved waste management and sanitation are some of the other objectives.”

According to the Economic Survey, studies were undertaken using the Agricultural Production Systems Simulator (APSIM) model that showed that wheat production in the arid areas of Pakistan was likely to suffer to the tune of 17pc.

It is feared that the aggregate impact of climatic parameters such as changes in temperature and rainfall, exerted an overall negative impact on cereal crop yields, given that the management practices and use of technology remain unchanged.

Modeling of climate change scenarios for Pakistan show that if agriculture and water management in the Indus River Basin continue in a business as usual mode, increasing

temperatures and changes in precipitation will pose serious threats to the future livelihoods of farmers and to the Pakistani agricultural sector.

Impacts of Climate Change on Water Resources: The Economic Survey has said that in the Karakoram region, the especially northeastern part of Northern Pakistan, which contains the major proportion of the Pakistani glaciers, there is evidence that most of the glaciers are either advancing or stable.

Recently Khurdopin glacier and the Shisper glacier surged down the hill at extremely fast rates, causing a blockade to a flowing stream, forming a temporary lake with an outburst risk.

On the other hand, some areas, especially in the Hindukush mountain range (Chitral and western Gilgit), the Chitaboo Glacier in Chitral has retreated rapidly in recent years due to global warming.

The survey said Pakistan has been consistently ranked as one of the most affected countries by climate change.

The population is facing natural hazard challenges like floods, droughts and cyclones.

The policymakers, scientists, developers, engineers and many others around the world are using geographic information system (GIS) technology to better understand this complex situation and offer tangible solutions in different climate change scenarios.

To improve the forest cover, the government has launched Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme to combat adverse effects of global warming. This umbrella project covers all the provinces including AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan with provincial budgetary share.

All segments of society such as students, youth, and farmers have been actively involved in this mega afforestation activity.

The government maintains that the coronavirus outbreak is a human tragedy, affecting hundreds of thousands of people globally, impacting the global economy, including Pakistan's.

In the current situation, the government has a dual challenge; to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate the socioeconomic losses to protect the most vulnerable.

This is the first time in hundred years that the world is facing a rapidly spreading fatal virus for which there is no authentic prevention/treatment to overcome the pandemic.

Under the current crisis, top priority of the government is to protect the vulnerable segments of society.

Meanwhile, the government is taking different measures to effectively tackle climate change challenges, such as improving technological responses by setting in place early warning systems and information systems to enhance disaster preparedness climate change resilience, and by improving forest management and biodiversity conservation.