

FPCCI seminar highlights country's water issues

Page No.02 Col NO.05

The Research and Policy Division of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) organized a roundtable on water scarcity in Pakistan and decided to form FPCCI committee on water scarcity to be headed by S.M. Muneer who will meet and make presentation on water issue to the Prime Minister.

The committee will make necessary recommendations to be gathered from water experts. The conference was held at FPCCI offices in Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore linking them through video conference. The aim of this roundtable was to discuss the water scarcity in Pakistan for minimizing risk and maximizing benefits.

During discussion session, the participants highlighted corruption related issues, tanker mafia, dumping of industrial wastage in sea, evaporation-losses from reservoirs and creation of reliable data of water resources, frequency of flood, high frequency of droughts, melting of glaciers and establishing of dam by India and Afghanistan etc.

They suggested installation of desalination plant in Karachi, Reverse Osmosis plant, good governance, establishment of Kalabagh and all other dams, barrages, price of water usage in agriculture sector, maintenance and repair/restoration of Tarbela and Mangla dams, rivers, canals, storage of rain water and improvement of water quality for food security, alleviation of poverty, stability, sovereignty etc.

They also emphasized that private sector should collaborate with government for resolving water issues and construction of dams.

WAPDA chairman Lieutenant General Muzammil Hussain said that Pakistan receives 145 million acre feet of water every year but only 14m acre feet of water is preserved. He said that due to soil gathering at the base of Tarbela and Mangla Dam, the storage capacity decreased by 35 to 40 percent. He said at present the capacity of water storage is only for 30 days and 94 per cent of surface and groundwater is used for agriculture in Pakistan. He said that being the biggest stakeholder, WAPDA is aware of water issues whereupon economic growth, food security, development and security of Pakistan depend.

"Lack of governance is main problem as there are many anti-dams lobbies that are under control of donors," he said, urging that Pakistan need concrete steps to resolve water issues. He said adoption of water efficient technologies, water safety and saving system in agriculture were also needed, as Pakistan ranked 46th out of 48 countries in water-efficient usage country.

FPCCI president Ghazanfar Bilour said that water scarcity is also a transnational and trans-boundary problem which seriously affects our agriculture and industrial sector productivity. He said Pakistan has very little capacity of water storage compared to India, China and USA.

"Successful reforms in water sector need to be accompanied by improvements in the agricultural production techniques, recycling plants and construction of small and large dams," he proposed.

FPCCI's ex-president S.M. Muneer said that water scarcity is a serious issue in Pakistan which may dry-out Pakistan by 2025 because of over-depletion, overexploitation and pollution of water resources.

"Pakistan is blessed with one of the world's best and largest irrigation systems, but we failed to get maximum benefit from the system by utilizing it efficiently," he said, noting that at present per capita availability of water is just 1000 cubic meters.

Muneer also highlighted challenges related to the global warming that include rising of sea level, high temperature, frequency of flood, high frequency of droughts and melting of glaciers etc. he lamented that Pakistan doesn't prepare itself for these challenges.

SAARC-CCI's SVP Iftikhar Ali Malik said the yield per hectare, livestock, energy and minerals explorations are directly affected due to water issues. He said there is a need that all provinces and political parties should be on same page for resolving of water issues. He said industrial and household waste is another issue that affects the quality of water and subsequently increases death rate because of water borne diseases.

Chairman of FPCCI Standing Committee on Banking, Finance and Credit, Dr. Mirza Ikhtiar Baig said that if Pakistan doesn't take immediate measures to build water reservoirs then Pakistan will face serious crises of water which will be more devastating than terrorism.

He also highlighted violation of Indus water treaty by India in term of building of dams on those rivers which are flowing towards Pakistan.

Chairman Industry-Academia Committee on Water, Waseem Vohra highlighted wasting of rain water and absence of recycling water.

Mega Tech's president Mazhar Talpur suggested usage of water efficient technologies.

Dr. Moazzam Ali Khan highlighted the movement of saline and contaminated sea water towards the Indus River and water losses during the distribution to household in Karachi.

Glacier Protection Organization's Dr. Shafqat Kakakhel called for implementation of minimum hygienic standards in water usage.

Director PIEDAT, Dr. Ayub Qutub highlighted the social practices in water usage in Pakistan such usage of water in producing sugarcane and others etc. He proposed control of water usage.

Director NDMA, Waqaruddin Siddiqui, spoke on the initiative taken by NDMA for controlling of floods and disasters in Pakistan that included: disaster policy, 10-year flood management plan and creation of disaster funds, etc.

Professor Dr. S. M. Imran of NED University raised the issue of exploration of ground water resources by India on border which may create shortage of ground water to Pakistan.

NFCIET's Tahir Imran Qureshi underlined Thar situation where people are drinking highly saline and fluoride water and facing bones and kidney related diseases. Moreover, malnutrition is another issue that increases death rate in Pakistan.

FPCCI vice presidents Tariq Haleem, Zahid Saeed, Waheed Ahmed, Karim Aziz, Arfan Yousuf, Saeeda Bano, Shabnum Zafar and Shafique Anjum also expressed their views on issued related to water scarcity and emphasized that concrete steps be taken to sort out the problem.

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