

# **Pakistan has capacity to store water for 36 days**

**Page No.02 Col No.01**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan being a water stressed country has the capacity of storing water for a maximum of 36 days, while the rest of the world can hold water for use for 130 days, the officials of Ministry of Water Resources informed the Senate Special Committee on Water Scarcity here Thursday.

Water Resources Secretary Shumail Ahmed Khawaja while briefing the committee regarding water availability in the country and its storages said that current water available resources is 138 million acre feet (MAF) with a storage capacity of 13.7 MAF which is only 10 percent of available water resources.

The meeting of the Senate Special Committee on Water Scarcity was convened by Senator Moula Bux Chandio. Khawaja said that in order to come to a consensus on this all important water issue, four sessions with chief ministers of all the four provinces were held under the Council of Common Interests (CCI). After rigorous deliberations a consensus was achieved after which the National Water Policy was conceived. All provinces agreed to a Water Charter according to which no matter which party holds the reins of power, there shall be no change in the policy until 2030 on account of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agreement on the construction of Mohmand and Bhasha Dams were achieved as a result of this meeting as well.

Apart from construction of dams, Khawaja stressed the need to conserve water. He stated that 90-95 percent of Pakistan's water is being used for irrigation; 50 percent of which is lost during canal diversion. According to the National Water Policy until 2030, 33 percent of water should be conserved. However, this seems impossible in the current context. According to different reports 8-9 million acre feet of water can be conserved if this wastage is controlled.

He further said that the National Water Council was established to achieve this goal. The panel was headed by the prime minister and included chief ministers of the four provinces, Prime Minister Azad Kashmir and Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan. Some ministers and secretaries were also part of the team. As a result of detailed deliberations it was suggested that water distribution systems around the country be developed. However, lack of coordination got the better of it and nothing could be achieved in this regard.

Senator Azam Khan Swati stressed the need for strengthening officers working on this daunting challenge. He also said that for any progress to be made, it is imperative that awareness about this issue is created at every tier of society.

While highlighting the problems of Sindh, Senator Sassui Palijo said that since yearly rainfall is rare in the province, the people of Sindh depend on its river systems for water. She stressed the need for equal distribution of water and implementation of the Water Apportionment Accord 1991 to address grievances of smaller provinces.

Water Resources Secretary Shumail Ahmed Khawaja was of the view that for any progress to be made it was imperative that water distribution in the four provinces is regulated. While discussing Senator Sherry Rehman's notice on July 23, 2018 regarding the need for installation of water desalination plants in the country, the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) informed the committee when faced with acute water shortage desalination is the last option, due to exorbitant costs.

It was revealed that investment costs for a large plant was \$900-1200/m<sup>3</sup> and \$2500/m<sup>3</sup> for a small plant. Desalination costs would come up to \$1.0/m<sup>3</sup> for a small plant. Senator Brig (R) John Kenneth Williams was of the view that the option of installation of filtration plants on the coastal belt must also be explored.

The meeting was attended by Senator Sassui Palijo, Senator Dr Ghous Muhammad Khan Niazi, Senator Brig. (R) John Kenneth Williams, Senator Muhammad Akram, Senator Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, and senior officers of the Ministry of Water Resources, Indus Rivers Systems Authority (Irsa) and Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR).