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Water experts and academia reject Diamer Bhasha Dam

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Water experts and academics at an online conference on Diamer Bhasha Dam have rejected all dams on Indus River saying that any further construction of dam would be a huge damage to already dying Indus Delta.

The online conference on Thursday was organized by Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, which works over issues of water, fishermen, peasants and environment.

Water expert Hassan Abbas said that 60 percent population of the country did not have access to clean water, people were consuming polluted and arsenic water and Bhasha Dam can not resolve these issues.

He said that Bhasha Dam will not resolve electricity issue either, which would be so expensive that nobody would afford it.

Chairman Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum Muhammad Ali Shah said by stopping Indus water, Indus River, Delta and people living there have been pushed to the wall socially and economically. The water, which brought silt for the growth of fish species, filled up lakes and provided rich soil to the lands, has either been constrained or dried up.

Due to slow down of fresh water flow into Delta, various water ways, creeks and lakes have become brackish along with underground water resources. Resultantly, wells and ponds are not drinkable anymore for the local population and they are forced to purchase drinking water.

He said that due to salt level increase, lands have become barren. Once rich fisheries, due to mangrove forests, are jeopardized and historically rich people of Delta are migrating on a larger scale. "Despite of that, federal government is constructing Bhasha Dam and other dams that would further jeopardize life connected with Indus River," he said.

Shah said dam means 'Power', the one who has water, has power. Recently, Imran Khan's federal government with colonial thinking has decided to construct Bhasha Dam.

He said due to construction of previous dams and barrages over Indus River, sea intrusion has intruded 4.0 million acres of land in Delta's three districts Thatta, Sujawal and Badin, 1.2 million people have migrated from the area while 2.0 million people have been affected with no discharge of water downstream Kotri Barrage. "We think that construction of Bhasha Dam will further endanger lives and environment related with Indus River. Politically motivated such decisions and policies will be disastrous for the helpless people of Delta," he said.

Shah stressed over the need that instead of controlling rivers, we should understand that they are living things, we provide them right of free flowing and learn to live in harmony with nature. "Let us work together to save rivers. It is time now that instead of constraining rivers behind dams, we provide them right to free flowing. We can not make nature our slave due to our own motives. Thus, constructing any dam on Indus River will be a big blunder and crime," he said.

Water expert of Mehran University Prof. Dr Altaf Ali Siyal said it is reported that about 80% of the flow and silt has decreased to reach the Indus Delta which encouraged the sea to intrude. A study reports that Indus delta has shrunk 90%. The entire irrigation system of Pakistan is not efficient. About 60% of water is lost from source to farm.

He said that instead of constructing hydraulic structures, water management techniques should be adopted. "Under changing climate scenario and construction of new hydraulic structures, the river flow to delta will further decrease," he said.

He suggested 100% lining of canals and watercourses in areas with poor quality groundwater, while areas with fresh ground water should not be considered for lining of channels.

Existing water reservoirs have lost about 40% of their storage capacity. Their capacity should be restored by desilting the dams, he said. Many countries have tools, techniques and expertise to desilt the dams.

He suggested that the rights of lower riparian should be safe guarded by implementing 1991 accord in letter and spirit.

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ismail Kumbhar, Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam during his presentation said that the deltaic communities of Indus River, who have historical and traditional rights on the Indus River, paid the huge price of dams in terms of irreparable damages to their livelihood along with other impacts.

Dr. Kumbhar suggested that Water accord signed by both riparian parties must be implemented by the Government of Pakistan, Water release of 27 to 35 MAF downstream Kotri Barrage to assure the survival of the ecology and economy of the Indus Delta.