

Pakistan to double its water storage capacity

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will double its water storage capacity to at least 28 million acre feet (MAF) of water from existing 14 MAF increasing the storage capacity from 10 to 20 percent of total water flows, reveals the draft document of National Water Policy (NWP) prepared during last 7 decades and tabled in Common Council of Interests (CCI) that met with Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi in the chair here on Tuesday.

Though the CCI attended by three chief ministers of Sindh, KP, Balochistan and Finance Minister of Punjab deliberated the draft of the National Water Policy in detail and decided that the said draft with more inputs from federating units be brought in next meeting for approval.

However, as per the copy of draft of the policy, in procession of this scribe, the authorities in Pakistan will also carve out the plan of reduction of 33 percent in 46 million cares feet river flows that are lost in conveyance. The decision makers will also come up with the plan to increase at least 30 percent in the efficiency of water use by produce more crop per drop ensuring g the gradual replacement and refurbishing of irrigation system.

Mentioning about the agriculture sector, the NWP draft point outs saying that the strategies and action plans shall be prepared to ensure food security of people of Pakistan focusing the concept of 'More Crop per Drop' that will be pursued with full determination.

Apart from it, irrigation system will be modernized. Irrigation facilities will be extended to new cultivable command areas for growing low delta high value crops.

And to make the water availability sustainable, the water charges will be increased to realistic extent. In addition special measures for rain-fed

agriculture will be taken such as solar pumping, rainwater harvesting and less intensive crops.

About the trans-boundary water sharing, the water policy draft unfolds that a mechanism will be devised for sharing the trans-boundary aquifers and joint watershed management including sharing of real time data.

More importantly a study will be carried out to evaluate impact of developments in the upper catchment areas on Pakistan's water flows. In addition, a regional mechanism involving more than two neighboring countries (Afghanistan, India and Pakistan) will be looked into.

Dilating upon the institutional framework, the water policy divulges that other than revitalization of WAPDA, new and vibrant institutions such as National Water Council will be established headed by Prime Minister to oversee the implementation of national water policy. Besides Provincial Water Authorities will be set up with the capacity to design and construct the small and medium dams. Ground Water Authority will also be established to issue, establish, and enforce standards for development and utilization of ground water.

In the policy, it has been mentioned saying that the investment of 2.891 trillion in water sector is required, meaning by that Rs1.6 trillion to build Diamer-Bhasha and Mohmand Munda Dam, Rs800 billion for water conservation, Rs150 billion for drainage, Rs12 billion for flood control, Rs300 billion for rehabilitation of barrages, head works and canals and Rs29 billion for research purposes.

Touching the issue of impact of climate change, the policy measures related to water resources will be adopted in line with provisions of National Climate Change Policy (2012).

Adoptive measures, short and long terms, will be worked out to mitigate impacts of climate change. And to better understand how rainfall patterns

will shift, local climate model will be prepared and to this effect collaboration will be worked out with international agencies and organizations in weather simulation and modeling.

On the issue of drinking water and sanitation, plans and strategies will be undertaken to progressively provide access to clean and safe drinking water.

Full financial sustainability will be aimed at for the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Systems and in this regard, Rural Water Supply and sanitation services will be priced affordably apart from desalination for remote areas.

Highlighting the issue of Urban Water Management, Public Health Engineering Department and WASAs will be encouraged to devise coordinated strategies under Provincial Action Plans and industrial units and municipal entities will be required to treat effluents and hazardous discharge before disposal. Wastewater treatment will be promoted at centralized level (in technical terms) at first and will be decentralized in due course of time. Drinking water supply will be aimed at provision of safe, affordable and sustainable supply of water to every citizen of Pakistan.

And to increase the hydropower, accelerated development hydropower will be treated as high priority objective and development of low-head hydropower projects on canal will be encouraged. The government will encourage private sector producers to develop hydropower.