

Final Episode(26)

Searching for Solution of Water Issues – Options and Possibilities

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In the 25 articles written so far, an attempt was made to cover the important issues pertaining to water management for the current and future generations. It was also mentioned that based on global experiences water issues are best resolved by politicians. In a country like Pakistan, handling of such emotive and intricate problems is even more difficult because in our federation, water is a provincial subject and ideally we need to have a uniform policy for all provinces. The justification for the need of uniformity is based on peculiar position of surface water availability in Pakistan. We have only one large river basin which is the main source of water in all federating units. Up to now, we have not made any progress in such policy formulation because of our failure to agree on Kalabagh Dam (KBD) Project. There is an urgent need to develop a consensus on KBD for it may enable us to hammer out an agreement on more important water issues.

With this aim, an honest effort was made to remove misperceptions which have come to surround this project over the last 25 years. It is sincerely

hoped that with positive help from the media, information about the real facts would pave the way for better understanding. Therefore, along with an agreement on KBD we may make an effort to resolve the real problems. It is in this regard that a set of suggestions is given below:-

1. The water issues be dealt with by a Committee of Chief Ministers under the constitutional forum of Council of Common Interests (CCI);
2. The following challenges may be entrusted to that Committee for finding a solution:-
 - a. After a careful study of the impact of climate change on Pakistan, develop a long term adaptation plan to cater for the effects on water flows in Indus Basin;
 - b. Price of water be fixed, with incremental increases over a period of time to ultimately bring it at par with its optimum value;
 - c. Regulation of sub-soil water extraction;
 - d. An action plan for the treatment of effluent generated by
 - i. Industry,
 - ii. Agriculture&
 - iii. Municipal use;
 - e. Assess population growth and its adverse impact on availability and quality of water, for taking remedial measures.

The Committee may hire the services of experts to provide them with relevant information and brief them about international practices for water management and design an enforcement mechanism through a legal framework.

Regarding resolution of KBD issue, the problem revolves around public perception in certain regions rather than economic and technical facts of the project. If that was not the case, how and why can we explain the difference in acceptance of Diamer Basha Dam (DBD) and rejection of Kalabagh Dam. Both are located on river Indus, DBD 320 km upstream of Tarbela Dam and KBD 200 km downstream of Tarbela Dam. Both will store water. DBD has 6.4 Million Acres Feet (MAF) live storage and KBD 6.1 MAF live storage. Similarly both will generate electricity, DBD 4500 MW and KBD 3600 MW. None of the two dams would have any off-taking canals because in both cases such outlets have been declared technically un-feasible. (A comparison of the two projects is available on WAPDA website www.wapda.gov.pk).

Water is distributed among provinces in accordance with Water Apportionment Accord (WAA) 1991 and both these dams would have no role in the distribution of water. The distribution of water from Indus takes place from the barrages known as Jinnah, Chashma, Taunsa, Panjnad,

Guddu, Sukkur and Kotri. Then what is the difference between the two which forms the basis of decision to approve DBD and oppose KBD.

The one explanation on record is that after constructing an expensive dam for storage, there would be a natural tendency to fill it up even when water may be in short supply. This would reduce downstream flow. This is a valid apprehension but this could be equally applicable to any storage facility; be that at point A or at point B on the same river. If the decision to store water at KBD can be detrimental to the interest of lower riparian, then how a decision to store water at DBD cannot have the similar effect.

So, if this is not the real explanation and there is no significant difference between the two Dams, what is the problem which has not been stated but is at the centre of Sindh's reluctance to accept KBD.

The real problem lies in decision making framework in IRSA which controls the operation of reservoirs. Decision making in IRSA is through a majority vote and Sindh wants certain safeguards. And as a lower riparian, it is perfectly legitimate for Sindh to ask for appropriate measures to protect its interests.

When President Musharraf wanted to develop consensus on Kalabagh Dam, he constituted a Technical Committee on Water Resources in

November, 2003 with eight members, two from each province and the 9th member Mr. A.N.G. Abbasi as the Chairman.

When its report was finalized on August 25, 2005, there was difference of opinion on some issues between the Chairman and seven members of the Committee and consensus could not be reached.

Mr. A.N.G. Abbasi, a competent engineer who had held Ministerial position in Sindh and was Chairman TCWR, included views of the seven members of the committee along with his own comments. In Sindh, the comments of Mr. A.N.G. Abbasi are believed to accurately reflect Sindh's point of view.

It is recommended that the Chief Ministers' Committee proposed to be constituted by the CCI may include the following in its TORs:-

- 1- a. The comments of Mr. A.N.G. Abbasi as contained in the final report of TCWR;
- b. Mr. Idris Rajput another respected engineer from Sindh who served as Secretary Irrigation & Power Department, Government of Sindh and regularly contributes in Sindhi newspapers on water issues was made Chairman of a Committee constituted by PILDAT in 2011. His recommendations as contained in PILDAT's "Background Paper on Inter-Provincial Water Issues in Pakistan" may also be included.

(The views of Mr. A.N.G. Abbasi and Mr. Idris Rajput are available on WAPDA website www.wapda.gov.pk).

The remaining TORs may include the following:-

2. The issue relating to water requirement for irrigation of Sailaba area and regulated flows downstream of Kotri barrage;
3. Sustaining of life and maintaining ecological balance in Indus Delta;
4. The KP Government may be offered to engage international Panel of Experts to assess the possibility of flooding as well as the water logging of lands in Peshawar valley due to construction of KBD;
5. To counter the threat of flooding to Nowshera, the most effective intervention is possible through building Mohmand Dam. Therefore, the decision to build KBD must be coupled with proper allocation of funds for building Mohmand Dam;
6. Net Hydrel Profits - The leadership in Punjab displayed magnanimity when Ghazi Barotha Hydro-Power Project (GBHP) was under approval in ECNEC. Punjab was pleased to fore-go its right of Net Hydrel Profits for developing a consensus on GBHP.

The Government of Punjab could show similar magnanimity in case of KBD with a difference. Net Hydel Profits from KBD be administered separately by CCI and its proceeds may be used for:-

- a. Economic benefit of people who are displaced by storage of water in KBD;
- b. Paying O&M cost in terms of electricity needed for the lifting of water in Chashma Right Bank Lift Canal;
- c. Financing projects for saving the animal and plant life in Indus Delta and for lining of canals.

The suggestions in this article, which is last of the series are in my personal capacity and given with the best of intention. May Allah Help and Guide us !

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