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Country has serious water problem, reveals minister

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan is going to face water management challenges. By the year 2025 Pakistan will have a population of 225 million i.e. 45 million more than what we have today and to accommodate this additional population the country has to establish eight more mega cities like Lahore and creating water resources for these cities will be a biggest challenge.

Minister of Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal explained serious issues and challenges that the country has to address before the technical experts and scientists who were gathered at a two-day international conference on 'Regulation of Hydraulic Structures for Food Management' Friday.

He highlighted that at the time of partition water availability per capita was more than 5,000 cubic meters which would decline to around 800 cubic meters in near future, a situation where human survival becomes difficult and economic development also come to a halt. "Pakistan's productivity per unit of water and per unit of land is one of the lowest in the world," he added and stressed on the coordinated effort of institutions to deal with hazards. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Islamabad with Pakistan Water Partnership (PWP) has organised the conference in Planning Commission of Pakistan, Islamabad. The conference is continuation of the technical dialogue under the UNESCO's Flagship Project 'Strategic Strengthening of Flood Warning and Management Capacity of Pakistan'. The conference is aimed at assessing the need for revisions of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of major reservoirs especially the Tarbela dam.

As an outcome of two days, the conference will draw recommendations by reviewing problems in present SOPs, its elucidation and solution for better management of water resources in the country especially in flood scenarios.

In his keynote address, Akira Kono, Charge d'Affairs & Interim, Embassy of Japan informed that under a project of Unesco, a flood forecasting system called the "Integrated Flood Analysis System (IFAS)" would be installed in Pakistan's government agencies.

'IFAS is a simple, flood run-off analysis system to make flood forecast more effective and efficient. It was

developed by ICHARM, a Japanese research institute under the auspices of Unesco. This project also focuses on training of Human Resources to make full use of the IFAS'.
"Having suffered from many disasters in the past, Japan has continued to develop technologies and expertise for disaster management," he said. Sharing an experience of a Japanese city named Kamaishi, in Tohoku region he emphasised the importance of preparedness to prevent or reduce the damage of disasters in the first place.

"On March 11, 2011, Japan was hit by the devastating Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Most of the houses were destroyed in Kamaishi city. However, almost all of 3,000 school children in the city escaped safely. All these school children had received disaster education extensively in their schools, and heard and learned the lessons from their parents and grandparents at home," he said. "This case suggests that preparedness based upon common understandings and shared knowledge through education, formal or informal it could be, is a key in minimizing the damages caused by disaster," he added.

Dr Shahbaz Khan, Deputy Director UNESCO Asia Region, Dr Kozue Kay Nagata, Representative UNESCO Pakistan, Mitsoyoshi Kawasaki, Chief Representative of JICA Pakistan also spoke on the issues. A wide cadre of international experts, water scientists and experts from United Nations Agencies and Pakistan have been participating in the conference. A need to assess the state of the art in countermeasures against flood disasters in Asia and the Pacific region is of paramount importance. Socio-economic impacts of floods are severe enough and require affected countries to continuously seek for more effective countermeasures against flood disasters in order to minimize losses incurred. IFAS and similar platforms are the solution for better estimation of floods for minimum human loss, stressed the speakers.