

Per capita water availability alarming: Minister

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Iqbal, federal minister for planning and development, on Friday said that the per capita water availability has alarmingly decreased from 5,000 cubic metres to less than 1,000 cubic metres and it is feared to further go down to 800 cubic metres by 2025, a situation where human survival becomes difficult and economic development also comes to a halt.



The minister unfolded this shocking disclosure, while addressing the two-day international conference on “Regulation of hydraulic structure for flood management” arranged by the Global Water Partnership.

Pakistan has lost almost 4.6MAF of live storage in the existing reservoirs because of sedimentation, which is slightly more than the existing live storage of Mangla Dam, he said, adding that the carryover capacity has now depleted to 18 days as compared to Egypt’s 1,000 days and India’s 220 days.

The minister said that Pakistan’s water storage capacity is around seven percent of the total available water and for better water management, 40 percent of the total water availability is required for storage.

The country’s dependence on single river system is highly vulnerable and has little flexibility as compared to most of the countries that enjoyed by virtue of multiple river basins and diversity of water resources, he said. “If the water, sediment or salt system of the Indus basin goes wrong, that’s it — and unfortunately we are very close to it,” he said.

There are serious issues and challenges that the government has to address without wastage of time, Iqbal said, adding that Pakistan’s productivity per unit water and per unit of land is one of the lowest in the world. Likewise, the return to GDP of one cubic metre is also lowest in the world. Against world average of \$8.6, Pakistan’s one cubic metre of water contributes only 34 cents to its GDP. Similarly, storage per person in Pakistan is 73 cubic metres as against the 6,150 cubic metres per person in the United States and 5,000 cubic metres per person in Australia, the minister said.

Pakistan is one of the most arid countries in the world. Over 75 percent of it receives rainfall less than 250mm and 20 percent of it less than 125mm. The population and economy are heavily dependent on an annual influx of around 164.88 million acres feet of water in the Indus River System, mostly derived from snow and glacier melt.

Pakistan will, he said, face water management challenges and by 2025, the country will have a population of 225 million. To accommodate this additional population, Pakistan has to establish eight more mega cities each having population equivalent to Lahore, he said.

Iqbal also mentioned the findings of a panel of international experts commissioned by the United Nations secretary general, which revealed that the major challenge for the world in the 21st century will be water scarcity. It was also predicted that the future wars will be on water, he said.

He said that the experts believe that water availability on the globe is a finite element and there is no technology available to add additional water in the system.