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Pakistan's Water Woes: India Bashing Continues at Higher levels!

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Mon, 12/10/2018 - 12:32

Paper No. 6469 **Dated 10-Dec-2018**

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On 29th October, the Supreme Court of Pakistan overturned an order of the Lahore High Court and directed to introduce blocking of Indian Content in TV Channels. This ruling came after Pakistan accused India of shrinking the flow of Water into Pakistan.

It is curious that the court did not examine any evidence oral or documentary to examine the accusation of India being held responsible for the “shrinkage” of water in Pakistan.

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan said that the ruling was justified since the country's neighbor -India was damming the rivers that flow into Pakistan! He said, “ India is shrinking the flow of water into Pakistan- Why shouldn't we close their channels?”

This brings into question whether the Supreme Court has studied in detail the provisions in the Indus Water Treaty.

I am sure that the Chief Justice is well aware that so far, in all the arbitration cases and in cases referred to 'neutral experts', not one has said that India has illegitimately used waters meant for Pakistan. In fact, the feeling in India is that India is not fully utilizing the waters provided for under the Indus Water Treaty and is letting Pakistan enjoy the surplus waters while these waters could be diverted to other parts of India that are starving!

It is not the first time that the Supreme Court of Pakistan is taking an interest in the shortage of water in Pakistan which in the first instance is mainly due to mismanagement of available water resources. Instead of cleansing the system, the authorities, the politicians and even the Jihadi groups have been diverting the attention of the public that “India is stealing the waters of Pakistan’s rivers” under the IWT.

It was on July 24th that the Chief Justice of Supreme Court Mian Saqib Nisar heard a case relating to scarcity of water and the delay in construction of dams to increase the storage capacity of waters flowing in and into Pakistan.

The ensuing Court order said that the water resources are pertinent not only for human lives but also for country’s stability. It ordered the immediate construction of Diamer-Basha dam and said that the court decision is final.

The Chief Justice deposited one million Rupees for a fund created in the name of “Diamer-Basha and Mohamand dams-2018 and urged others to contribute to get the construction of the dam going. This fund was subsequently merged into PM’ fund on September 7, 2018 by PM Imran Khan.

In the course of the Court proceedings, the Chief Justice asked a direct question to the Ministry of Power and water- “ How much water are we wasting?”

To this, the response was that water worth millions of dollars is being wasted and then came out with a startling figure that in one year 90 million-acre feet of water is wasted!

So, who is responsible for the so-called shrinkage of water? The Supreme Court of Pakistan was fully aware of the real cause of shortage of water and yet it has also joined the bandwagon three months later to accuse India of being responsible for “shrinkage of water in Pakistan!”

Pakistan’s water challenges are manifold. We have mentioned on this, many times before in our website. A 2016 report of IMF mentions that water scarcity has been reduced from 5600 cubic metres at the time of Independence to barely 1070 cubic metres now and would get reduced further.

Data emanating from Pakistan gives the following figures on the availability of water in Pakistan.

1951 5260 million cubic metres

2007 1200. -do-

2009	1100	-do-
2010	1000	-do-
2017	908	-do-

It is projected that by 2025 the availability of water will be reduced to 800 million cubic metres.

As a measure sensitizing the public on conservation of water and the serious situation of water scarcity in Pakistan, the Supreme Court recently arranged a symposium titled “ Creating a Water Secure of Pakistan”.

The Symposium focussed on three main issues-

1. Investing in measures to increase water supply in small and big dams. (The country has storage facility for only 30 days in a year)
2. Manage Consumption.
3. Water Conservation.

The symposium at the end issued a 20-point declaration known as “Islamabad Declaration”. Significantly of the 20 points, two related to the Indus Water Treaty.

These were

1. Prioritising measures to realise the potential of Pakistan’s share of the Indus Basin.
2. Revisiting Indus Water Treaty to bolster Pakistan’s case globally.

Before tinkering with the Indus Water treaty that survived wars and periods of intense hostility, Pakistan should first look inward and see how to avoid mismanagement of available water resources and focus on a more equitable distribution of waters among its States rather than blaming India without sufficient evidence of being responsible for its water woes.

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