

# Kalabagh Dam

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**S**uccessive governments from Zia-ul-Haq on have been responsible for criminal indecisiveness on the Kalabagh Dam. Phony threats first by Fazle Haq and later by NAP, and totally unjustified apprehensions of Sindh and Balochistan based on ignorance and disinformation, had put the government on the defensive on this vital issue. Both Benazir and Nawaz Sharif could be forgiven, as political leaders seldom give priority to national interests when these clash with political mileage, but Zia and Pervaiz Musharraf had no such political compulsions. The latter's strongest trait had been decision-making, which appears to be getting rusty.

The press too has contributed to the current impasse by publishing articles by all and sundry, as authors who have no clue of water discipline or related engineering, making all sorts of utopian suggestions, have added to the general confusion. Some ignorant self-styled geniuses have made proposals of constructing dams to pond rainwater in the Punjab plains, where the natural gradient is between 1:500 and 1:1000. They do not have the foggiest idea of what such a suggestion entails; hundreds of thousands of acres to pond less than a MAF. Who would foot the bill for such a fantasy? The press has also given disproportionate coverage to anti-Kalabagh statements by some political parties which have negligible following.

No government since Zia-ul-Haq (included) has effectively projected the compulsion of constructing Kalabagh. Anti-state elements with confirmed anti-Pakistan record are being allowed to spread disinformation.

The prevailing drought has proved a blessing in disguise. While some areas have been hit more than others, it has subjected all parts of Pakistan to water scarcity. This has helped people look at Kalabagh's necessity more realistically. The groundwater table has already gone down an average 10-15 feet, which will worsen if not recharged by fresh rains. This will seriously affect tubewell outputs and increase undesirable salts in the water, adding to soil salinity. The government has projected losses at \$1 billion which will increase if the dry spell persists.

The overwhelming majority of Sindhis and Sarhadis are as patriotic as anyone else. Only a tiny handful of foreign-sponsored elements among them are creating all the mischief. Even after the government had released 5000 cusecs to Sindh out of Punjab's quota, rather than being grateful, what justification remains for creating law and order problem in Karachi on the grossly unjustified slogans of water shortage?

None of the objections raised by NWFP is based on facts. A much lesser area of NWFP will be affected by the dam water, than the area that will be irrigated. The construction of the dam will help control even the worst floods through regulation at

largest in the world, approximately 100-105 MAF are used for irrigation. Because of unlined canals and khals, the water loss is to 40-50 percent (40-50 MAF).

\* Pakistan has so far constructed two major dams; Mangla with 4.64 MAF ponding capacity (presently 4.63 MAF) and Tarbela with 9.68 MAF capacity (presently 7.295 MAF).

\* Approximately 30 MAF is thus going waste to the Arabian sea.

\* Kabul River alone has a total annual capacity of 26 MAF. During the flood season most of its water goes waste to the sea. The 1 MAF earlier ponded at Warsak is now zero, due to sedimentation.

\* Kalabagh Dam with its reduced level will have a capacity of 6 MAF which will raise total ponded capacity to approx 20 MAF.

\* Even after construction of Kalabagh Dam we will still have untapped 24 MAF of water, most of which will be flowing waste into the Arabian Sea.

\* Pakistan has far more water than its genuine requirements for irrigation. Its water management is extremely poor. Its irrigation system causes a loss of more than 50 percent. Absence of large dams wastes over 30 MAF to sea which is more than the total water Indian Punjab got.

\* Kalabagh's combined operation with Tarbela will improve flood control manifold.

\* Very badly needed 4000 MW of cheap hydel electricity is being denied to Pakistan by delaying construction.

With the modern communication infrastructure available, early warning of prevailing level at Nowshera in Kabul river will help regulate discharge from Tarbela and Kalabagh, which can allow even the highest recorded flood to pass smoothly.

The province to benefit the most by the construction of Kalabagh dam will be NWFP, particularly Dera Ismail Khan Division, whose hundreds of thousands of acres of level land are at present barren for want of water. This dam will make Pakistan a wheat exporting country for many decades.

Pakistan therefore needs to apply a two-pronged strategy forthwith.

To make its irrigation system more efficient, the canals and watercourses must be lined under a crash programme. Some Pakistani firms have produced synthetic open trough type channels which are very easy and quick to lay. These will reduce water losses where these are the maximum. India did this long ago and has brought water losses below 20 percent. This way Pakistan can save at least 30 MAF.

Simultaneously Pakistan should undertake construction of not only Kalabagh Dam but also many other and more minidams as part of watershed treatment to retain maximum silt to increase the life of the major dams.

Leaders are known by the bitter-