

Kalabagh Dam

Bold Initiatives Needed to Forge National Consensus on the Kalabagh Dam

- Any nation should be ashamed of itself that has not built a single hydro-electric project in the last 25 years based on its own free fuel (water) and instead built only thermal power (based on expensive imported fuel).
- Any nation should re-examine its self-reliance rhetoric and priorities if it sacrifices the option of producing power at 1.4 cent per kwt through Kalabagh Dam in favour of purchasing power at 6.4 cents from IPPs; if it wastes 22 million acre feet of water into the sea every year (more than the total flow of the Nile river in Egypt) but refuses to store 7 million acre feet through Kalabagh Dam to irrigate its own parched soil; if it fights for two decades over the political acceptability of Kalabagh but cannot come up either with a national consensus or a viable political alternative.
- The Prime Minister is absolutely right that the Kalabagh Dam must be built for the future self-reliance and prosperity of Pakistan. It is essential now to take bold initiatives to build a national consensus around Kalabagh Dam. This can be done.
- The problem is neither technical nor technocratic. Kalabagh Dam has already been redesigned to lower its height and to avoid any threat of floods to Nowshera. Further design changes are always possible in consultation with the provinces. But that has never been the real problem. All the dire warnings about the adverse technical consequences of Kalabagh Dam are exaggerated, unsubstantiated, overblown and irrelevant.
- The real problems are different and they must be faced.
- The biggest problem is a flawed constitutional provision. Only the province where the Dam is located gets all its royalty. The entire nation will borrow or spend around \$ 8 billion or more for the construction of the Kalabagh Dam but rich royalties running into billions of rupees will go only to Punjab. Why should the entire nation borrow and repay for a project where only Punjab gets rich on its royalties? If royalties were to be equally shared among all the provinces, they would have got a tremendous transfer of development resources and developed a common stake and interest in the building of the Kalabagh Dam.
- Here is a chance for Punjab to be magnanimous and evolve a new formula for royalty-sharing. Here is where the Prime Minister can design a new and politically acceptable package around the Kalabagh Dam.
- In addition, there must be a fair sharing of all the benefits of water and power from the Kalabagh Dam for all the provinces. It is little realized, and hardly ever projected, that over 50% of these benefits will go to non-Punjab provinces.

- It will be a tragedy if we waste another 20 years fighting over the Kalabagh Dam while producing power at 5 times the cost that we should, wasting our free and abundant flow of water resources, waiting resignedly for the inevitable silting of Tarbela in the absence of Kalabagh Dam, and proclaiming self-reliance while embracing national policies and political controversies for our own self-destruction.