

‘Climate change, disparity major challenges to food security’

RAWALPINDI: Food production has been hit badly by climate change, and unity is needed within the global community to alleviate poverty and protect water and energy sources, speakers at an international conference said on Wednesday.

The three day ‘Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on Water, Energy and Food Security for Poverty Alleviation in Dry Land Regions’ began at the Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi (PMAS-AAUR) on Wednesday.

The conference was organised by PMAS-AAUR and Unesco, with support from the Japan Funds-in-Trust and Malaysia Funds-in-Trust. It aimed to give policymakers, scientists, academics and other stakeholders the opportunity to explore new dimensions to increase water and food security and alleviate poverty in resource deficient dry land regions in the Asia-Pacific region and particularly in Pakistan.

Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Sheikh Aftab Ahmad was invited to the inaugural session as the chief guest. The session was attended by Japanese Ambassador Takashi Kurai, Malaysian High Commissioner Dr Hasrul Sani bin Mujtabar, Azad Kashmir Treasury, Planning, Development and Public Health Minister Dr Mohammad Najeeb Naqi, Unesco Jakarta Director Dr Shahbaz Khan, PMAS-AAUR Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Rai Niaz Ahmad, Unesco Pakistan Director Vibeke Jensen, Dr Shamul Mulk, Mumtaz Khan Manais, as well as 200 participants from Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, China, Philippines, Nepal, Korea, Afghanistan and Australia.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sheikh Aftab Ahmad said the government has put water, energy and food security at the top of its development agenda in Vision 2025, because these sectors are the most vital instrument of socioeconomic development in a country.

“We are facing immense challenges in the energy sector, which is considered the lifeline of any economy, and the most vital instrument of a country’s socioeconomic development,” he said. Mr Ahmad said special attention is being paid to incomplete hydroelectric projects, such as the Diamir Basha Dam, to make the country self sufficient in the energy sector. “The energy sector has also been the prime focus of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The government is also realising the importance of alternate energy sources so that resources can be used in an optimum way,” he said.

He told other participants of the conference that changing climatic conditions, particularly natural disasters, as well as resource base degradation, poverty, low levels of education and high disparities in access to food are major challenges to food security in Pakistan.

Mr Ahmad also commended PMAS-AAUR for cultivating resources with efforts such as its rainwater harvesting model, energy production from solid waste and initiatives to promote 21st century agriculture through hydroponics.

Mr Ahmad urged the dialogue's participants to discuss thematic areas and propose policy guidelines and strategies for the effective use of resources to ensure water, energy and food security. He said he hoped this conference would help facilitate the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into development plans for Pakistan and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Dr Mujtabar, the Malaysian high commissioner, said: "We have to play our role to create awareness regarding food security and other challenges so that future of new generation can be secure." He added that such conferences are essential because they provide the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of key issues and give knowledgeable individuals a platform to share information.

The Japanese ambassador said Japan has been assisting Pakistan in various fields, including support for clean drinking water projects.

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