

1) Despite being vital, water scarcity is the most neglected issue in Pakistan

1) Introduction

Thesis Statement:

Water scarcity is truly a ticking time bomb that lacks significant attention.

A mixture of demographic, institutional, and political factors are responsible for this negligence.

However, the issue can be resolved via good diplomatic efforts and institutional reforms.

2) How Pakistan became a water scarce country.

3) Why Pakistan neglected the issue of water scarcity

a) Lack of government insight into the problem

b) Regional tensions and internal security threats overshadowed the issue

c) Lack of political will to address the issue

d) Deteriorated economy cause the negligence

e) Society's knowledge about importance of water is limited

f) Role of media is unsatisfactory in highlighting the issue

4) Impact of water crisis on Pakistan

- a) Regional tensions have escalated
- b) Inter-provincial rifts are widened
- c) ~~Deteriorated~~ Lack of infrastructure resulted in floods
- d) Deteriorated the economy via declined exports
- e) Rapid urbanization depleted the underground water table
- f) Biodiversity affected due to deforestation and desertification

5) How to solve the problem

- a) Diplomatic efforts to engage neighbors and international community
- b) Infrastructure building to conserve water
- c) Regulating efficient water management
- d) Awareness of people about water scarcity

b) Conclusion

The statement of Hazrat Muhammad (ﷺ) that do not waste water even if you are at the bank of flowing river is depicting the current state of water crisis in Pakistan. Despite being endowed with significant water resources like Indian Basin, the complex interplay of demographic, environmental and institutional factors have led to acute ~~shortage~~ ^{state} of water ^{scarcity} in Pakistan. The issue was neglected as the government lack foresight of ~~plentiful~~ ^{dire} state of water availability in Pakistan. Also the regional tensions and deteriorated state of inner security ~~overlaps~~ overshadowed the issue. Moreover, there was no political will to address the issue partly due to the ^{worst} economic conditions. People also lack insight into considering water as a finite source and their old methods and water-intensive crops' farming exacerbate the process. (Climate change * due to global warming)

Role of media in highlighting the issue was unsatisfactory. This lack of attention to the issue has badly impacted Pakistan; well as its regional tensions or inter-provincial rifts. Lack of water conservation policy and infrastructure has resulted in floods, ~~and~~ further deteriorating the country's economy. This has resulted in rapid urbanization

in the country resulting in deforestation and desertification of fertile land. The issue needs immediate attention and political will.

(1) Diplomatic engagement with regional neighbours and infrastructure building to combat the modern challenges of water scarcity is need of the day.

Moreover, efficient water management and increasing awareness of people regarding the conservation of water will be beneficial. Water scarcity is truly a ticking time bomb that lacks significant attention.

A mixture of demographic, institutional and political factors are responsible for this negligence. However the issue can be resolved via good diplomatic efforts and institutional reform.

Pakistan is blessed with fertile lands and significant water reservoirs like Indus Water Basin: one of the world's largest water reservoirs. It was reported that per capita water share of an individual was 5700 cubic meter in 1947. However, it has plummeted to 970 cubic meter in 2023 (World Wildlife Fund - Pakistan, 2023).

This condition might be attributed to a number of factors; chief among which is the regional division of rivers between India and Pakistan in 1960 i.e. Indus Water Treaty. Moreover the demography of Pakistan has also played

its parts. Pakistan's glaciers are in the North; the rugged high mountainous region while the steep slope in the South causes the river to move swiftly. Apart from these, the lack of insight of government and people also caused Pakistan to become a water scarce country.

The water issue is neglected in Pakistan because government was not considering it as their issue. It is due to the Indus Water Treaty and funds' provision by World Bank for building dam. It made them falsely believe that water is an international issue and the world's institutions will come to their aid whenever they face water crisis. It is due to this reason, that while India was building dams on its shore of rivers, we were ~~not~~ doing nothing. Currently, Pakistan can store only 30 days of water less than the 120 days limit set by International standards. Hence, due to the false belief of considering water an international issue, we ignore the water scarcity issue.

(Meha Nisar,
Bleak state of
Water crisis,
May 2022)

Apart from lacking foresight into water issue, the regional tensions and internal security challenges overshadowed the issue. It is because

Pakistan remained ² center of attention during Afghan Jihad and War on Terror. These issues divert the attention of government from taking steps to address the issue. Along with external tensions, internal security threats not only entrapped government attention but also delayed the projects. An example of this is Diamer-Basha dam where multiple terrorist attacks has ~~delayed~~ delayed the project's completion. Hence, due to the regional tensions and internal security challenges, Pakistan has neglected the issue.

Along with security tensions, political will to address the issue is lacking. It is because water has remained a center of conflict between provinces and no one wants to ~~take~~ take a lead. An example of this is Kala Bagh dam, which is delayed for past 50 years due to the conservation by Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. Also recent Canal scheme for Cholistan desert under Green Pakistan initiative faces severe backlash and protest in Sindh. Due to this reason, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announces to stop the progress on canal projects until a consensus is made on the issue. (www.arabnews.pak, PM stops canal project, Apr, 2025). So, due to

Provincial disharmony, water issue is neglected in Pakistan.

Apart from political challenges, the deteriorated state of economy is also a reason to neglect water issue. It is because water conservation projects required a large sum of money which current state of economy can't ~~afford~~ ^{support}. The previous projects like Tarbela and Mangla were supported by World Bank. So due to this reason, for the current projects of Diamer Basha and Mohmand Dam, a fund is established under Prime Minister and Chief Justice of Pakistan. Hence, the deteriorated state of economy is causing Pakistan to neglect water issue.

Due apart from governmental negligence, society lack of awareness regarding water as a finite source is also causing the neglect. It is because people are unaware of the fact that water is perishable and it must be use with care. It is evident from the fact that 97% of Indus Water is use for agriculture. Of this, 80% is use to grow water intensive crops like wheat, cotton, sugarcane and rice (Bleak state of water, ^{Alta Nisar,} May 2022)

Hence, this lack of ~~see~~ insight into water crisis is stopping them from raising their voice against the negligence of water issue.

The reason for unawareness of the society is due to the unsatisfactory role of media. It is because media can shape people's view about the issue and put pressure on government to take necessary steps for water conservation. Media ~~not only~~ also enables government to take action against those ~~destroying~~ wasting water. An example of this is the closure of restaurant in Gilgit Baltistan after it was found dumping its waste into Attabad Lake. Hence the unsatisfactory role of media to highlight the issue of water scarcity is causing the negligence of water issue.

This water scarcity has badly impacted Pakistan, igniting regional tensions. ~~Pak is~~ because Pakistan is dependant on water flowing from India to Pakistan, of which $\frac{2}{3}$ rd is use for agriculture and one-third for hydropower. Now if India ~~ign~~ stop the water \downarrow it will badly impacted Pakistan. (due to abeyance of IWT)

!! New York Times have reported that

in India violates Indus Water Treaty, 35%.
Less water will be available to crops
in Sindh and Punjab deeply impacting the growth.
It is due to this reason, Bilawal Bhutto
said that India is trying to push Pakistan
for first nuclear war on water (Dawn, Jun 2025).
Hence, water scarcity has resulted in regional
tensions.

Apart from the regional tension, inter-provincial
rifts has been widened. It is because
provinces are always meddling over their share
of water. As due to water scarcity, Pakistan's
water share is reduced that has resultantly
reduced the province share. However, provinces
keep ~~any~~ blaming each other for this loss.
An example of this is current Cholistan
Canals projects under Green Pakistan initiative,
which was stopped due to protests in
Sindh disturbing the national harmony. So,
water scarcity it has also widened the
inter-provincial rifts disturbing the national harmony.

Due to the lack of infrastructure
for water conservation, Pakistan is badly impacted
by floods. It is because Pakistan has no
safety mechanism to safeguard itself from the
state floods. Pakistan is among top 10 countries most

vulnerable to climate change. Pakistan has one of the largest reserves of glaciers after arctic regions. Due to global warming, massive pouring into rivers due to glacier's melting causes floods. That causes severe devastation. It was reported that small dam projects of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were crucial in saving province from devastated effect of floods in 2025. So, lack of infrastructure for water conservation has made Pakistan vulnerable for the floods.

These floods also impacted the economy of the country. It is because Pakistan is an agricultural country, and its exports are mainly agricultural products. It was reported that Kinnow export were 1/4 reduced in 2024. Similarly, the 2025 floods cause 25% reduction in cotton production, which is among the chief export of Pakistan. Cotton is also necessary for textile industry, another major export of Pakistan. So, water scarcity has impacted the economy of the country, caused a decline in its exports.

The deteriorated state of economy in agriculture cause the people to shift to urban side. It is ~~because~~ due to lack of water

in rural side that has caused rapid urbanization. Currently, the urbanization rate in Pakistan is 3.54%, the highest in South Asia (Asian Bank Development Report, 2023). This urbanization has further deteriorated the water scarcity as people pump vigorously without any regulation. This has depleted the underground water table. Currently, main urban cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore and Rawalpindi all faces underground water shortage. So, rapid urbanization has depleted the underground water table.

This urbanization has detrimental effect on the ~~agricultural~~ biodiversity. It is because, forests are cut down to increase the space for cities to expand. It was reported that 80% of mangrove trees were cut down for DHA in Multan. Moreover, fertile land is under threat from desertification ^{due to which} people are leaving agriculture. ~~and that~~ also this change of profession is partly due to the better availability in urban life and also due to the destruction of forests and desertification of land due to water scarcity.

The issues can be resolved by a political will to act. As Pakistan is a lower riparian state and is dependant on its water for India, it must ensure good diplomatic efforts to re-establish the Indus Water Treaty. Apart from inter-state negotiations, international bodies like UN and World Bank (which guarantee the treaty) must also be contacted. Apart from India, Afghanistan must also be mediated for its declaration of Dam on River Kunar, a tributary to river Kabul which inturn is a significant contributory to Indus river. Hence, Pakistan must ensure diplomatic initiatives to secure its water share.

Along with meditations with regional neighbors to ensure ^{non-stop} water river flow, Pakistan also tries to maximize its benefit from these sources. Currently, Pakistan only store 10 percent of river flow against the 40 percent of suggested landmark (Sohar Arshad, Pakistan's water crisis, July 2025). Provinces should be encouraged to make their own water reserves for efficient irrigation. It was reported that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has made 65 small dams in the province had not only

save water but also generates hydro-electricity in small amounts. Other provinces must be encouraged to follow. Hence, Pakistan must build its own infrastructure to benefit from the river and rain water.

Apart from building infrastructure, efficient water management system must be encouraged. Like rain water harvesting. It will not only save the cities from urban floods but will also raise the ground water level.

Research indicates that implementing Rain Water Harvesting on just 43 critical ponding roads in Lahore could harvest over 303.5 acre feet of run off with potential to raise the ground-water level by 3.54 feet after each monsoon.

Another option is waste water ^{treatment and} recycling. Pakistan is currently among the lowest number of countries to treat water while Singapore recycle 40% of its wastewater to fulfill its needs (Nazam parooq, Water crisis in Pak, 2022)

Hence, by efficient water management, issue can be addressed.

Along with incentive measures, masses need to be aware of the water variability and its scarcity. Currently 97% of the Indian Water is use for agriculture

that contributes only 18% to GDP. Moreover 80% of this water is use for five water intensive crops like wheat, cotton, sugarcane and rice (Noha Nisar, Bleak state of water, May 2022). Farmers should be encouraged to diversify crops and adopt climate-smart agriculture, by shifting support towards less-water intensive grains and developing varieties that could withstand droughts or floods. Apart from this making the water use and legislations to stop wastage water ~~will~~ will be beneficial.

In summation, water scarcity is a neglected issue in Pakistan. It lacks significant attention due to lack of government interest and political will to address the disharmony among provinces on water. The deteriorated economy, and no interest of media to aware the masses has played its role too. This has badly impacted Pakistan's security and economy. due to rapid urbanization that has resulted in floods, deforestation and desertification. The issue of water scarcity needs to be addressed. Ensuring Pakistan's water security is not just avoiding droughts or floods, it is about safeguarding Pakistan's very viability as a prosperous and stable nation. Pakistan needs diplomatic efforts and institutional reforms to address this issue. The water issue is

scarier as it requires both internal and external factors to play its role but by acting out the suggested remedies, Pakistan can surely overcome the challenges of water scarcity.