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**'Sindh wants implementation of 1991 Water Accord'**

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By By Imtiaz Ali

Karachi

Sindh does not want "acrimony and misunderstanding" among the provinces over the distribution of water, said Sindh Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah on Friday while winding up the general discussion on the provincial budget 2009-10 at the Sindh Assembly.

In an apparent reference to the recent protest by Punjab's legislators over the alleged curtailment of their province's share of water, the CM said that being a lower riparian, Sindh was also facing a shortage of water.

He said that they wanted the implementation of the 1991 Water Accord. He disclosed that the Balochistan chief minister had called him up the other day, complaining about the reduction of the water flow from Pat Feeder. He said that he had issued instructions to give Balochistan its share of water.

Shah said that the shortage of water was not the result of any fault on the part of Sindh, adding that the province was considering initiating "drip irrigation" due to the shortage of water and had also approached China for this purpose.

He said that huge tracts of lands in the province could not be irrigated owing to the water shortage. He hoped that the water situation would improve with the start of the rains.

Opposition leader Jam Madad regretted the protest by Punjab on the water issue. "The vehemence with which Punjab has protested reflects that it does not consider itself a big brother," he said. "It shows that Punjab considers itself a 'separate entity'. Such protests further increase the importance of provincial autonomy."

Irrigation Minister Murad Ali Shah, while giving a statement before the House and later talking to media, said that Sindh's share was 130,000 cusecs but it was getting 95,000 cusecs since June 10 because of a dip in the Indus river system. He said that as per the 1991 Water Accord, the provinces had to share the shortage of water, and this shortage was natural. "We are finding the best possible ways to overcome this problem," he said, adding that Balochistan was also sharing the shortage.

He said that when the dip occurred in the Indus on June 10, Sindh approached the Indus River System Authority (Irsa), which held a meeting on June 25 with regard to sharing water among the provinces. He said that the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) was also asked to attend the meeting as it was filling the Tarbela dam because of the accumulation of silt in its turbine.

He said that Wapda was increasing its level, which was harmful for Sindh. Since the turbine had been maintained, storage in Tarbela was being reduced, he said, adding that when the dip occurred, every province had to bear its effect, and that, the issue has now been resolved.

He explained that Irsa had taken this decision and not President Asif Zardari. A meeting to this effect was held in Karachi on the request of Irsa and the President was informed of its decisions about sharing water, he added.

Murad Ali Shah said that the decision has provided "some relief" to all provinces, because Punjab was also getting extra water from Mangla. He added, however, that next week would be "critical" for Sindh as the flow of water takes time in reaching there. Information Minister Shazia Marri lamented that "unnecessary confusion" had been created about the water issue.

Earlier, during question-hour in the assembly, the irrigation minister said that toxic water from Punjab was destroying the agricultural land of Sindh. He said Punjab was releasing around 350 cusecs of toxic water in Sindh daily, which has affected about 70,000 to 75,000 acres of land in district Ghotki.

The minister said that contaminated water had also adversely affected seven villages there and the people were about to shift somewhere else. He said that toxic water had also affected cattle, especially cows. "The matter is being taken up with the Punjab government through the inter-provincial coordination department," he said.