

Stopping water storage in Tarbela: Not even 1% of Punjab's water being cut: Riaz

** Senior minister says he will resign if province's water share is reduced*

** Khosa says Riaz should contact PM and tell him not to implement decision*

By Rana Kashif

LAHORE: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the PML-Quaid (PML-Q) stood united in the Punjab Assembly (PA) on Thursday against the release of Punjab's water to Sindh.

Both parties strongly opposed Wednesday's decision at a high level meeting chaired by President Asif Ali Zardari. The meeting had decided to reduce the flow of Taunsa-Punjad, and even to close it if needed.

While defending the president's decision, Senior Minister Raja Riaz, who is also the PPP's parliamentary leader in the PA, said, "To heck with this ministry if any wrong is attributed to my party, which is the largest political party of the country."

Assurance: Riaz, who is also Punjab's irrigation minister, said he could assure the House that not even one percent of Punjab's water was being reduced, and he would resign from the ministry if the water was reduced.

The debate started when opposition MPA Mian Muhammad Shafi, speaking on a point of order, said according to press reports a high-level meeting chaired by Zardari had decided that since Sindh was expected to face acute water shortage, there would be no further water storage in Tarbela.

He said Zardari had directed the IRSA authorities to ensure water distribution among the provinces in line with the 1991 Water Accord, and Sindh's due share from Mangla Dam. He demanded that a separate day be fixed for debate on the issue. Opposition MPA Mohsin Leghari said the decision was surprising given that Punjab was already facing a shortage of water. Leader of the Opposition in the PA Chaudhry Zaheerud Din said decisions about Punjab's water should be made in Punjab, and immediate notice should be taken. Leghari said stopping the storage of water in Tarbela would shut down the turbines, and there would be no electricity generation. He said there was already a great shortage of electricity, and stopping the water would lead to a complete blackout in Punjab.

PML-N MPA Muhammad Waris Kahlo said the matter was to be decided by IRSA, and not Punjab. However, he said, no one would be allowed to deprive Punjab of its waters. He said the Kalabagh Dam, which was the need of the hour, was not being built, and now Punjab's water was also being cut.

Contact PM: PML-N Punjab President and Senior Adviser to the Punjab government Sardar Zulfiqar Khosa said it was the matter of all Punjab, and the president should not take such decisions unilaterally. He appealed that a meeting of the federal cabinet be called immediately to discuss the issue. He said the irrigation minister should contact the prime minister (PM) and inform him that this should not be done.

MPA Chaudhry Javed said according to the water accord, it was only Punjab that had right on the water of the Mangla Dam, and Punjab's water would not be given to anyone.

In reply, Riaz said Punjab was getting its full share of water.

Riaz said 'tonga' parties should not tell the PPP that it was discriminating against any province.

Zaheer said the practice of disgracing political parties in the House should be stopped, adding that the opposition was playing a constructive role in the assembly.

Meanwhile, Speaker Rana Iqbal asked what the solution should be if all that was being reported in the media was true. At this the opposition said, "Resign."

Addressing the senior minister, the speaker said, "You also belong to Punjab and in case someone usurps the rights of Punjab and a dacoity is committed, we will have to collectively stop it." He directed the minister to investigate the matter.

Khosa said if the senior minister's words had hurt the opposition, he apologised on behalf of the minister and his own party.

Riaz said he regretted that the speaker had used the word 'dacoity', and said, "Mr speaker, if you are a Punjabi, then I am also a Punjabi, and if you are a Rana, then I am also a Rana." He said that there was no need to bring any resolution about the issue.

The speaker said he apologised if his words had hurt Riaz's feelings. Khosa said he had received a message from

the Punjab chief minister that he would be holding a meeting on Thursday evening and its report would be presented in today's (Friday) proceedings of the House.

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