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## **Moot voices call to help conserve Indus delta**

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HYDERABAD, Jan 3: Speakers at a moot on Saturday expressed their concern over the apathy of authorities over the conservation and protection of the Indus delta, which was facing destruction as a result of non-release of required water at Kotri downstream.

They urged the government to revisit the 1991 Water Accord as it according to them it was thrust on Sindh the way the NFC award had been imposed and one unit was imposed while other speakers including a PPP MPA Humera Alwani called for strict enforcement of the water accord in question and provision of Sindh's due share of water.

Such deliberations were made at the second annual review and networking meeting of "Indus for All Programme", organised by the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature, Pakistan at a local hotel. The vice-chancellor of the University of Sindh, Mazharul Haq Siddiqui, was the chief guest.

He warned people against tinkering with the nature because it always maintained its own equilibrium but it dealt a severe blow to the people. He said that the people must demand water for the Indus delta and not for their own agricultural land. He stressed the need for furthering the vision collectively to save the delta.

MPA Alwani gave credit to people for getting decision on Kalabagh Dam postponed.

"Kharochhan had 100 per cent sea intrusion, Keti Bandar 86 per cent and Shah Bandar had 80 per cent of sea intrusion so far", she claimed. She said that the effects of Indus ecosystem's destruction could be seen among people of Thatta and Badin districts.

"These people suffer from food deficiency," she said. She urged people to plan because in case of a cyclone or tsunami-like situation then Clifton and Defence areas could be washed away within minutes in absence of a disaster management plan.

She demanded of the federal government to close flood canals in Punjab, which had become perennial and to give Sindh its due share of water to save it from further environmental degradation. She stressed the need for the implementation of the 1991 Water Accord.

"Parliamentarians also need to learn so many things. I feel they lack understandings of various issues," she remarked.

Prof Mushtaq Ahmed Mirani of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology said that the way water resources were depleting the day was not far when there would be no water in the Indus delta. He accused the federal government of working against the principle of natural justice as far as Sindh's rights are concerned.

“Sindh government has no vision and is embroiled in transfers of officials”, said Mirani while arguing that Sindh was faced with huge multi-faceted crisis at the moment. He said that water resources’ institutions like irrigation refused to develop because of frequent transfers adding that culture of conservation needs to be promoted as it has become need of the hour.

He said that the local communities living in the Indus delta had to face the brunt of sewage of 20 million to 25 million people from 40 cities upstream.

Environmentalist Naseer Memon while discussing climate change voiced concern over destruction of mangroves that serve as natural shield against cyclone and tsunami given the fact that we were part of the South Asian region where tsunami had hit a couple of years but we luckily survived it.

He said that growth of shrimp farms to the tune of \$9 billion in South Asian region in 15 years was reflective of the fact that mangroves had been dealt a severe blow. He said that the warning time ahead of cyclone or tsunami was very short and people couldn’t be moved from coastal belt.

He pointed out that Sindh had more or less 14 cyclones between 1977-99 and in shape of LBOD, the sea found a direct outlet to settled areas while Sindh was losing its natural covers of mangroves very fast. He said that development at the cost of environment would have to be paid in terms of disaster.

WWF’s programme coordinator Nasir Panwhar briefed about objectives of Indus for All Programme which is aimed at making livelihood and conditions of lower Indus basin sustainable.