

# 'Unilateral decisions on water created distrust'

By Our Reporter

KARACHI, Feb 20: Leaders of various political parties and experts on water issues attending daylong deliberations on fair distribution of water criticised Punjab over what they described as denial of due water share to Sindh and rejected the proposed power project on the tail end of Chashma-Jhelum link canal.

The conference organised under the banner of the Indus People's Forum at the Karachi Press Club coincided with a bilateral meeting of public representatives from both provinces held to resolve differences over the water issues at the Chief Minister's House on Saturday.

Pleading Sindh's case on fair distribution of water, the participants of the conference demanded release of at least 10 million acre feet water downstream the Kotri barrage and said that sea intrusion due to dry canals had turned millions of acres into a vast saline wasteland.

In the resolutions adopted at the conference, they said the unjust distribution of water and unilateral decisions of the Indus River System Authority, Water and Power Development Authority and the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority were responsible for creating distrust, hatred and differences among the people of the two provinces. In this situation, the power plant's construction on Chashma-Jhelum link canal would be a death blow to the agrarian economy of Sindh, they said.

Claiming to represent the sentiments of 50 million people of Sindh, the leaders poin-

ted out that water flowed down the link canal only when there was surplus water in the Indus River in addition to Punjab's share and such a situation hardly came about due to a persistent shortage of water.

They said the people of Sindh believed that diversion of water flow to Chashma-Jhelum and Taunsa-Panjnad canals from the Indus River in violation of water accord of 1991, continued construction of Greater Thal Canal and plans to establish the power plant on Chashma-Jhelum link canal were clearly "loot and plunder of the rights of Sindh," which created a deeper sense of deprivation and helplessness among the people of Sindh.

They called upon the people residing upstream the river and those in the power corridors to see the miserable conditions of the people living downstream Kotri, especially the districts of Thatta and Badin, where agriculture and huge settlements had been destroyed by sea intrusion.

Millions of acres of irrigated land did not exist anymore, they claimed, pointing out that the Indus delta region had been destroyed, mangroves hardly existed and there was a serious threat that two districts and historic cities of Thatta and Badin might be swallowed by the sea.

"There is a persistent drought in the Kutcha area of the province and agriculture stands destroyed as water table has fallen, causing scarcity of drinking water."

## 'Cover-up project'

The participants of the conference were of the view that power crisis was genuine,

which required immediate attention and concrete plans. But, they said, the people believed that the issue was being exploited as a cover-up to deprive Sindh of its water share. They rejected the Kalabagh Dam and reiterated that the projects on Chashma-Jhelum and Taunsa-Panjnad were not meant purely for power generation. They alleged that there were attempts to divert Indus water.

They argued that there were several viable alternatives for power production, including coal of Sindh and other sources of energy, which were not only economical but also non-controversial. They demanded that the energy crisis should be addressed by a committee of technical experts which paid due consideration to the interests of all the provinces.

They observed that past agreements on water issues had been dishonored and violated by upstream users, saying that various reports for equitable share of water had never been implemented.

The participants were of the view that resolutions passed by Sindh Assembly on Kalabagh Dam, Greater Thal Canal and the proposed Chashmapower project had not yet received a positive response, which was against the spirit of a true federation. They demanded that the resolutions adopted by the assembly be respected and plans to construct power plant on Chashmalink canal be immediately be cancelled.<sup>1</sup>

Among the participants were Sindh Assembly Speaker Nisar Khuhro, Sindh Minister for Irrigation and Power Murad Ali Shah, Sassui Palejo, Rasool Bukhsh Palejo and Sardar Rahim.