

# Water crisis deepens in lower Sindh: farmers

By Qamaruddin

MIRPURKHAS, Feb 20: Growers' protest against an acute shortage of water in areas irrigated by Nara Canal and its distributaries continued on Saturday in the district and adjoining areas.

The irrigation department had closed the canal and its distributaries in Dec 2009 to carry out desilting and repairs and recently released only 6,000 cusec into the canal which was not enough even to meet the requirement of drinking water, the protesters said.

Growers have held dozens of demonstrations in different areas of Mirpurkhas, Umerkot and Sanghar.

On Friday, thousands of farmers manhandled the SDO of Mirpurkhas irrigation subdivision on the Sanghar-Mirpurkhas road. They dismantled the iron-gate of a distributary in Kot Ghulam Mohammad taluka to get water to their land.

On Saturday, thousands of growers blocked the

Umerkot-Mirpurkhas road, demanding release of water in Bareji distributary.

They said that their villages were not getting drinking water and their cattle were dying of thirst.

The chairman of Sindh chapter of Farmers Organisation Council Javed Ahmed Junejo and vice-president of the Mirpurkhas chapter of Sindh Abadgar Board Haji Abdul Ghafoor Maher said that wheat, sunflower and sugarcane crops were dying in the tail-end areas of the canals and channels.

They complained that Nara Canal always supplied less water than other canals in the province. The tail-end areas in Mirpurkhas, Tharparkar and Sanghar were facing acute water shortage because 400 illegal pumping machines had been installed in the upper stretch of the canal in Khairpur area.

Besides, they said, 200,000 acres earlier irrigated by the Rohri Canal had been shifted to the com-

mand area of Nara without increasing the water supply.

They accused irrigation officials of mismanaging the distribution of water.

In Pithoro town, people had been forced to fetch drinking water from far-flung areas, they said.

They said that over 3.5 million acres were cultivated in the command area of Nara and this year's water shortage could cause a 40 per cent decline in wheat production in lower Sindh.

They appealed to Sindh governor, chief minister and minister for irrigation to ensure that tail-end areas received adequate water from the Nara canal.

Ghulam Mustafa Dahri, director of Nara canal area water board, admitted that because of shortage in the Indus river 6,000 cusecs had been released into the canal against a requirement of 18,000 cusecs. They were unable to run the canal system in the given situation, he said.