

Friends of Indus worried over destruction of Sindh's wetlands

By Amar Guriro

KARACHI: Members of the Friends of Indus Forum, an offshoot of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), have expressed grave concern over the worsening situation of the wetlands and Indus eco-region sites of Sindh and said the acute shortage of water in Indus River has badly affected the general ecology of the province.

The forum members have demanded the federal and provincial governments to improve the wetlands of Sindh particularly Keenjhar Lake, Manchhar Lake and other major lakes of the province.

In a meeting at the Keenjhar Lake, the members also deplored the reduced flow in Indus River and demanded the federal government to release sufficient water in downstream Kotri, so that the important wetlands in the Indus Deltaic region could be restored.

The forum also decided to launch its position paper on water requirements downstream Kotri, which had been published recently, to sensitise policymakers on the issue.

"The degradation of wetlands, reducing forest cover, negative impacts on wildlife, reducing number of migratory and indigenous birds and worsening environment in the deltaic region are all results of reduced water flow in Indus River, therefore the only way to solve all the environmental and ecological worsening situations is to release sufficient water in downstream Kotri," said Naseer Memon, prominent development sector expert and president of the Friends of Indus Forum.

Presiding over the forum's meeting, Memon said the government has not given due attention to the situation and if these conditions continue to prevail, the environmental degradation would increase twofold in the coming days.

The members of the forum pointed out that the wetlands have deteriorated at an alarming rate, and as result, the number of migratory and local birds in these areas has declined sharply.

They said the communities that are dependant on natural resources like wetlands have been pushed to the poverty level. "Thousands of indigenous people were forced to migrate from their native places in search of livelihood, due to environmental degradation, but neither has there been a survey to officially calculate the number of people who migrated nor has anybody assessed their losses."

The members said that the untreated effluents from Kotri and Nooriabad industrial sites have been released into Keenjhar Lake, which has affected the general ecology of the lake.

"The Keenjhar Lake is a major source of water for Karachi and there is an urgent need to stop the disposal of industrial waste into the lake."

The lake is also a Ramsar site and is located amid the Indus Flyway route of migratory birds that come from Siberia, Russia, Middle Eastern countries and former Soviet Union countries, but due to degradation, the lake is not offering a favourable habitat for these birds. The forum also expressed its concern over the pollution caused by tourists and suggested that a mechanism should be devised to save the lake from visitors who even wash their vehicles inside the lake and throw garbage in the important water body. The forum urged to promote the concept of eco tourism.

During the meeting, Zahid Jalbani, site manager of the Keenjhar Lake Indus for All Programme-WWF, gave a presentation on the lake. Earlier, the Forum members visited the interventions of Indus for All Programme-WWF at villages Aaz Mohammad Jakhro and Karo Dhandhail located around Keenjhar Lake. Rauf Palari of local NGO Jhole Maari Welfare and Development Organisation briefed the members about the biogas and solar unit in the village. Later, the members also visited the under construction Keenjhar Conservation and Information Centre at the edge of the lake, and also the floating hut established by UNDP-GEF.

The forum members including Dr Ali Murtaza Dharejo, Nasir Ali Panhwar, Prof Qalandar Shah, Ishaque Mangrio, Dr Yameen Memon, Dr. Fateh Mari, Dr Altaf Abro, Ali Mohammad Shaikh, Aziz Ranjhani, Nazir Esani, Nawaz Kumbhar, Prof Aijaz Qureshi, Zulfiqar Halepoto, Ashfaq Soomro, Abdul Jabbar Bhatti, Khalil Yousfani, Majeed Thaheem, Shoukat Soomro, Saleem Shaikh and this scribe attended the meeting.



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