

Bottled water companies, SC seeks detailed report from officials

ISLAMABAD: Expressing dismay over delay in implementation of the apex court verdict on bottled water, Justice Atta Badial on Thursday sought a detailed report from concerned officials about progress made on installation of meters and CCTV cameras by Punjab provincial government.

Hearing a case pertaining to conservation, purification and taxation on extraction of underground water by bottled water companies, Justice Bandial asked Professor Dr Ahsan Siddiqui, amicus curiae and a water technologist, about the implementation of apex court verdict, saying: "What is the progress on our order which we wanted to be implemented?"

Justice Bandial said that work on underground water taxation should start as it is a social welfare issue. On this, Dr Siddiqui said that except chief secretary Punjab, no official from the remaining three provinces has responded to a letter written to them.

Justice Ajazul Ahsan, a member of bench, asked Siddiqui about the progress regarding Re 1 tax on one litre of extracted water on mineral water producing companies by the recently issued notification issued by Sindh provincial government.

On this, the advocate generals of all the provinces present in the court said that all the provinces have issued a similar notification. The additional advocate general Punjab said that the provincial government of Punjab has started collecting tax.

Justice Ahsan said that the meters were supposed to be installed within 30 days of the court order, and directed to present a detailed report by next hearing about number of CCTV cameras and meters installed so far.

Dr Siddiqui said that collection of tax on use of underground water by the industries has started, and a five-star hotel in Lahore is using 2400,000 litres of water per day.

He pleaded the court to issue orders to the court to direct the provincial chief secretaries to cooperate with them, saying Lahore Development Authority (LDA) is not cooperating in matter pertaining to tax collection on water.

Justice Faisal Arab remarked that the provincial government would not need to install meters if a regulatory duty on goods is imposed instead of taxing water.

Dr Siddiqui said that by end of March, a formula will be devised for sugar mills about use of water.

The counsel for Qarshi Industries proposed to impose water tax like sales tax.

Dr Siddiqui said if tax is imposed on goods, it will be difficult to determine wastage of water, to which Justice Ahsan said that water installation of meters would be more appropriate. He directed Dr Siddiqui to complete the work on mineral water and beverages.

The director general for environment said that data about beverages and mineral water companies is needed. On this, Justice Ahsan said that the data of industries which use water as a raw material should be collected first.

Dr Siddiqui said that work on this would be completed by April; however, Justice Ahsan said that the court could not give him time till April.

Justice Bandial said that the major issue is lack of cooperation between government departments.

Justice Ahsan said that there is a need to pay attention towards the beverages companies.

Dr Siddiqui said that effluent treatment plants have been installed on 50 percent industrial units.

Justice Bandial said that the court does not want to deprive them of their jobs in an effort to preserve water, but there is no second opinion on dissemination of knowledge and installation of treatment plants.

A representative of the federal government said that the industrialists have some reservations on some of the issues, but Dr Siddiqui said that his commission would help the industrialists from spending too much on this.

The court adjourned the hearing of the case for an indefinite period.

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