

Any attempt to roll back 18th amendment will be resisted: Murad

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said on Wednesday that his provincial government will strongly oppose any attempt to roll back the 18th amendment to the country's constitution. The chief executive said this while addressing a delegation of 215 participants of the National Security & War Course 2019 of the National Defence University who had called on him at the CM House.

Responding to a question, Shah said the 18th amendment has strengthened the federation as well as made the provincial governments administratively, financially and democratically strong. "Its fruits are being harvested by all the provincial administrations."

But there are some people who believe in the centralisation of powers and have been opposing the 18th amendment, even though powers are supposed to be devolved in modern democracy, he added.

Coal mining

The CM said Thar is a game changer. "We have changed the game by excavating coal, and we shall transmit the first electron to the national grid from there by December." He said the achievement of open-pit mining, installation of a coal-fired power plant and production of electricity has a long and painful history. When all the doors were closed, the provincial government formed a company with Engro and started mining, he added.

Shah said Thar means "desert", but the Sindh government invested over \$1 billion to develop a road network, airport and other facilities in Thar, which is why it has become a land of opportunities.

Drought

The CM blamed the drought situation for the poverty in Thar. "A large portion of the population lives in the deserts. Their livelihood depends on rainfall. When there is no rain, the people start migrating, during which their children and cattle die."

He held early marriages, malnutrition and lack of awareness responsible for children's deaths in Thar. "For the most part, weak children are born there and the rate of premature births is also high."

Terrorism

Shah said he is proud that Sindh has not produced any terrorist, as all the terrorists came to the province from other areas. "Sindh was a land of peace, but wrong policies made the province, particularly Karachi, suffer a lot at the hands of terrorists."

Lauding the results of the targeted operation against terrorists, target killers and extortionists, he admitted that street crime is now a major challenge for the law enforcers in the city. "We have launched a policy to counter it squarely."

Dams

The CM said water shortage has badly affected the ecology of the Indus delta, adding that our river system does not carry so much water so that new dams can be constructed. "Water shortage can be controlled through conservation and change in cropping patterns, meaning we would have to switch over to low delta crops and canal lining."

K-IV project

Talking to a group of journalists in a separate meeting at the CM House, Shah said his government will try its best to complete the first phase of the K-IV Greater Karachi Water Supply Scheme of 260mgd by the end of next year.

However, he said, the cost of the project has increased to around Rs53 billion from the initial estimate of Rs25.2 billion. The cost has increased due to several components and technical aspects, including proper fencing of the long water channel from Keenjhar Lake to Karachi, augmentation of the water board's system and procurement of land, equipment and machinery, he added.

The CM conceded that the preliminary feasibility study of the project was not properly conducted, because of which the initial cost of the project was not correctly determined. He said the contract for the construction of the first phase was awarded to the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) in the previous provincial government's tenure. "But this vision could not be achieved and the project got delayed owing to a number of unavoidable reasons related to its technical and financial aspects."

Shah said the plan to build a sea water desalination plant on the shoreline of Karachi is a challenging project, but his government will try to build it with the support of the private sector within the current government's term.

He said he could not lay the foundation stone of the Karachi Circular Railway project on last December 25 because the Chinese support and financial backing for the scheme had diminished under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor arrangement due to political uncertainty here. The CM said he would work expeditiously to explore the option of Chinese support for the project and secure it at the earliest. Responding to a query, he said the federal government will now finance the Green Line project's buses component, which had earlier been the Sindh administration's responsibility.

NAO 1999

The CM said the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) 1999, under which the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had come into existence, is a draconian law that needs to be replaced. "NAO gives the NAB chairman unbridled and sweeping powers, which are unprecedented in nature and never before seen in the country's history."

About the accountability drive being carried out in the country, Shah said he still believes that anti-corruption is a provincial subject, adding that the previous Sindh Assembly had also passed a provincial accountability law.

He said that unfortunately, he could not act upon the new law because there was much hue and cry on the issue from various quarters in the country, including the media. The chief executive said the officers in the provincial bureaucracy cannot perform well and discharge their duties for the public good owing to the constant fear of accountability drive unleashed under NAO.

He said that owing to the same reasons, desired actions could not be taken by officials of his government to bring much needed reforms and improvements in the health, education, sanitation and water supply sectors. Replying to a question, he admitted that much needs to be done in the health and education sectors to improve them.

Our Correspondent