

Judicial commission summons industrialists polluting sea on 20th

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KARACHI: The Supreme Court-mandated commission on water and sanitation in Sindh on Wednesday summoned the owners of most of the industries located in the industrial zones of the Port Qasim Authority for draining untreated industrial waste into the sea.

After receiving complaints from different quarters, the head of the commission, retired apex court judge Justice Amir Hani Muslim visited the Port Qasim Authority.

While briefing the commission, the PQA chairman said that there were three industrial zones within its limits — north west, east. He further told the commission that plots for industries were allotted on the condition that the industrialists would install pre-treatment plants before they made the industries functional. However, the chairman said that most of the industries did not have treatment plants on their premises and were directly discharging liquid waste/industrial effluent into the sea and also provided a list of such industries to the commission.

The commission also inspected the sites where different pipes were used to illegally discharge untreated waste into the sea.

Orders urgent provision of funds to DMCs for cleaning drains

The PQA chief further said that M/s Orient Textile, Denim Textile and Aga Steel were penalised, but they neither paid the penalty nor stopped untreated discharge of industrial waste from their industrial units.

The commission was further informed that not only the PQA but the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) had also issued notices, but apart from a few, all the industries within the industrial zones of the PQA did not care and were still draining industrial waste directly into the sea.

The commission issued notices to the owners of all the industries mentioned in the list provided by the PQA to appear in person before it on June 20 and justify the discharge of untreated industrial waste into the sea. Notices were also issued to the PQA chairman and the Sepa director general.

Funds for cleaning drive

The commission directed the provincial authorities to provide funds on an urgent basis to the district municipal corporations (DMCs) for clearing storm-water drains of the city.

Justice Muslim also asked the local government secretary to put a monitoring mechanism in place through the DMCs and deputy commissioners for transparent and judicious use of these resources.

At the outset, in pursuance of an apex court order dated June 9 about cleaning storm-water drains across the provincial metropolis within a month, Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar informed the commission that there were 38 large nullahs which came under the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) domain while there were also more than 550 smaller (feeder) nullahs under the jurisdictions of the DMCs which terminated into bigger nullahs.

The provincial government had recently provided funds to the KMC and a process of cleaning storm-water drains had been started, he added.

The commission observed that the entire exercise would not bear any fruit until the DMCs cleared their drains as well and almost all the DMCs were reportedly facing an acute shortage of funds.

The DMCs in consultation with the respective deputy commissioners have identified the trouble spots and worked out their demands which were sent to the local government secretary, it added.

The commission directed the local bodies' secretary to forward the demands to the provincial government on an urgent basis for the provision of funds to the respective DMCs for clearing storm-water drains.

It also ordered a monitoring mechanism for transparency in use of these funds and sought a weekly performance report.

IG asked to take action against water theft

The commission directed the provincial police officer to immediately take up the issue about inaction against water theft with all the SSPs across the province with clear direction that in future if any SHO failed to register cases, action would be taken against the SSP concerned and if needed the matter could be referred to the Supreme Court for initiating proceedings against those SSPs.

It further told the inspector general of the Sindh police to immediately issue directives to all the SSPs to make sure that the SHOs must register FIRs immediately on complaints of various officials of the irrigation department and take action against the culprits.

The commission gave these directions after hearing officials of the irrigation department and expressed serious resentment over the conduct of police in registering cases despite receiving written complaints about water theft from officials of the irrigation department.

Secretary for Irrigation Jamal Mustafa Syed, who is also the chairman of the commission's task force, informed the commission that there were more than 500 letters addressed to the police by various officials of the department against proper acknowledgment, asking for action against stealing irrigation water and tampering with the modules.

However, police were not cooperating with them as per law and even if the FIRs were lodged on the basis of the letters, no arrest had been made by the police, he added.

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