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Sea intrusion threatens coastal

areas of Sindh, Balochistan

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ISLAMABAD: Members of a Senate committee will undertake a three-day visit to coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan to assess the damage being caused by sea intrusion and suggest measures to prevent a possible future disaster.

The three-member sub-committee of the Senate Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Reforms headed by Dr Karim Ahmed Khawaja of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) will have an aerial view of coastal areas by a helicopter to be provided by Pakistan Navy.

The committee members plan to visit coastal areas of Badin and Thatta in Sindh and Gwadar in Balochistan after receiving briefings from experts in Karachi.

Talking to Dawn here on Monday, Dr Khawaja regretted that the Ministry of Planning and Development had constantly been insisting that the issue fell in the domain of provincial governments.

On the other hand, he said, provincial authorities were not aware of the gravity of the disaster which the two provinces might face in future because of the sea intrusion.

He said the committee members believed that the issue related to both federal and provincial governments and it should be part of the Vision 2025 Programme of the PML-N government.

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Dr Khawaja, who had initially raised the issue in Senate two years ago, said that there were a number of stakeholders and departments concerned both at the federal and provincial levels. They are planning and development, water and power, revenue, disaster management, National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco), Indus River System Authority (Irsa), coastal development authorities and irrigation department.

The PPP senator said that the committee planned to hold meetings with officials of each of these departments to know their viewpoint on the issue. The committee, he said, would then finalise its recommendations, which would be presented before the Senate after approval by the main committee.

He said the committee's visit to coastal areas was scheduled to start from Wednesday, but had been postponed for a few days because of the summoning of the Senate session to discuss the PIA issue. The committee members will undertake the visit as soon as the session was over.

Last month, a number of experts had informed the Senate Committee on Planning, Development and Reforms that sea intrusion had already devoured about two million hectares of land along coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan.

The meeting was informed how Pakistan Navy, NIO and Suparco were using satellite imagery to record the pace of sea intrusion, but precise data was still not available because of shortage of funding.

The experts said that climate change and especially human interference with nature's course were main reasons for the erosion.

According to NIO director general Dr Asif Inam, Pakistan had 30 to 40 years to take mitigation measures.

Besides the Senate Committee on Planning, Development and Reforms, the issue was previously taken up by the House Committee on Science and Technology, which had also finalised its recommendations and sent them to the prime minister last year.

The recommendations included measures like plantation drives and de-silting of dams.

In one of the meetings of the science and technology committee in February last year, members were informed that Badin and Thatta would drown in the next 30 years followed by Karachi, if immediate steps were not taken to check the sea intrusion. The members were told that the level of seawater was rising at a rate of 1.3 millimetres per year.

An official of the Badin administration had disclosed that over 31,000 acres of land of the Badin district had already been devoured by sea.

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