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NA discusses depletion of mangrove forests

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ISLAMABAD: In spite of being declared protected forest and a ban on commercial harvesting to strengthen the conservation and protection activities, the mangroves are shrinking at an increasing rate due to various biotic (living organisms) and abiotic (environmental degradation) reasons, the National Assembly was informed here on Wednesday.

Responding to questions on the measures taken to protect the fast-disappearing mangrove forests, Minister for Environment, Hameedullah Jan Afridi, said the mangrove forests of Pakistan were located at four geographic locations along the 1,046km coastline. The Indus delta constituted 98 per cent of coastal forests of the country.

The mangrove forests of Sindh, once the sixth-largest in the world, used to cover an area of 26,000 sq/km. Due to a combination of natural causes and human exploitation that area had now decreased to 2,600 sq/km.

The assembly was informed that the Sindh Forest Department had administrative control of 280,470 hectares of Indus Delta Mangroves, the Board of Revenue controlled 260,000 hectares, Port Qasim Authority 64,400 hectares and Karachi Port Trust 2,547 hectares.

The minister informed the NA that mangrove forests under control of Sindh Forest Department and Port Qasim Authority are categorized as protected forests under the provisions of Forest Act 1927.

Afridi claimed that the Sindh Forest Department was alive to the situation and was endeavoring to ensure proper protection and rehabilitation of fragile Indus delta mangroves ecosystem. They department had completed various development initiatives like raising plantations, effort to introduce extinct species, setting up seed orchards, awareness raising and education, the minister claimed, adding that a comprehensive plan for the surveillance and rehabilitation had also been submitted to the government of Sindh.

However, the Assembly was informed that mangroves under the administrative control of Sindh Board of Revenue and Karachi Port Trust were not assigned a legal protection status. The proposal to declare the entire mangrove of the Indus Delta as 'Protected Forests' was being finalized by the Mangrove Conservation Committee headed by the chief secretary Sindh.

The Minister stressed the need for a collaborative effort that took all stakeholders on board. He urged NGOs, coastal dwellers, environmentalists, and government departments to coordinate their efforts to ensure implementation of a joint and holistic action plan to help this fragile ecosystem to sustain its survival.