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Sindh Assembly Erupts in Fierce Debate Over Ajrak-Themed Number Plates

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On July 25, 2025, a heated session of the Sindh Assembly unfolded as lawmakers from opposition and treasury benches clashed over the government's enforcement of mandatory Ajrak-themed vehicle number plates. The opposition, particularly members of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement–Pakistan (MQM-P), accused the provincial government of using the cultural initiative as a pretext to impose unnecessary financial burdens on citizens, especially those in Karachi. MQM-P MPA Shabbir Qureshi criticized the imposition of fines, Rs 1,850 for motorcycles and rickshaws, and Rs 2,450 for cars and commercial vehicles, as punitive. He questioned the selective enforcement of the policy, arguing that if it truly symbolized provincial culture, it should be implemented uniformly across Sindh.

Treasury members strongly defended the policy. Excise Minister Mukesh Kumar Chawla noted that over one million motorcycles had already been issued the Ajrak-designed plates and framed the initiative as a step toward promoting Sindh's cultural identity. He emphasized that similar cultural motifs had been adopted by other provinces, including Punjab, and accused the opposition of politicizing a unifying symbol. Chawla and other government representatives also stated that the plates were part of a broader vehicle digitization program under the Sindh Safe City Project. They highlighted the inclusion of tamper-proof features and security technology, such as RFID chips, designed to assist law enforcement in combating vehicle theft and identifying fake or unauthorized plates.

The debate intensified when opposition MPA Najm Mirza proposed the formation of a parliamentary committee to examine citizens' concerns over delays and alleged harassment by traffic police. The treasury welcomed the proposal, acknowledging challenges in implementation. Despite initial enforcement deadlines, the government extended the compliance date to August 14, 2025, citing administrative backlog and public frustration. During this grace period, traffic police were directed not to fine citizens solely for lacking Ajrak plates; however, fines for standard traffic violations remained in effect.

Critics argue that while the initiative may hold symbolic value, its rollout has been marred by inefficiency. Many vehicle owners report delays of several months in receiving plates despite paying the required fees, raising concerns about mismanagement. With over 3.3 million motorcycles and 2.3 million cars registered in Karachi alone, the logistical challenge remains significant. As tensions in the assembly highlight deeper issues of governance and public accountability, the Ajrak plate controversy underscores the need for transparent, equitable, and citizen-focused policy execution.