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Sindh Assembly Divided Over Ajrak Number Plates

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A heated debate broke out in the Sindh Assembly on Friday over the enforcement of Ajrak-themed motorcycle number plates. The opposition strongly criticised the government for issuing hefty fines to citizens, arguing that while they respected the cultural significance of Ajrak, penalising people for not having the plates was unfair.

Opposition lawmakers pointed out that the crackdown appeared to be limited to Karachi, while in other areas of Sindh, many motorcycles still operate without number plates altogether. Several Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) said the public was being

harassed under the guise of cultural enforcement and raised broader concerns about notices issued to residents of deteriorating buildings in Gulistan-e-Jauhar and Hyderabad.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) member Shabbir Qureshi criticised the traffic police, calling the issuance of fines arbitrary and excessive. In response, Provincial Minister Saeed Ghani defended the policy, stating that Ajrak-themed number plates were introduced two to three years ago and contain advanced security features.

“These plates can be read by Safe City cameras and have been effective in identifying criminal elements, including those misusing government vehicles,” Ghani said.

Excise Minister Mukesh Kumar Chawla added that over one million motorcycles have been issued these plates since 2022. He argued that the plates reflect Sindh’s cultural identity and pointed out that even the Punjab government had adopted Ajrak designs for infrastructure projects like flyovers. “It is unfortunate that something celebrating our heritage is being made controversial,” he said.

However, MQM’s Najm Mirza countered that the problem is not the Ajrak design itself but the way it is being used to pressure the public. He called for the formation of a special parliamentary committee to investigate the implementation and its impact on citizens. Ghani welcomed the proposal.

The session also addressed the recent building collapse in Lyari, which resulted in 27 fatalities. Ghani admitted responsibility, stating the building was constructed illegally in the 1980s. The Director General of the Sindh Building Control Authority has since been removed, and legal action has been taken against 11 officials, several of whom have been arrested.

Ghani noted that many of the victims lacked identity documents, causing delays in assistance. However, the government is now providing Rs90,000 per family to cover three months’ rent. He added that 66 hazardous buildings in Karachi and another 87 across Sindh have been vacated as part of ongoing safety measures.