

The mysterious Rann of Kutch

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RINA Saeed Khan in her article, 'The mysterious Rann of Kutch (Images, May 31), has described an extremely backward area of Sindh and also ably portrayed the economic miseries of people living there.

The Rann of Kutch was first known to the world when a dispute over the boundary arose between Pakistan and India which led to serious skirmish between the two neighbours.

Consequently, on British intervention, a ceasefire was declared and an agreement was signed on June 30, 1965.

Then the forces were withdrawn and the matter was laid before the three-man tribunal appointed by the International Court of Justice (IJC) for arbitration.

The international tribunal pronounced its verdict in 1968 delineating the marshes Salt-marsh area that forms two shallow lakes (the Great Rann and the Little Rann) in the wet season and is a salt-covered desert in the dry.

The tribunal awarded 90 per cent of the Rann of Kutch to India and 10 per cent (about 800sq km) to Pakistan, the latter comprising almost all the elevated area above water the year round.

The decision was accepted by both the parties, thus the territorial issue was finally settled.

I, however, disagree with Ms Khan's claim that the Rann of Kutch dispute led to the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965.

The socio-economic conditions of the people living in Badin district (adjoining the Rann of Kutch) is appalling, though the district produces more than 44 per cent oil of the country's total production.

The main source of livelihood of the people living in this extremely backward area is either raising livestock or fishing. Both the sources have been closed to these hapless people.

It is mainly because the once lush green forests are dying due to lack of water from the irrigation system and the lakes have been made inaccessible to the locals for fishing because of Rangers' interference, as has been disclosed by Ms Khan.

The chief minister, ministers concerned and the chief secretary of Sindh should take some time from their daily schedule and visit Badin district, which is contiguous to Rann of Kutch, and see as to the subhuman conditions the people are living in this part of the country at the advent of the 21 Century.

They should order necessary steps for alleviation of their miseries, sooner the better.

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