

# THE FUTURE OF KARACHI'S SADDAR

## An alternative plan for Empress Market

Arif Hasan  
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### Urban Resource Centre

A-2/2, 2nd Floor, Westland Trade Centre,  
Commercial Area, Block 7 & 8 Shaheed-e-Millat Road, Karachi Pakistan  
Tel: +92 21 – 3431 5656 E-mail; [urc@cyber.net.pk](mailto:urc@cyber.net.pk), Web Site: [urckarachi.org](http://urckarachi.org)



Aerial view of Empress Market proposed plan | Courtesy Arif Hasan

**For the past 30 years, the future of Empress Market and hence of Karachi's Saddar has been a subject of debate among architects, planners, administrators and politicians. Some have proposed that the building should be turned into a museum, others have wanted it to become an art gallery and, more recently, the planners appointed by the government have proposed that it should be turned into a high-end dining space. There are also those who have said it is, after all, Empress Market (the emphasis being on market). So why should it not remain a market?**

All proposals have been accompanied by area plans. The proposal of the present city mayor is simple: Empress Market should be restored to its former glory. To which period "former" belongs to has not been defined.

The future function of Empress Market will, to a great extent determine whether Saddar is to acquire an elitist and sanitised physical and social environment, taking away yet more more space from the middle-middle, lower-middle and working classes of the city, or will it, in some way, reflect its existing populous nature. After the recent demolition of the bazaars around Empress Market, the eviction of shopkeepers from within it, and the removal of the hawkers from Saddar's streets and pavements, the question of its future has become all the more important, not only for Saddar, but for Karachi as a whole. So, a bit of history is necessary.

*The recent 'anti-encroachment' drive in Karachi has resulted in the loss of over 200,000 jobs as well as threats to the multi-class social and cultural fabric of Saddar. Eos presents a proposal to ensure that the city's tangible and intangible heritage are both preserved...*

## A HISTORY OF SADDAR

Saddar was established in 1839, after the British occupied Karachi as a trading post, in competition with the markets of the native city which were located within and on the periphery of the walled city of Karachi, mainly in the areas of Kharadar and Mithadar. After the annexation of Sindh in 1843, the British administrative and military functions were located in Saddar and its environs. The first Church in Karachi was also built in 1843 in Saddar and, between then and the turn of the century, a large number of the important administrative and military complexes were constructed in Saddar along with civic and religious buildings of the Christian and Parsi communities.

The freedom fighters of the rebellion of 1857 against the British were also blown from the mouths of cannons in Saddar on the parade ground where Empress Market is located today and the parts of their blown-up bodies were buried in pits on the parade ground. As such, Empress Market is also their mausoleum. There are many legends associated with the rebellion and they survive with the residents of Chanesar Goth, many of whose ancestors were sent to Kala Paani to die of disease and starvation because they had supported the rebellion led by Ramay Panday, who was from Bareilly (in Uttar Pradesh) and a Subedar in the army of the East India Company.

Empress Market was inaugurated in 1889. It was designed as a meat, vegetable, fruit and household goods market and it was meant for the families of the British administrators and soldiers and Goans and Parsis who inhabited Saddar. The area around the market had posh cafes, bars, and restaurants such as the Saddar Tea Rooms, Elphinstone Restaurant, India Coffee House, the old Todi shop and Café Parisian. Badly dressed persons were not permitted to enter Saddar and it came to be known as the European Quarter of Karachi where the white population could shop in a not unfamiliar environment, often with merchandise brought from home.

Here it is important to note that Empress Market was part of a larger urban design project. It was placed on the axis of Napier Street (Karam Ali Talpur Road). During the same period, the Edulji Dinshaw Dispensary was also built (1882) and it was placed on the axis of Somerset Street (Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road). The Parsi maternity home was built in 1917. These three buildings are built around Jahangir Park, which was inaugurated in 1883 and was the first and last gravel park of Karachi.

A number of other axes were also created by the British. An important one in Saddar is Clark Street (Shahrah-e-Iraq). Christ the King monument and St. Patrick's Cathedral lie on its axis and so does the High Court. Before Partition, there was an important monument on the crossing of Clark Street and Somerset Street emphasising the importance of the axis. The monument has long since disappeared. In any plan for Saddar, the importance of these axes has to be taken into account and respected.

Because of its importance, Saddar also became an important public transport terminal of a city that, by 1941, had a population of 450,000. Bus routes terminated here and it was an important tramway junction.



Top view of the proposed plan showing the dismantle-able shops on the Empress Market premises, and the paved courtyard surrounding it to facilitate pedestrian flow  
 And so Empress Market and Saddar continued until 1947 when the demography of Karachi underwent a major change due to Partition and the market, along with Saddar as a whole, had to accommodate the needs of a much larger population and also cater to different classes and ethnicities. By 1977, Saddar had 44 pre-Partition businesses still operative, 17 non-text bookshops, 17 bars and nightclubs, 11 billiard rooms, 12 cinemas

and four music schools. In addition, it had 37 restaurants and cafes. These facilities catered to different classes and existed side by side. Jahangir Park became the centre of political and religious activity and a cricket ground, where Pakistan's leading cricketers have played and received training. Thus, a multi-class public space was created which was within walking distance from the federal secretariat on the Artillery Maidaan, Civil Lines (where embassies were located), the university on Baba-e-Urdu Road, and the D.J College, S.M Law College, and N.E.D Engineering College. As a result, a mix of bureaucrats, politicians, intellectuals, students and proletariat became part of Saddar's commercial and intellectual life.

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With 'Islamisation' in 1977, entertainment and recreation disappeared from Saddar. The night clubs, bars and billiard rooms vanished. With this change, the elite stopped visiting it. The retail markets started to cater almost entirely to the lower and lower-middle class. However, Saddar remained a major bus terminal in Karachi and, as a result, the number of commuters continued to increase with an increase in population. Hawkers emerged to cater to the needs of the commuters and occupied pavements and, later on, even entire streets. In the sixties, trade and commerce expanded rapidly but no place was developed in the city for catering to it. Since Saddar was the destination or transit point for the majority of commuters, the new commercial demands found space around Empress Market and its neighbourhood to establish themselves. The state supported this process by regularising and, in some cases, creating the emerging business markets. So in the process, the tea market (with strong links with Kenya, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh), the bird market (with strong links with legal bird suppliers in Africa and Southeast Asia but also with smugglers in the wildlife trade) and the dry fruit market (with strong links with Balochistan and Afghanistan) were created in 1962. The cloth markets with strong links with Chinese and Indian product importers were created in 1972-1973. The tea, dry fruit and bird markets were specialised markets, and their customers were those who had an acquired taste for these products. All informally created markets, hawkers, beggars and performers paid bhatta (extortion money) amounting to crores of rupees per month to 'collectors' protected by the police.

## DEMOLISHED MARKETS

- Paan Market and Book Market  
(both markets were on the same side)
- Dry Fruit Market
- Tea Market
- Umer Farooq Cloth Market
- Birds Market
- Kite Market
- Four hotels
- Two tea shops outside
- Ice depot
- Ali Husain Bazar (vegetable market)
- Egg Wholesale Market
- Pansar Market

This entire development was organic and ad hoc, its nature determined by the culture and the financial and technical constraints of those who created it. Its “disorganisation” was heavily criticised by planners and city managers. At the same time, the ambience it created was appreciated by many architects and romantics, and especially by tourists. This was because of its strong informal culture and atmosphere of an “oriental bazaar.” People from all walks of life kept visiting Empress Market but it was the commuters and Karachi’s middle-middle and lower-middle class that were the majority. As the number of predominantly male visitors increased, the number of women visitors decreased and, with the end of elite-related recreation and entertainment, and the creation of alternative bazaars in the elite ghettos, the “begums” ceased to visit it.

### WHAT WAS LOST?

It is not possible to determine the extent of loss that the demolition has caused to the informal economy of Karachi, which according to estimates is 30-40 percent of its total economy. Nor is it possible to determine the loss incurred to various chains of production, delivery, wholesale and retail. However, it is possible to determine the

number of markets that have been demolished, and the number of jobs that have been lost in the process (a list of demolished markets is given on page 1). Here, it is important to note that 72 percent of all Karachi jobs are informal and the majority of jobs lost due to the demolition are almost all informal.

Estimates vary. However, the figure most quoted is that 1,700 shops were demolished, of which 1,200 were either leased or were paying rent to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. Inside the market, 93 butchers' shops were also destroyed although they were not encroachers. In addition, fruit and vegetable markets were removed from the pavements and so were approximately 3,000 push-cart hawkers. These figures do not include mobile hawkers and those who spread out cloth on the ground and placed their wares on it. It also does not include the musicians and performers who entertained the commuting public, nor the beggars who extracted charity from the visitors. Surveys by NED University students of development studies and the Karachi Urban Resource Centre have established that over 200,000 persons lost their jobs due to the demolitions. These include suppliers of manufactured goods, meat and vegetables; employees of the various businesses; porters, solid-waste collectors, chowkidaars, and 20-30 Hindu women who sold spices on the roadside like their parents and grandparents had done before them.



### Front view of Empress Market

Visits and meetings with the affected population established that they were poor and, as a result of the demolition, they are rapidly falling into debt, without which they can no longer feed their children or pay their rents.

In addition to the markets, Saddar also has a cultural life revolving around the educational and religious institutions of the Christians and Muslims. The most important Catholic cathedral (St. Patrick's) is located here along with a number of Catholic educational institutions, including St Patrick's High School and St Joseph's Convent High School, set up in 1861 and 1862 respectively. Katchi Memon Masjid, an important mosque and educational institution of Karachi is also located here. Then, there is night cricket played on the streets under floodlights in Ramazan and also on weekends. There are also special bazaars during Eid and people from all over Karachi, including its distant katchi abadis visit them. And then there is also a Sunday book bazaar at Regal Chowk which has been there since the last 50 years and attracts students and book lovers from every corner of the city.

With the building of the Atrium Cinemas and the commercial area connected to them, a process of gentrification is emerging in Saddar. Owners of properties are being approached by developers, and fast-food outlets are exploring the possibility of establishing themselves here. Some have already done so. This gentrification is welcome and should be guided through appropriate building by-laws and zoning regulations that also promote the reuse of heritage buildings. However, Saddar's present reality and its pre- and post-Partition history and tangible and intangible heritage should also be protected and promoted so that a multi-class public space can be recreated. For example, a non-obtrusive plaque in a corner of the Empress Market courtyard should be placed in memory of the martyrs of the freedom movement of 1857 and should tell their forgotten story.

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### THE PROPOSAL

The manner in which this can be done is by accommodating the old markets and bringing back the hawkers in an organised manner so that their presence does not create congestion or obstruct pedestrian and vehicular movement. Popular culture can also be promoted by creating public spaces for performances by young people who constantly demand open spaces in the city centre for their cultural activities and fail to get it. Some occupy space without permission, such as the ghazal singers of Kotari Parade did when Muhammad Bin Qasim Park was open, and the singers and dancers in the Frere Hall gardens. More recently, such space has formally been provided in a park in Sector 11-B



of North Karachi, which has been taken over by Habib Bank Limited under the ‘Adopt a Park’ Scheme.



Before and after demolition of ‘encroachments’

Keeping the above vision in view, it is proposed that:

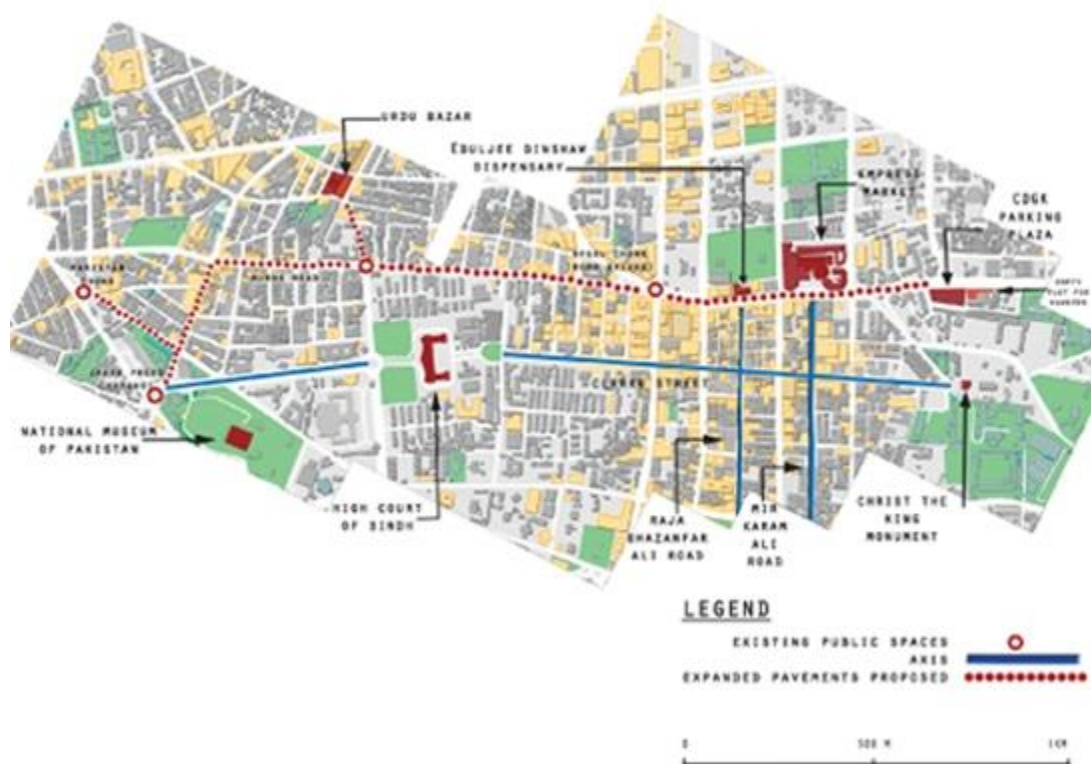
1. Bring back the meat, vegetable, spices and household goods shops in the interior of a beautifully restored Empress Market. This was its original function.
2. Create about 800 shops in an organised manner around the building of the Empress Market. These shops can be of metal, dismantle-able and of low height. They can be arranged in a manner that the view of the Empress Market is not obstructed. Even after they have been put in place there will be sufficient space around the market to accommodate events such as weekend bazaars, food courts and cultural happenings (for details see above plans and 3-D models).
3. Where wide pavements are available, such as on Preedy Street, small beautifully designed and dismantle-able kiosks can be placed for commercial activity.

4. Bazaars that cannot be accommodated around the market can be shifted to the City Government District Karachi (CDGK) parking plaza and the open space next to it can be developed in an organised manner as a hawkers' market. To make the plaza and the hawkers' market commercially viable, a number of bus stops should be created next to them on Preedy Street. A pleasant walkway should link the hawkers' market to the Empress Market podium. The walkway should continue to an appropriately upgraded Regal Chowk so that the weekend book bazaar can be held in a more pleasant environment. The walkway should continue to the Burnes Road food street, where pavements can be widened to accommodate roadside eating spaces. The walkway can then turn right to a renovated Urdu Bazaar which is visited by hundreds if not thousands of students and book lovers every day, and then turn left to the open space near the S.M. Law College and the D.J. Science College, and also to Pakistan Chowk. Many such walkways can be created to link students, small businesses, hawkers and different types of eating places with each other.
5. Hawkers' bazaars that are held on M.A. Jinnah Road on Sundays and are visited by low-income groups should also be organised so as to have a better appearance. Spaces for community, cultural and social use should be created wherever open space is available. Perhaps some aspects of the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre can serve as a model.
6. The axes that were created by the British should be enhanced. Pavements on both sides of Karam Ali Talpur Road, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road and Shahrah-e-Iraq should be widened and trees on either side should be planted so as to enhance the axis and integrate important public buildings into a larger plan.
7. The car parking problem in Saddar is less related to the non-availability of space and more to traffic and space management. Space for parking can be considerably enhanced by segregating through and local traffic in Saddar. Proposals for this have been made previously by the Traffic Engineering Bureau.
8. A major constraint in improving Saddar's physical and social environment is related to the poor state of Karachi's public transport vehicles and the pollution they cause, both visually and environmentally. In addition, there is an absence of proper bus stops, pavements and traffic management. If these aspects are not addressed, it is more than possible that Saddar will go back to being what it was before the demolition. But then, this is not a Saddar-specific problem but holds good for all of Karachi.

## THE PROCESS

The above proposals are schematic in nature. They, or any future plans, need to be critically examined and discussed with the Saddar market operators, hawkers' unions and the residents of Saddar. To make this possible, it will be necessary to follow a process described below.

- A. Categorise the activities and markets that have been demolished and those that still exist.
- B. Determine which markets and activities need to be rehabilitated around the Empress Market and those that can function commercially even if they are relocated to the Parking Plaza.
- C. Determine the number of hawkers that can be placed at bus stops and the locations for such placement.
- D. Hire appropriate consultants that have an understanding of the socio-economic aspects of urban development and are acquainted with the evolution and history of Karachi and of the people that inhabit it.



The map shows the proposed walkway linking the hawkers' market to Empress Market and continuing to the Burnes Road food street and Pakistan Chowk. To make any proposal possible, institutional arrangements have to be made. Maybe it is time to have an institution that deals with planning and implementation of developments in Saddar with a vision that it is to be a multi-class city centre, catering to the needs of

not only its residents, but of Karachiites of all classes and ethnicities, by providing them the institutional and physical space for setting up their businesses and for expressing their culture. But such an institution has to be subservient to a larger Karachi planning and development agency, which unfortunately does not exist in any effective form.

It also requires a political establishment that is less paranoid of liberal values. A struggle for the creation of such an agency, and for societal values that reflect the aspirations of Karachi's youth, has to be a part of this struggle as well.

*The writer is an architect and town planner*

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