

FACTS & FIGURES

Situation being created where migrants outnumber locals, says Pakistani academic Hasan

Pakistani architect and academic Arif Hasan on Thursday stated that a situation is being created across South [Asia](#) where, due to changing values and lifestyles, the number of migrants in cities has started to outnumber the locals.

"I think society is its values. We are caught up with values and lifestyles which are different from those of rural areas and this is creating cities where the migrants will ultimately dominate instead of the local people. In Karachi it is already like that - there are more migrants than the local people," Hasan said, while speaking at a conference titled 'Between The People And The Polis', organised by Nepal based magazine Himal Southasian here in the national capital.

"I think that is one difference, we will be dealing with cities with people with many diverse features and somehow we have to bring them together", he added.

Stating that South Asian nations experience similar situations, Himal Southasian editor Kanak Mani Dixit said that the situation in Karachi is similar to that in Mumbai, Dhaka and Kathmandu, predicting that it will happen in Kabul next.

The experiences all over South Asia are very actually very similar and we must learn and cross-pollinate and learn from each other. The kind of distress that the people are suffering and experiencing in the Karachi region has absolute mirror images in Mumbai, Dhaka and now in Kathmandu and it will soon happen in Kabul," he said.

"These mega cities do not care for the poor and that is a common problem in South Asia. It does not do when you have to deal with issues which involve large number of people in distress. That is why we thought Arif Hasan, who is a world expert on subjects such as mega cities of South Asia, should be brought to New Delhi. His message must go all over," he added.
(Business Standard, 08/12/2014)

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Why Karachi will keep flooding

There was a time just 50 years ago when it scarcely rained in Karachi, Pakistan's industrial and commercial hub and seaport; just a shower every few years if residents were lucky.

From the late 70s, however, rains are more frequent as are floods in the sprawling 1,400 square mile city of 21 million people, one of the world's biggest in terms of both area and population. Traffic stalls with roads being waterlogged and there's serious risk of falling into open manholes and drowning. The flood may be localised when it rains in only part of Karachi, but it nonetheless disrupts the lives and livelihoods of thousands of people.

Is global warming responsible?
"Global warming exists. That's obvious by all the changes we see and experience — consensus only varies as to its extent," said internationally acclaimed architect, urban planner and environmentalist Arif Hasan, who is a leading authority on Karachi. He does not find the increased frequency of rains extraordinary.

"Looking at the rainfall figures, I can say with certainty that the present floods have nothing to do with climate change. Not even minor. The figures keep going up and down. There is no regular pattern. We've had periods of far more intense flooding during the devastation of 2010. It rained frequently during the 70s. Karachi's Lyari river frequently overflowed previously, but the city didn't drown."

Then why does it drown now?
"Major outlets to the sea were blocked," he explained. A bypass, for instance, was built

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A solution to Karachi traffic

One of the many civic problems that have plagued Karachi for a long time has been the lack of an efficient, smoothly functioning public transport system, which has engendered several other issues in its wake, including problems related to traffic congestion. To resolve the difficulties posed by traffic congestion, over the years, various governments have tried to manage the issue through the construction of flyovers, underpasses and bridges. This approach did alleviate the situation to an extent, but it proved to be a short-term measure to deal with the problem. With regular increases in the city's vehicular population, the utility of these concrete structures in easing Karachi's traffic woes have decreased with the passage of time. Added to this is the problem faced by millions of Karachiites, who use public transport as they continue to suffer, travelling in overcrowded, sub-standard buses that take long hours to reach their destinations.

Keeping in view this state of affairs, what Karachi clearly needs is an efficient and affordable public transport system that not only eases problems faced by those who currently use public buses, but is also able to attract those who normally use private vehicles. This will ensure that the vehicular population on Karachi's roads decreases, thereby easing traffic congestion. In this regard, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's initiative to start a dedicated bus lane for the Bus Rapid Transit System(BRTS) is a step in the right direction. The 22.4 kilometre track from Dawood Chowrangi in Landhi to Numaish Chowrangi in Saddar is expected to reduce travelling time by half. Although the project is still in its very initial stage, it is already being hoped that it will become operational before the end of 2014. The BRTS envisages around 200 large buses running on either side of the road's green belt at an interval of a few minutes with around 13,000 passengers being able to use it every hour.

The project will be carried out under a public-private partnership at a cost of two billion rupees. Although this move seems to be a well-intentioned one, the authorities will have to be wary of the potential snags that they may run into. Previous projects to revamp the city's public transport system have failed spectacularly. The fate of the Karachi Circular Railway is there for all to see - a project that never saw the light of day despite being in the news for a long time. There will also be a need to remain wary of the vested interests that have huge stakes in the city's public transport system as it exists at present and who may not wish to see this project succeed and may try to sabotage it.

To counter the challenge posed by these elements, good intentions and proper planning will not be enough. What will be required is immense political will to take on these forces. As Enrique Penalosa, the celebrated former Mayor of the Colombian city of Bogota once said: "Urban transport is a political and not a technical issue. The technical aspects are very simple. The difficult decisions relate to who is going to benefit from the models adopted". While this project has the potential to benefit the majority of the city's commuters, at the same time, it can also pose dangers to the interests of what many refer to as Karachi's transport mafia and this is where the political aspect of the BRTS may come to haunt it. Keeping in view all these potential obstacles, one needs to temper optimism regarding this positive development with a healthy dose of caution, lest this initiative comes to doldrums.

(By Syed Ebadur Rehman, Pakistan Observer, 05/12/2014)

Call to scrap new N-power projects on Karachi coast

The nuclear power plants being built along the coast of Karachi with the help of China would prove to be harmful for residents, their livelihoods and properties, said Dr AH Nayyar on Thursday.

"They can cause catastrophic damage to around 15 million people in case of any accidents," he said while addressing a press conference at the Karachi Press Club with the representatives of Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (Piler) and Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF).

Nayyar said that under the original deal with China, two reactors to be built in Karachi were based on under-development ACP-1000 design which had not been tested anywhere.

Nayyar said: "It surfaced in August 2014 that the design had even been abandoned by its developer. Now the Chinese government has ordered the China National Nuclear Corporation and a leading competitor, China General Nuclear Power Group, to combine their designs to form a hybrid called the Hualong-1 reactor."

Citing the Nuclear Intelligence Weekly's issue of November 7, he said it was being reported that the new reactor still needed a final approval from the Chinese government and also construction permit from its National Nuclear Security Administration. He said the new reactors being built in Karachi would have to rely solely on Chinese components since China could not export to Pakistan a plant which had components from other countries. "This means 15 percent of reactors in Karachi

will be made in China for the first time, and will not have been tested and or tried out before use.”

A constitutional petition had been filed in the Sindh High Court in October by some citizens against the construction of nuclear power plants.

Nayyar said the chief reservation of all the petitioners was that the proper legal procedures were not being followed for these projects and no public hearings were being conducted for its environmental impact assessment. The petitioners argue that the procedures laid out in the Pakistan Environment Protection Act 1997 were not being followed for building the nuclear reactors.

According to him, the initial petition had been filed in the Sindh High Court (SHC) by four people — Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Arif Belgaumi and Nayyar himself — after which the court had ordered a stay on the construction of the nuclear plants. They were later joined by Amina Jilani and Roland De Souza of Shehri and now Piler and PFF had also decided to join forces.

On November 26, the SHC had extended its stay order, halting further construction of the two Chinese nuclear reactors. On October 16, the court had issued orders to stop the project on grounds of failure of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission to comply with the Environmental Protection Act and conduct the mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment, including a public hearing, required as per law. He said this was the first time the court had ever halted a nuclear construction project in Pakistan.

The second order of the high court on November 6, said Nayyar, the stay order on the construction of two Chinese nuclear reactors was extended till November 26, and then for the third time till December 6.

PFF chairperson Mohammad Ali Shah pointed out that the livelihood of fishermen would be damaged by building the nuclear reactors. He regretted no scientific study had been conducted by the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant to assess the effect of radiation marine life.

Farhat Fatima of Piler said the organisation was concerned about health risks to workers of the nuclear power plants.
(By Shahid Husain, The News, 05/12/2014)

Historic fuel price reduction only yields one rupee concession in Karachi's bus fares

Despite talks with the Sindh government after a record decrease in petroleum prices in the country, transporters in Karachi have announced a decrease in city fares by just one rupee, *Express News* reported.

The decision was made after talks between provincial transport minister Mumtaz Jakhrani and members of Karachi Transport Ittehad on Thursday.

While talking to media after the meeting, President Karachi Transport Ittehad Irshad Bukhari said public transport fares were reduced by a rupee, after which Rs10 will be charged for a

journey between one to five kilometers; Rs14 for a distance between five to seven kilometers whereas minimum fare will be Rs10.

Bukhari argued that as compared to other cities, fares in Karachi were the lowest but the government was discriminating against them.

“Fares were reduced in 2012 after a fall in CNG prices but now they are asking us to reduce fares after a decrease in petrol prices,” he said.

Jakhrani on the occasion said strict action will be taken against transporters violating the reduction, adding that a crackdown against Qingqi rickshaws was also on the cards.

Properly planned and well-managed urbanisation is the driving force for economic growth and human development, says a report on the Human Development in South Asia 2014. Given the fact that South Asia is one of the least urbanised regions of the world, planners and policy makers have to consider future urbanisation as an opportunity to address issues of poverty, inequality, deprivation and underdevelopment. Such an approach will facilitate economic growth and create employment opportunities.

Published annually by the Mahbub ul Haq Centre, the report points out that South Asia is the second fastest growing economic region of the world. Three-fourths of total economic growth is contributed by the urban areas. The level of urbanisation in South Asia is projected to increase from 31 per cent (498 million) in 2010 to 52 per cent (1.189 billion) by 2050. With an increase in the level of urbanisation in the future, urban areas' contribution to region's total GDP will increase even at a higher rate. If properly planned, this urban

transformation would provide a great opportunity to change the destiny of people by creating jobs for urban residents and also contributing to rural development.

The role of urbanisation will be vital to absorb the growing labour force. In South Asia, the labour force will increase by 12 to 14 million per annum during the next two decades. As the agriculture sector already contains surplus labour, urban-based industry and services sectors have to create employment opportunities for urban residents, and rural to urban migrants. So far, urban areas of South Asia have not created sufficient formal sector jobs. In South Asia, 8 out of every 10 workers are employed in the informal sector, the report says.

Besides job creation for urban workers, urbanisation can also promote rural development by providing jobs to rural migrants and markets for rural farming and non-farming sectors. In Pakistan, in 2001 average income of working men and women improved by 1.8 and 2.4 times after migration to cities. The ratio of female to male earnings also increased from 62 to 85 per cent. Similarly, in different urban centres of Pakistan, urban areas have benefited rural residents not only by providing employment opportunities, but also by providing markets for the sale of their food products. For instance, Lahore and its surrounding districts; twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi and their nearby cities of Jhelum, Chakwal and Attock and Sialkot, Gujrat and Gujranwala are examples of this.

However, rapidly expanding urban areas have increased demand for land in surroundings of cities in South Asia to build residential areas, industrial clusters, transport corridors and for waste disposal. Such trends are not only reducing farm land but also affecting food availability. For instance, in Lahore, between 1972 and 2010 about 3,016 hectares of vast agricultural areas on the fringes of the city were converted for urban use annually. If present land use policy and norms are not modified, the remaining total cultivated area of 52,332 hectares will be exhausted by 2030.

The report recommends that the region has to link economic growth with job creation by boosting investment in labour-intensive sectors, encouraging small- and medium- enterprises and increasing social sector spending on health and education. Any urban development policy must recognise the role of the urban informal sector and work towards incorporating them in the formal growth process in a substantial way.
(The Express Tribune, 06/11/2014)

Coal burns up Karachi's energy efficiency

When it comes to production, the power sector is a privatised entity since 2005. K-Electric, formerly known as the Karachi Electric Supply Company, is a publicly listed power utility involved in generation, transmission and distribution. It is the only remaining vertically integrated power utility in Pakistan with exclusive licensing rights for Karachi, having a customer base of 2.4 million. When it comes to consumption, the demand for fossil fuels in Karachi has increased manifold over time. This is due to the ever-increasing population, lack of an efficient public transportation system, limited application of environmental control

measures in the industrial sector, and a lack of focus on exploiting the renewable energy potential of the city.

Problems related with increased energy consumption and harmful carbon emissions are magnified as Karachi is not served with a proper and efficient public transportation system. This fact is endorsed by the fact that the total road network in the city, which is 8,000km, has a density of 219km per 100km² and this is mostly being used by private vehicles that have high energy consumption.

Between 1990 and 2008, the observed growth in vehicles is comparatively greater than the population growth. This was due to increasing demand of transportation in the city and the fact that banks gave easy loans to own a car. Some years ago, compressed natural gas (CNG) came as an environment friendly alternative but its availability is on a constant decline.

Given these factors affecting the production and consumption of energy, the overall sector can be categorised into two: power, and industries and automobiles. This high level of consumption in these sectors began soon after the country was formed. The major industrial development in Karachi took place between the years 1947 and 1969 and during 1986 and 2009, claimed research done by S H Sajjad, N Blond, A Clappier, Asif Raza, Safdar Ali Shirazi and Khadija Shakrullah. Their work on 'The preliminary study of urbanisation, fossil fuels consumptions and CO₂ emission in Karachi' published in the year 2010 in the African Journal of Biotechnology, shows that the consumption of coal, the dirtiest of all the three fossil fuels, was 262,000 short tons in 1980 and it increased to 1,009,000 short tons by the year 2007 with an increase of 285%. This rapid increase is

mainly due to increase of consumption of coal in cement industry. With a disproportionately large number of industries relying on fossil fuels, Karachi is losing its energy efficiency. If we want to make Karachi an energy efficient city then research-based target setting and benchmarking needs to be done.

What can be done

We have to prioritise actions and work with a mix of technological and non-technological strategic options. Karachi has many strategic advantages than other cities in Pakistan that it can leverage to put in place a viable programme for energy efficiency. More importantly, it needs a transition to renewable sources of energy. What is needed is not just a collage of 'projects' but deeper thinking, vision and a long-term strategic framework. Going for wind and solar energy is a fairly obvious choice and it can be implemented at household, neighbourhood and housing-society levels. Karachi can benefit from offshore wind mills, taking into account the relevant environmental considerations. It can only find attractive ways to utilise waste as the amount of waste produced by a population of more than 20 million people goes completely unutilised right now. Setting up co-generation plants, methane recovery, bio-mass production, etc, are a set of options that can be availed. We need to have a holistic vision truly capable of achieving the objectives set by the government in terms looking for a 'fuel mix' that finds a role for the use of renewables and a strong emphasis on energy efficiency. A balanced mix would be an efficient mix of instruments, legislations, regulations and ordinances.

As is the case with large cities in the developed and even developing world, Karachi needs to invest in producing every year a 'Greenhouse Gas Inventory' that would also indicate the changing trends, the major emitters, and help set appropriate benchmarks.

(By Farhan Anwar, The Express Tribune, 15/12/2014)

A tourist's guide to Karachi

When planning a holiday, most tourists don't think about Karachi twice. The weather, load-shedding and city's violent reputation put most people off – a gang war in Lyari isn't exactly everyone's cup of tea. There are some, however, who dare to look beyond Foreign Policy's 2011 article where it named Karachi as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Unfortunately, for them, they end up going to the Quaid's mazaar or Burnes Road again and again. Keeping this in mind, a group of architecture students and their teacher, Farhan Anwar, worked together and came up with something rather brilliant.

Anwar, who is also an urban planner, assigned his class of 15 students the task of figuring out a way to make the city accessible for tourists. They worked within a 600 metre radius around the Pearl Continental Hotel where they had to identify tourist sites, distances, how to get there and problems tourists were likely to face along the way.

Getting around

The students had an entire semester to research – read, write and explore. They decided that the best way to understand the area they were going to work in was on foot. Their aim was to identify historic sites and interesting places where a tourist would want to

go. They narrowed it down to eight places – the Polo Ground, Frere Hall, Aman House, the National Academy of Performing Arts, the Arts Council, Free Mason Lodge, Metropole Hotel and Flagstaff House. They realised that a few things they needed to sort out as soon as possible. One of them was maps. "How does a tourist know where to go?" they asked. "Most hotels do not have maps of tourist spots or even lists of things happening in the city."

According to one of the students, if a businessman was in Karachi for a couple of days – where did he go? "He probably only has time to roam around the area he is staying in," said the students. "The easiest way for him to explore the city is on foot or riding a bicycle. Metropole Hotel, Frere Hall, Zainab Market and Flagstaff House are all can all be reached in a little over 20 minutes." The real problem, they added, was the fact that all these places existed but there was little documentation. With maps out of the way, the students geared up to face a real roadblock in their research – barricades. "There are several roadblocks and barricades in the area, especially around Chief Minister House," said the students. "These barricades make it difficult for pedestrians to walk on the sidewalk and force them to walk on the road."

Anwar's students decided that they needed to work on making the city's streets pedestrian-friendly as well. "Most of the sidewalks in this area are four feet wide," said Ayesha Channa, a student. "According to smart city planning and design, they should ideally be six to 10 feet and should have plenty of space for planters and shading." She added that there should be shaded seating on footpaths for the people waiting for buses or for passersby, who can use it as a place to sit.

Getting to know Karachi

Speaking about Frere Hall, the students said that it was sad that people had no recurring reason to keep going there – despite the structure’s beauty and historical significance for the city. “There is a book bazaar on Sunday and a library but there is a need for more,” they said. “There is so much space there. They can use the gardens and turn it into a walking or cycling track. Aman House was voted as one of their favourites. The house is tucked away in a street behind Quaid-e-Azam’s 1943 residence, and is owned by the Aman Foundation. It is usually used for private events. The space, according to the students, is perfect for a heritage site. “They need to organise the parking and increase public activity to utilise it properly,” said a student. “They could use some of the rooms in the house as a library or renovate the building and turn it into a museum.”

Project: Tourist district

Ayesha Channa, Rushad Dastoor, Zainub Khan, Mehreen Kazim, Shahbano Popalzai, Faheem Abrar, Insia Abbas Lakda, Takreem Nehal, Samar Zehra, Muhammad Wasim Shekhani, Jahangir Ahmed Chohan, Farrukh Ahmed Salman, Rija Yousaf, Syed Kazim Manzoor Naqvi and Dawood Akbar went around Karachi’s Saddar area to identify places tourists would like to visit. While conducting their research, they timed how long it took them to walk from one place to another. Using the PC Hotel as their centre point, they said that it took them 11 minutes and 30 seconds to walk to Flagstaff House and around 29 minutes to talk from PC to the Free Mason Lodge near Karachi Press Club. (The Express Tribune, 14/12/2014)

Burned out: Will someone rescue the fire department, please?

At around 6am, the night-shift staff at the SITE fire brigade station was alerted to a fire that had erupted in a cotton factory. The station incharge responded immediately and dispatched two fire tenders to the site.

The events that unfolded thereafter laid bare the plight of Karachi – a city of 22 million inhabitants who are at the mercy of an ill-resourced and inept emergency response system.

The two fire tenders finished the water within the next 15 to 20 minutes. Instead of being doused, the fire escalated as the firefighters helplessly looked on. The chief firefighter called for backup and the 10 fire tenders that arrived from the nearby stations all managed to finish their water within a few hours. No water browsers or snorkels could reach the spot and three hours on, the fire showed no signs of subsiding.

A water tanker and snorkel from the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) finally reached the site at around 10am. The KPT snorkel, which is also referred to as the ‘bacha’ snorkel did not work. The fire department’s snorkels were out of order and the drivers of the water browsers were not on duty. For the next 20 hours, the firefighters helplessly watched on as the fire gutted the factory. The fire department, that eats millions of rupees of taxpayers’ money each year, had failed the citizens yet again. The department was allocated Rs650 million in 2014 alone, which was supposed to be spent on salaries, fuel, maintenance and other operational costs.

Karachi’s predicament

The fire brigade department falls under the purview of the city administration. It is normally the first to respond to a distress call and must be ready to cater to the challenges of not only a burgeoning population but also the unplanned cityscape.

Sadly, this department has been the victim of sheer neglect and bureaucratic apathy. Add to this the illegal political appointments, corruption, out-of-order vehicles and unsuitable workplaces and you have yourself the recipe for disaster.

“The fire brigade does even not have a snorkel or water browsers to handle an emergency situation,” said Karachi Metropolitan Corporation’s (KMC) former senior director of municipal services, Ghulam Rasool. “In addition to the out-dated infrastructure, the department has taken lot of people who are not willing to do their jobs and are simply ghost employees,” he said. Rasool added that most of the experienced staff was set to retire in 2015 and those who would replace them were either untrained or rather unwilling to do their jobs. More than 30 fire fighters have lost their lives in the line of duty.

Rasool revealed that two computerised snorkels were imported from Finland during the tenure of former city Nazim, Mustafa Kamal, but they have been out of order since the fire that broke out in the PNSC building in 2007. The snorkels had been imported without spare parts and there are no engineers who can fix them in Pakistan. “It would take millions to repair these two snorkels,” said Rasool, adding that a third snorkel, which is manually operated, is also in a deplorable condition. The water browsers, large tankers that can hold up to 3,000 gallons of water, are a slightly different story. The department has four water browsers, all of which are in

sound working condition. Sadly, there is no one to drive them as the contracts of their former drivers have expired. Thus, the browsers have been rusting away in a corner. Of the 22 registered fire stations in the city, 13 do not even fit the description of a fire station. Some are one-room offices with a parking area for the fire tender. Others are operated out of make-shift containers. Moreover, only around 45 of the 75 fire tenders are functional. The department employs 1,350 personnel which brings the ratio to 30 staff per operational vehicle. According to international standards, there should be one fire station for every 0.1 million people. This would mean that Karachi needs at least 200 fully equipped fire stations.

The KMC covers all areas in Karachi, including Defence Housing Authority (DHA), industrial areas and cantonment areas as well as Nooriyabad with the 22 fire brigade stations. The other municipal authorities and cantonment boards, however, do have their own fire services:

Clifton Cantonment Board – Two fire tenders

Faisal Cantonment Board – Two fire tenders but both are out of order)

Karachi cantonment Board – One fire tender

Civil Aviation Authority – Five state-of-the-art fire tenders

Karachi Port Trust – 21 fire tenders and a small snorkel

Fit for purpose?

Let's call them fire stations

Shah Faisal Colony fire station

Single-room establishment with no water connection and a garage that house one fire tender

Manzoor Colony fire station

Makeshift garage for a fire tender

New Karachi fire station

Half-built structure with no water connection

Baldia fire station

No water connection while most of the land has been encroached and cultivated with fruits and vegetables

Hawkesbay fire station

Only three staff posted here that calls a run-down structure their office

Hawkesbay new truck-stand fire brigade station

Established in a container; no seating arrangements or water connection

Bolton Market's tonga stand fire brigade station

Established in a single room; no water connection

Gulistan-e-Jauhar fire station

Single-room establishment; no water connection or facilities

Cattle Colony fire station

Established in a shipping container; only functional during the day

Civic Centre fire brigade station

Single-room establishment

Malir fire brigade station

Earlier encroached by law enforcement agencies; now established in a small area with no proper facilities

Gulshan-e-Iqbal fire station

Established under a flyover in a single room

Gulshan-e-Maymar fire station

Single-room establishment with no facilities

Blame it on the fire

Officials (try to) explain the mess

Karachi has seen a mushroom growth in vertical developments over the last decade. Unfortunately, the officials who signed off

these developments did not take into account the lives they were putting at risk in case of emergencies. For a city where nearly 5,000 small and big fires are reported annually, a properly functioning fire service is a must.

Chief fire officer Ehteshamuddin Siddiqui admitted that the department was in a deplorable condition. He refused to comment on the reasons for this condition, saying the head of the KMC's municipal services department would be better suited to answer such queries. For his part, KMC municipal services department's Masood Alam listed a number of reasons for the mess. "Only a handful of the able staff from the 1990s is left in the department," he claimed. "The rest are not willing to do their jobs and can get away with it due to political backing." Alam added that the department needed at least Rs12 million to fix the snorkels – money that the KMC simply could not spare.

"When there is an emergency, all the blame is thrown on the fire department," lamented Alam. "It is time other stakeholders realised their responsibilities and try to improve the facilities provided to this department."

A few years ago, the Sindh governor had directed to set up emergency response centres at all important locations, including Nagan Chowrangi, Jail Chowrangi and Manzoor Colony.

With the passage of time, however, the authorities forgot all about them. Most of the centre's buildings serve as garbage-dumping points and homes for stray dogs.

(By Ali Ousat, The Express Tribune, 19/12/2014)

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at the junction of two major natural drainage channels to replace the flood plains. It was a narrow and inadequate 60-foot-wide drain flowing into a creek leading directly to the sea. During the rains, it can't cope with the volume. This is in the Clifton area, adjacent to the Defence Housing Authority, home to many of the city's most affluent who seek to live as close as possible to the ocean. As a result, the upscale residential area now dominates the city's coastal area, covering almost 14 square miles and growing relentlessly. The problem is that most of Karachi's waste-water and sewage is channeled into the sea, so there's no avoiding cutting through DHA to get there. "Another major drainage channel flows into a similar creek (Gizri creek). Its one-and-a-half kilometre wide floodplain was replaced by an 80 feet drain! The area never flooded before; now it does. Why? Because DHA converted the floodplain into a residential area. When rains occur during high tide, the water can't get out because the tide pushes back the rainwater into the drain, blocking it from exiting," Hasan added. Other contributing factors are scores of encroachments in the form of 'katchi abadis', or informal settlements. When it rains heavily, many of these are inundated because they are built on floodplains. The most recent case is of Saadi town which was completely submerged last year and all but disappeared. An unsatisfactory sewerage system compounds Karachi's woes. Existing sewage processing plants have only one-fourth the capacity to treat what Karachi generates. "These could process more of Karachi's sewage — if it only reached those plants! Their capacity is 150 million gallons, but only 30 million reaches. The rest, about 400 million gallons, goes into the sea." Storm-water drains double as outlets for sewage which mixes with city floodwaters, creating serious health hazards. "The city simply has to get rid of the Defence housing colony that's encroached on a mangrove strip and the Mai Kolachi Bypass road (in Clifton)... There's no other way," Hasan said. Public protests led by environmentalists have failed to save the mangroves. The once vast mangrove forests have been progressively shrinking. The resultant heavy pollution has threatened shrimp nurseries and the livelihoods of local fishing communities. "The whole area now stinks, and there's no mechanism to get the sewage properly flushed out," said Noman Ahmed, head of the department of architecture, NED University. Eventually, the smell may drive residents away.

"People who reside there or are thinking of moving into DHA reclaimed area should think twice," warned Noman, "DHA Phase 8 alone is about 4,000 acres, the bulk of it from reclamation. To do it scientifically is very expensive. Instead, quicksand and marshy areas were consolidated by simply dumping and compacting earth. That's not good enough. In any seismic activity, cracks may appear in buildings and infrastructure with serious consequences. Yet, now they're thinking of reclaiming even more." The same mistakes were made by other major cities — Bombay, Dhaka, Bangkok and, in the nineteenth century, New York, London and Paris. Drainage channels were closed and canals and creeks built over them. "But the big difference between those western cities and us is that those were small populations, making it easier to correct," Hasan said. "Today, Karachi is the world's fastest growing city." Planners know the problems but are unable to act on them for political reasons. Different parts of Karachi are controlled by various ethnic groups and political parties that don't see eye-to-eye. Karachi comes under 13 different administrations that don't coordinate with each other — Cantonment Boards, Port Trust, Civil Aviation Authority, industrial estates, housing societies, etc... Everything is done ad hoc. "There are endless delays in implementing sanctioned plans. The financial constraints keep mounting with the steadily increasing population in the urban sprawl. "There's still no overall authority in Karachi to control construction... or to prevent damaging changes," said architect and activist Roland deSouza. Misbahuddin Farid, former head of the Karachi Water & Sewerage Board (KWSB), agreed. Nobody even considers KWSB a stakeholder, so we're not even consulted. I've brought up the matter often, even with the chief minister, to no avail."

Surely things have come to a head by now?

"It's a political problem, not a planning one," said Hasan, "City government planners are highly qualified and know all this. The biggest problem is that politicians are not aware and don't inform themselves. It is ignorance and the lack of desire to know. They don't see it because it doesn't happen to them. The planners, the best informed, have no independence. If they assert themselves, they can be sacked or transferred to doing nothing of consequence. So they keep quiet to retain their jobs or leave for jobs elsewhere." "In the coming 50, 100 years, global warming may cause greater rainfall and aggravate matters. But whether there's global warming or not, unless these problems are resolved, Karachi will keep flooding." Ironically, Karachi also suffers chronic water shortage, a problem that impacts the entire country. Pakistan, overall, is getting more water than ever before, from both increasing floods and rains. "Yet our water storage can hardly meet a month of our needs," said ecologist and energy expert Parvaiz Naim. His key concern, he stressed, was that the "lack of adequate water storage facilities exposes us to floods when we get more rains, and droughts when we get less. Pakistan needs to go for adaptation measures."

(By Najma Sadeque, Dawn, 01/12/2014)

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