

# FACTS & FIGURES

## Metropolitan affairs: Nearly one-third of Karachi is owned by 2% of its population

**K**arachi, the city as we know it today, has grown from a small village to a burgeoning metropolis in the span of a few decades. And who better to speak about the mushroom growth of the city than the man who has observed it so closely. Arif Hasan, architect, urban planner and author, knows what he is talking about.

At a seminar at Karachi Institute of Technology and Entrepreneurship in Korangi, Hasan discussed Karachi and its issues with regards to development and planning. "Karachi is the fastest-growing city in the world. Between the 1998 census and today, the population has increased from 9.8 million to 21 million. No other city in the world has grown this fast in such a short period of time," remarked Hasan.

"Initially, Ayub Khan created two satellite towns to house refugees – the Landhi-Korangi area and North Karachi. This was the first decision that divided Karachi into rich and poor areas as well as divide it on basis of ethnicity" he recalled. "The settlements in the first stages were on the basis of clans, not income. With the development of societies in the 1950s, this old pattern broke up, leading to class-based settlements as well as ethnically homogenous ones."

The creation of DHA used precious land, leaving the poorer members of society with no option but to live in katchi abadis. The development of these katchi abadis as well as increased urbanisation led to the disappearance of sub-soil water and the removal of sand and gravel from riverbeds.

According to Hasan's estimations, there are 5,000 people per hectare in high-density areas in Karachi, such as Lyari, Lines Area and Chaki Bora. In Defence, there are 160 people per hectare. The people whose houses range from 400 to 2000 square yards make up 2% of Karachi's population, yet they occupy 30% of Karachi's residential area.

People who previously resided on the city's periphery no longer find it feasible to do so because of the high transport costs. Indeed, even gender values and family structures are changing. In 1984, 39 per cent of the women in the 15 to 24 age group were

**Continued on Page 09**

## Despite a high rate of environmental wrongs, Sindh lacks a green court

While courts continue do an admirable job in prosecuting violent criminals, there seems to be a glaring lack of 'green courts' in the province as environmental rights offenders go unpunished.

In April 2012, Mushir Alam, who was the provincial chief justice at the time, announced that special green benches will be established in the high court along with several district courts across the province. The high court registrar, Faheem Siddiqui, confirmed that former SHC chief justice Mushir Alam also gave orders to set up green courts but the orders have yet to be implemented.

Justice Alam had stated that the idea of constituting green benches or courts was to ensure that those found guilty of violating environmental standards do not go unpunished.

The decision to establish green courts and tribunals was decided in the Bhurban Declaration, which was adopted by judiciaries of various countries in April 2012. The idea was agreed upon after representatives of Pakistan, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Brazil and Malaysia discussed the deteriorating environmental conditions and sought solutions.

"In accordance with the Bhurban Declaration, special green benches have been established in the Supreme Court of Pakistan as well as the high courts of Lahore, Peshawar, Islamabad and Quetta," environmental lawyer Qazi Ali Athar told *The Express Tribune*. However, no such bench has been established in Sindh.

**Continued on Page 10**

## Only one in four of our children can read this

**D**ays before Sindh celebrates a year since the passage of Article 25A – the legislation which declared free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged five to 16 – a national report on the state of education reveals abysmal figures in the province.

With 37 percent children out of school, Sindh lags far behind other provinces, states the Annual State of Education Report 2013, which was launched on Monday at a ceremony attended by politicians and educationists of the city.

The report is the combined effort of various not-for-profit organisations, which includes the Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi and the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF). It is recognised internationally and similar reports are launched in India and Bangladesh.

“Owing to private schools, the enrolment rate in Karachi is considerably high with 92 percent, but in rural Sindh only 71 percent children are currently attending school,” said Aziz Kabani, SEF Director Programs, Operations & Research, as he read out the report. However, he added, school dropout rate from primary to secondary is enormous.

The worst district in terms of primary to secondary dropout rate is Tharparkar, where 11 to 20 percent students who attend primary school do not make it to secondary school. When it came to learning levels, 29 percent children of rural Sindh in class five cannot solve a two-digit sum.

Similarly, 41 percent children in class five in rural Sindh cannot read a story fluently in Urdu or Sindhi. Moreover, only 25 percent children in class five in rural Sindh can read sentences fluently in English. The report stated that girls in rural Sindh continued to lag behind in developing arithmetic and language skills.

When it came to school results, even low-cost private schools did better than public schools across the province.

An interesting finding of the report was that 70 percent out-of-school children recognised digits and alphabets without ever going to school, but their understanding stopped there.

### School attendance

Compared to previous years, teacher attendance in Sindh has shown improvement. In public school 80 percent teachers attend schools regularly. Attendance of students remains better in private schools.

As for basic facilities, 68 percent schools have access to useable water, 63 percent schools have boundary walls and 50 percent have toilets. Instances of multi-grade teaching, where one teacher handles students of more than one class levels, are higher in rural Sindh.

### Reactions on report

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s Arif Alvi criticised the report for “technical glitches”. He said that with modern technologies, expenses on buildings should reduce.

“A good example can be how the California education department has begun to use the online tutor Khan Academy to help students who lag behind. Within six months, low achievers have become as good as high achievers.”

Taj Haider, Sindh General Secretary of the Pakistan People’s Party, said: “Even without these reports we know how bad education in the province is. To quote an example, 42 schools in Keamari Town are not functioning, and this is just one union council in an urban metropolis.”

Muhammad Hussain Mehanti, former Karachi chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami, said: “We should be ashamed that we are a nuclear power and yet lag far behind in education. Only education can lead to progress.”

Dr Muhammad Memon, Director of Agha Khan University Institute for Educational Development, said: “What use is getting teachers back to school when children are not learning?”  
(By The News, 12/02/2014)

### “Urban Housing Policies and Approaches in a Changing Asian Context”

by Arif Hasan

The paper originated as an outline for the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) in 1992. It was developed into a paper for a policy seminar on ‘Training for Housing and Development’ organised jointly by the UNCHS (Habitat) and the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven (Belgium). It has now been updated and jointly published by the ACHR, City Press and URC. Price Rs 50 excluding postage

## Save a city: Karachi's oldest inhabitants in danger of losing their identity

**A**s we celebrate the 'Sindh Festival' with great fanfare, it would be a suitable time to ask the Sindh government to share any vision, strategies, plans and projects that it may have to protect and promote the unique culture and lifestyle of this multi-cultural province.

The protection of livelihoods and indigenous lifestyles of the communities residing in rural Karachi can be cited as one such urgent challenge. This is urgent in view of the uncontrolled urban sprawl in the city.

Karachi's urbanised settlements and its rural hinterland, though distinct in their socio-economic, administrative and environmental profiles, are linked inextricably by history and geography and can very effectively supplement the city's sustainable growth as they can provide food security and act as a barrier to uncontrolled urbanisation.

The consequences of urban sprawl can be seen in the rapidly diminishing natural supportive resources such as water and fertile soil, which in turn threaten the agro-livestock based livelihoods, residential security and cultural uniqueness of Karachi's oldest inhabitants.

Historically, Karachi has been a conglomeration of neighbourhoods – villages or goths – that included not only the ancient villages of Jokhios, Memons and Mir Bahars on the fringes of the old town, but also the picturesque and characteristic neighbourhoods of Silwats who lived in the central area of the city. The Silwats had migrated centuries ago from Jaisalmer in Rajasthan (now part of modern-day India) to live in the capital of Sindh.

Karachi's goths can be categorised into rural, coastal and 'urbanised'. Sindhi and Balochi speaking communities that still inhabit most of these goths have also historically been the dominant ethnicities yielding influence in the region. Karachi lies at the foothill of the Khirthar range of hills and is not part of the Indus delta. It constitutes part of the territories of the chieftains who controlled the Hub Malir region and the Makran coast. This region, though part of Balochistan, has been a Sindhi-speaking area right up to the 'Jamdom' of Lasbella, the most important regional chiefdom. In the seventeenth century, the region was in control of the Kalmati Maliks who had dominated the area perhaps since the thirteenth century.

According to the findings of the study – Informal Sector Housing Study of goths in Karachi, 1990, by Abdul Hamid Shaikh, in the early periods, the settlements in Karachi were mostly characterised by fishing villages. A British commander, Carless, who was deputed with the task of surveying the coast of Karachi in the 18th century, wrote that the population of Karachi largely consisted of seamen and fishermen – the total population nearly 14,000. The British surveyed the goths of Karachi in 1885 that were progressively converted into grazing land and then agricultural land through cultivation due to the increasing demand for vegetables and fruits in the market.

Speaking about the existential threat faced by the rural Karachi's inhabitants, it can best be qualified as a threat to its land use. The agriculture and grazing-based land use and its associated economy and culture are now being altered at an alarming pace through unplanned urbanisation. With the change in land use, the overall cultural, socio-economic and financial profile of the area is being transformed and distorted beyond recognition.

Here arises the need to create private-sector linkages for assistance and investment in setting up agricultural support services and infrastructure – more employment opportunities for youth and create a financial incentive to sustain the agro-urban economy and its associated livelihoods. Before this is possible, however, it is important to declare that the land in these outskirts of the city will be used for agricultural purposes only. It is also important to invest in the protection and sustenance of the valuable resources such as water and land.

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(By Farhan Anwar, The Express Tribune, 10/02/2014)

**URC News  
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## Karachi's changing demography & its planning-related repercussions

If the 2011 pre-census house count and its analysis for Karachi is to be believed, then [Karachi's population increased from 9.8 million](#) to 21.2 million between 1998 and 2011. This makes it the fastest growing city in the world. Researchers also claim that no other city has grown so much in so short a time. This growth also makes Karachi the most dense mega city in the world after Dhaka and Mumbai.

Apart from the political ramifications of this growth, two things are of concern. One, that this density is unevenly distributed with high income areas, such as Defence having a density of less than 100 persons per hectare and with areas like Nawalane in Lyari having densities of over 4,000 persons per hectare. And two, that unlike for the rest of Pakistan, where household size has decreased between 1998 and 2011, the household size in Karachi has increased by 10 per cent, from 6.7 persons to 7.3 persons. This increase is not because of higher fertility rates but because of a lack of appropriately located affordable accommodation for low-income families.

According to the [Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020](#), Karachi requires 80,000 housing units per year for its expanding population. However, building permits are issued for only around 30,000 units a year and about 32,000 units are built informally. The rest of the population is not catered for. It is because of this unmet demand that the household size is increasing and because of which the number of families sleeping on pavements is multiplying. There are many reasons why this demand is not being met even by the expansion of informal settlements. One reason is that the [cost of land on Karachi's periphery has increased](#). In 1992, one square metre's cost was 1.7 times the daily wage of unskilled labour at that time. Today, it is 10 times the cost of unskilled labour. In addition, the cost of constructing a semi-permanent house has also increased.

The other reason is that it is becoming cheaper to rent within the city rather than own a house on the periphery. There are a number of reasons for this. [Travel costs have increased by over 100 per cent](#) since 2000. The time taken in travelling in uncomfortable conditions is increasing as a result of which working parents seldom see their children during the day. Women cannot get work near the periphery low-income settlements and without working women, the kitchen can no longer function. The number of seats for women in buses, in relation to their population, has decreased by over 35 per cent since 2000. Also, living on the periphery restricts upward mobility. Education, health facilities and places of entertainment are far away. As a result, a demand for cheap housing within the inner city or its vicinity has been created.

This demand is being met by informally densifying the existing formal and informal settlements by converting their 60 or 80 square yard single-storey houses located in narrow lanes into multi-storey flats. This is being done in two ways. One, by families building upward to accommodate the families of their children. Two, by informal developers purchasing land from the owners and converting it into high-rise apartments. The owner gets some money and a couple of flats in exchange.

There are problems with this form of development. Over time, the units are becoming smaller so as to make them affordable for rent, purchase or *pugri*, with the result that whole families of eight to 12 people live in one room. There are no lifts in these buildings with the result that old people and children are handicapped. Toilets are insufficient and this is a major problem, especially for women. Young couples complain that they have no space for themselves and everybody complains that increasingly, their neighbourhoods are being inhabited by people whom they do not know. Rentals are increasing and in the absence of any controls, renters, who are the most vulnerable category of residents in these settlements, can be evicted at a day's notice. The buildings are of poor construction and will just collapse in an earthquake. In addition, there is conflict because the developers want land to build at all costs and the owners wish to protect their assets.

It is a well-established fact that beyond a certain limit, high-rise high densities, especially if unplanned, lead to physical and social degradation and conflict. This is already happening in Karachi and is likely to increase unless remedial measures are taken quickly. It is also a well-established fact that a city with Karachi's layout and typology cannot develop a sustainable, affordable and comfortable mass transit system without a major subsidy. In the absence of such a subsidy, motorbikes and Qingqis remain the only option.

Politicians and planners have to realise that the traditional *katchi abadi* of friendly neighbourhoods is fast becoming history and that there is a major crisis in the offing. To overcome this, it is essential that the 4,000-plus hectares of vacant government land that is

available with cantonments and other government agencies be set aside for high density low-income housing; a 15-year loan be provided for the purchase of land and/or apartment to low-income families; a transparent system of identifying potential owners be put in place; and that these housing schemes be subsidised by high income real estate development. Land at the junction of the circular railway and major roads should also be set aside for low-income housing. These proposals should be made a part of the Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020 and the mechanisms and institutions to make them transparent should be developed. This will, at least, take care of the needs of the better-off poor and the rapidly being impoverished lower-middle class. If not, we will pay a higher price in conflict and environmental degradation than what we are paying today. Let us preserve land and have a land ceiling act limiting the maximum plot size to 400 square yards and a non-utilisation fee on land that forces land into the open market. Can this be done? One does not know but it is something to aspire and work for.

*(By Arif Hasan, The Express Tribune, 08/02/2014)*

## Saving circles of Orangi

Standing in the kutchra street outside their homes in Karachi, in the gentle sunshine of a January morning, Chanda Khanum and her neighbour, Ghulam Sakina, voiced their anguish at the recent killing of polio workers in the city. “They went out to work for only 250 rupees a day,” said Sakina, shaking her head. “Why were they targeted? They were only doing their job.”

The women, who live in Karachi’s low-income locality of Orangi, know a thing or two about trying to make ends meet. And about the inexplicable dangers that stalk even those whose work serves the underprivileged.

Chanda and Ghulam are members of a women’s savings group project that Perween Rahman, well-known social activist and director of the acclaimed Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), had been working on when she was murdered near her office on March 13, 2013. A tireless advocate for the poor, especially the women, this was a project dear to her heart.

(No one has yet been charged with her murder although there is suspicion that criminal elements involved in the area in activities such as land-grabbing and operating illegal water hydrants — which she was documenting — may have been responsible.)

The savings groups are based on a Sri Lankan model that was replicated here in 2010 by the Technical Training and Resource Centre (TTRC) in coordination with the OPP. Each member contributes her monthly savings — usually between 100 and 300 rupees — towards a central fund which entitles members to interest-free loans of up to Rs10,000 each. Loans have to be paid back within one year before the borrower is entitled to ask for another.

This has enabled the women to start or expand small home-based businesses such as embroidery, poultry-keeping, animal husbandry, and so on. Some have even set up beauty parlours in their homes. Still others have used it to pay for health and education expenses.

Chanda is the leader of her group, which has 60 members. There are 14 such groups of varying sizes in Orangi with a total of around 300 members. In what used to be her living room, a khaddi (a wooden frame on which material is stretched while being embroidered) occupies most of the space. Her son and daughter sit at either end, deftly threading glittering sequins and beads on a fuchsia-coloured material.

“My two daughters-in-law and I also work on the khaddi,” said Chanda Khanum. “We complete six or seven pieces per week, sometimes putting in nights, for which we’re paid Rs550 each by a middleman who then sells them in the market.”

Her neighbour Nasreen Bibi, who leads another savings group, has opened a small shoe factory with a loan of Rs10,000 and employed four workers who make up to 40 pairs per day. “My son had a hi-roof van in which he ferried children to and from school,” she said. “Now he’s hired a driver for doing that while he supervises the work at the factory.”

Membership of the savings groups in Orangi also entitles the women to interest-free loans up to Rs24,000 for small improvements to their homes, which comes out of another programme managed by the OPP. Both the OPP and TTRC also offer them technical advice pertaining to ventilation, construction, etc.

With the help of such a loan, Ghulam Sakina, who sells ‘herbal’ beauty lotions sourced from Punjab, has raised the ceiling of her house so that the room where her physically handicapped daughter spends most of her time will be cooler in the summer. “Unfortunately, my neighbour refused to allow me to put in a ventilator in the adjoining wall as I was advised to do,” she said. “But it’s still better than before.”

The women's savings groups in Orangi are part of a project that continues to grow and thrive. There are now 147 such groups in Karachi, upper Sindh and lower Punjab with a total membership of 100,000.

Perween Rahman would go out of her way to interact with the women and build their capacity to empower themselves. Chanda Khanum's eyes grew moist as she recalled the group's monthly meetings with her. "She would sit on the ground with us, laugh and joke with us. How could anyone kill someone so kind?"

(By Naziha Syed Ali, Daily Dawn, 07/02/2014)

## Not safe even among people

*Study reveals 43pc women find public places most common spots for sexual harassment*

**W**omen almost regularly face sexual harassment in public places, mostly on streets, in markets and on public transport, according to a government survey.

About 43 percent of the 12,600 women surveyed recently have said public places are the most common spot where they are sexually harassed.

The survey, jointly done by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Population Fund, covered all the seven divisions of the country. The women were randomly chosen from city, urban and rural areas.

"I hardly know a woman who has not been verbally harassed or groped in the streets," said Umme Nahar, an official of a private firm in the capital.

She claimed she was first groped at the age of twelve and that she is sexually harassed every day on the streets.

"My friend was nearly raped the other day," said Shejuti Hridi, a student at a Chittagong university.

Relating the incident, Shejuti said her friend was returning home just before the evening when she noticed a middle-aged man following her. It was a quiet residential area and there was nobody around, so she started walking faster. Suddenly the man tackled her from behind and threw her to the ground. "My friend screamed and the man got up and ran away," Shejuti said, adding that what happened next affected her friend in a far worse way.

"An old man came running to help her and started admonishing her for travelling alone, saying it was her fault. When she told her friends about it, they too agreed, saying that since she is taller than the average girls, she is more attractive and so she must wear a veil," she told this correspondent. Asked for her comments, Ayesha Khanam, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said women's attire was not the issue here.

"Women wearing all types of clothing face sexual violence. It cannot be generalised that women wearing a certain kind of clothing face more sexual harassment," she said.

According to a survey by the ICDDR, B and the United Nations

Population Fund, around 54 percent of the urban men think it a woman's fault if she gets raped. The survey was done on 2,000 men in 2011.

Ruma, an official in a private company in the capital, said she nearly broke down in tears on a bus recently because when she tried to get a seat reserved for women from a man occupying it, he flung degrading comments at her.

"He declared to everyone that I was probably a sex worker because I was wearing jeans and I dared to talk back," she said.

When university student Adity Shayantany reprimanded a man groping her, he hurled abuses at her, saying that she was making false accusations.

"This happened during a religious festival. I was only in eighth grade then," she said.

Anamika Alam of Barabkunda village of Sitakunda in Chittagong told The Daily Star that the situation was just the same in the villages.

"I was stalked for days on end," she said. However, that did not stop her from going to school or university.

Living in the port city now, Anamika feels that villages are better compared to the scale of sexual violence she faces on the city streets.

"At least everyone knows me there and would not dare to do anything more extreme than stalking. I have no support networks to fall back on in the city," she said.

(By Zyma Islam, <http://www.thedailystar.net/front-page/not-safe-even-among-people-8895>)

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## Cost of impunity: Illegal token system emerges as the biggest road hazard

Stand at a busy junction for a few minutes and you are likely to observe overloaded buses and trucks, puffing thick black wisps of smoke speedily making their way down the road, forcing the other vehicles to swerve out of their path. These vehicles, which should have been scrapped a good few years ago, are able to ply on the roads unchecked, with the blessings of the very people who are responsible to keep them in check.

This is the 'token' or 'monthly bribe' system operated by the traffic – the very reason for the impunity that these 'unfit' vehicles enjoy. The system not only allows these vehicles to ply on the roads unrestrained, but also ensures that the traffic personnel look the other way when they drive around recklessly. What is all the more alarming is that many of these drivers of commercial vehicles do not even have route permits, driving licences or any proper documentation for the vehicles.

The system is one of the major causes of the large number of accidents in the city. According to the Sindh traffic police department's data for the year 2013, 315 people were killed and another 256 seriously injured in road accidents. Of these, 215 people were killed in accidents involving commercial vehicles ranging from trucks, dumper trucks and buses to minibuses, coaches, water tankers and trailers.

The owners or operators of these commercial vehicles pay a monthly sum as bribe to each traffic police check post that falls on their route. The department's lower-ranking personnel, from section officers (SO) to constables are largely involved in the token system.

A traffic police officer, seeking anonymity, told The Express Tribune that each check-post extracts a fixed sum as bribe every month and issues tokens which serve as symbols of impunity from checking in that particular check post's jurisdiction.

These tokens bear the signatures of the check post in-charge or the SO or even the constable. They may also bear various symbols such as the bat, hockey stick or even pictures of animals. The price of these tokens range from Rs100 per month at each check post to Rs2,000, depending on the size of the vehicle.

"I make sure to submit the monthly payments to the 26 check posts that fall on the routes of my vehicles before the beginning of each month," a supervisor of bus stand told The Express Tribune. He added that he pays Rs45,000 in bribe each month.

While the drivers and vehicles' owners justify the payment of bribes by claiming it is to protect themselves from unnecessary harassment, the traffic police personnel have a different story to tell. "It is very easy to criticise the traffic police. How about the time when we stop an influential person for violating the traffic rules and our superiors suspend us for trying to implement the law?" said an aged traffic police constable who was on duty at Punjab Chowrangi. "No one comes to our aid at that time," he lamented. "I used to be a strict policeman when I initially started out as a traffic police officer. After getting suspended numerous times, I learnt to look the other way." What is ironic is that each time the issue is raised by the media, the traffic police high-ups

jump into action and suspend a few officers and constables who are caught taking bribes. The situation, however, returns to normalcy after a few days.

Traffic DIG, Arif Hanif, when asked about the issue, told The Express Tribune that the department issues regular instructions to the officers and takes action against the personnel if found involved in such practices. "We have suspended a number of personnel on receiving complaints. We have a 12-member vigilance team who investigate the complaint and act accordingly," he explained. (By Sohail Khattak, The Express Tribune, 18/02/2014)



## Karachi lands in trouble

Urbanisation needs urgent corrective measures, professionally sound and socially appropriate planning process

The last few days in Karachi showed the audacity and striking might of the criminals regarding land management. Architect Salim Alimuddin, director of Orangi Project (OPP), narrowly survived an attack on his life on January 29, 2014. The OPP is a research institution with a focus to help members of poor urban communities in matters of shelter and infrastructure.

A few days later, Mohammad Ishaq, deputy director of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), was killed while trying to remove an encroachment on public land. Many public spirited professionals and activists have lost their lives while protecting Karachi's lands from illegal encroachers in the past. Nisar Baloch and Perween Rahman are two prominent mentions.

Occupation of Gutter Baghicha, the mysterious takeover of park plots all along the city, and encroachments along Northern Bypass and in Gadap are some crucial issues that need attention of the administration.

The policy makers, including members of legislature, view land as a commodity which can be traded to obtain short term financial gains. From an urban



planning and sociological perspective, this is not correct. Land is a finite asset which can only be used for public benefits. Its utilisation is best determined through a professionally sound and socially appropriate planning process.

A vigorous urban life cannot be imagined without a proper utilisation policy for land with a detailed master plan to lay down all the proposed functions in relation to existing constraints and potential.

Given the ongoing crisis of infrastructural decay, poor governance and declining urban management capacities, it is crucial that any new venture must be examined for its operational viability and sustainability in the short and long term.

For example, the federal government acquired an exceptionally wide land strip for the construction of Lyari Expressway (all the way from the port to Sohrab Goth along a 16.5 kilometre stretch). The allotment has created the lucrative provision of over 1.8 million square yards of land for real estate. It is important to note that none of these lands have been allotted or utilised according to any openly pursued or applied land use policy for the city.

Similarly, the government has made the master planning department subservient to the building control authority. This is against the standard norm of the land and construction management. The building control bodies follow the prescriptions of master plans — not the other way round. Such a professionally dubious move can render the whole apparatus of land management a laughing stock in front of stakeholders!

Decision-making pertinent to urban lands has remained highly centralised. As per rules, the chief minister possesses the discretionary power to allot land to any party as he deems appropriate.

It is deplorable to note that these powers have been used most injudiciously in the past. It was reported that from 1985 to 1993, four chief ministers allotted land in Karachi worth more than six billion rupees to cronies or party favourites. The institutionalised procedures of land allotment are also not free from corruption.

The standard procedure is through balloting. People are free to fill any number of application forms they can afford. Thus, rich people file dozens of applications with different names of family members, relations and even servants. The probability of a computer ballot automatically increases the chances of the rich instead of the poor and needy, who file only one application with great financial hardship. As a result, schemes for low income groups become the high ground for speculation.

It was found that the land policies do not reflect the range of quasi-legal situations existing between formal and informal housing. Various intermediate situations have been discovered in the land and housing scenario which cannot be described as legal from the statutory standpoint. As per standard definition, the land or housing which is formally registered through the offices of registrar, after completion of formalities related to the title are recognised as legal properties. According to another definition, the property which can be accepted by a housing finance institution for mortgage financing is a legally valid property.

Spot field studies have shown that there are many lacunae



where land and housing units fall short of meeting any of the two conditions. In reference to land, the plots floated in any scheme by the development authorities, legally constituted cooperative societies. Legality of such land parcels is only verified and accepted when the leasing conditions of the concerned neighbourhood/locality are completely fulfilled.

Katchi abadies which have been approved for regularisation but await the initiation of the leasing process; neighbourhoods which await the notification of amelioration plans; localities where change of land use has taken place and areas that have a change of status or jurisdiction are only a few types which cannot be compared with a normally leased area. Owners and prospective buyers have to suffer due to indifference of planning and development agencies. However powerful groups acquire such properties at lower prices and harass the stakeholders, including legal heirs, to submit to their demands.

Land and housing delivery mechanism is so designed that speculation automatically evolves in the process. Land development agencies from the civilian and military domain allot land parcels at a very low selling price. As the owner completes the formalities, he already possesses the opportunity of delaying construction and accruing profits on idle land. Since powerful interest groups benefit from this in-built procedural defect, they are averse to changing the practice.

Regulatory controls in the form of non-utilisation fees or any other form of levies are either non-enforceable or too miniscule to bother the property owners. A simple outcome is the artificial rise in property demands that results into a rush supply of land and housing without any urban planning. Land sales along Super Highway, DHA City and space along major transportation projects are examples. These instances render land management and control an even more uphill task.

It may also be understood that an absolutely uncontrolled market mechanism soon becomes a detrimental entity for the stakeholders themselves. In Karachi, the impotence of land control bodies has been historical. Vested interests, in connivance with government functionaries, have managed to keep planning agencies and building/town planning control departments separate from each other. Thus urban planning, wherever and

whenever performed, only becomes a ritual. Nobody is bound or regulated to follow its prescriptions.

The current state of affairs demands various actions without any further delay. It is an established fact that land is a finite asset which requires very careful utilisation, largely on the basis of social needs. Any land transaction that is initiated must be finalised after inviting views and observations from the concerned stakeholders.

To instill transparency in the routine processes, the various government departments — including the military authorities — must be requested to publish the details of the land owned or controlled by them. The provincial and city government must create an autonomous planning agency for Karachi to deal with land management, infrastructure and planning issues for the city. This step shall greatly help streamline the otherwise haywire scenario of misappropriation and ill-managed utilisation of land in Karachi.

(By Noman Ahmed, The News, 16/02/2014)

## Metropolitan affairs:

Nearly one-third of Karachi is owned by 2% of its population

*Continue from Page 1*

married, compared to 17 per cent of men in the same age group. In 1998, the numbers decreased to 18 per cent among women and 7 per cent among men.

One of the major reasons for this is the increased education of women who make up 68 per cent of Karachi University's student body, 87 per cent of the student body in medical schools, 46 per cent of students in NED University and 92 per cent of architecture and planning students as of 2006. "There is a sizable middle class who have the same aspirations as you do."

A big role has to be played by the major political parties in Karachi, he explained. "Both parties [Pakistan Peoples Party and Muttahida Qaumi Movement] have to rise above the politics of constituency and realise that both parties have valid points," he explained. "The problems are understood by everyone, as are the solutions, yet nothing happens. We need a powerful government that can act against the interests of others." (The Express Tribune, 17/02/2014)

## Lack of planning contributing to urban poverty

Continue from Page 1

### The need for a green court

Windy storms have become the norm in some areas of Sindh as the timber mafia cuts down forests at an alarming rate, Athar revealed. "Despite a notification from the provincial chief justice regarding the constitution of 'green benches' in the province, no action has been taken to implement it," he pointed out. "The number of anti-terrorism courts in Karachi has increased from three to 25 but a green court has yet to be established."

However, the environmental lawyer informed *The Express Tribune* that the Sindh government is working on establishing these courts, revealing that a draft is being prepared.

He remains optimistic about their positive impact on the environment. "Once the proposed law is passed by the provincial parliament, it will pave the way for a pollution-free environment."

Pakistan Muslim League-Q provincial president Haleem Adil Shaikh believes that the lack of specialised environmental benches shows that the judiciary needs to focus more on environmental issues. "It is very unfortunate that environmental cases usually attract the least amount of interest in the courts," he stated.

### Petitions filed

A total of three petitions have been filed against the high level of contamination and pollution in Manchhar Lake, which is believed to be the one of the largest fresh-water reservoirs in Asia, and Keenjhar Lake, which is the main source of Karachi's water supply. Other environmental petitions have also been filed including petitions against the illegal cutting of forests in interior Sindh and mangroves deforestation along Karachi's coastal belt. Due to the lack of a specialised green court, these cases are being heard in different courts across the province.

(By Naeem Sahoutara, *The Express Tribune*, 13/02/2014)

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