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Access denied: The incredible shrinking Karachi that is scared of itself

As Karachi grows so too does it shrink. This contradiction is made possible by an Architecture of Fear that is colonising public spaces to rule with a fist of barbed wire.

"It started with military installations [and] went into ordinary neighbourhoods," explains Prof Noman Ahmed. He and his team at NED University, Bushra Owais Siddiqui, Dureshahwar Khalil and Sana Tajuddin, have made a 40-minute documentary that was shown at the Urban Resource Centre on Friday.

Drive around Karachi today and you will pass five-star hotels that are girt round by shipping containers to buffer them from a bomb attack. Gulshan-e-Iqbal has restricted entry into streets with barriers. In Lyari armed men and invisible turf markings ensure that only those who are permitted enter. The Dawoodi Bohras have created a ghetto after they were attacked. All streets leading to their institutions in North Nazimabad's Hyderi have been sealed off. You need to show ID to enter.

"The residents were not able to find solace in the law-enforcement agencies and the city administration so they started fending for themselves," says Dr Noman.

A resident of Gulshan-e-Iqbal's block 9 remembers it began in 1992. "Huge gates were installed but the Rangers removed them [later]." But when the city broke down in 2001 they went up again. "All the residents got together. I don't think we took permission from anyone."

Thella wallahs are not allowed to enter any more. This reduces the important social interaction between the poor and rich. Have we learnt no lessons from the French Revolution? The Russian Revolution?

Who gave the residents permission to do this? "These streets are public property," admits the resident. "You cannot make it your private property. But we are doing this." But the irony is that these changes have still not prevented robberies at gunpoint. As one police guard at Imambargah Khurasan put it: "Not even airports are safe despite all their security features. Even the GHQ isn't safe."

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Perween Rahman remembered

When it comes to resilient women, social worker Perween Rahman is the foremost personality who worked against all odds for this city.

"We will die but we will die happily," the slain social worker had told a colleague in Bangkok a few days before she was shot to death. The same colleague, Anwar Rashid, who is now a director at the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), remembered her as someone who wanted to live for the poor.

The former director of the OPP, Rahman was remembered in a seminar, 'Narratives of Resistance and Resilience: Celebrating International Women's Day and Perween Rahman,' organised by the Women Action Forum (WAF) in collaboration with Szabist at their college campus.

Architect and OPP chairperson Tasneem Ahmed Siddiqui recalled how Rahman joined a private architect firm, designing houses for the rich after she graduated from Dawood College. "She grew dissatisfied and wondered if this will be the work she would be doing all her life," he remembered.

Rahman's anxiousness took her to Arif Hasan, who guided her to OPP's Akhtar Hameed Khan. The people at OPP thought that, like many young people, she would leave in a day or two. "She started working and kept on working in the same place for 30 years."

Women rights activist Anis Haroon pointed out that Rahman's most important work was saving land records of 2,000 goths and attracting the wrath of the land mafia.

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Failure of urban planning

Pakistan is one of South Asia's most urbanised countries. Punjab is the most urbanised province of the Islamic Republic. It is 2015, and yet the concept of integrated urban planning seems to be a far-off dream.

Good urban management is as important to sustainability as it is to democracy. With most people in Pakistan now living in cities, do they have any say in the development of those cities? Do city managers hear out the needs of the residents of a city, or are their priorities ordered from elsewhere? Are urban utilities such as water, electricity and land equitably distributed so that everyone has an equal opportunity? If clean water and air are not available in our cities, let alone underpasses, expressways and 'signal-free corridors', what type of future are we condemning our children to?

In the past three weeks, the Supreme Court and the Lahore High Court have stayed three urban mega projects in the provincial capital of Lahore. One was aimed at the further widening of the beautiful tree-lined avenue, the Canal Road; one was for a ['signal-free' corridor](#) from Qurtaba Chowk, along Jail Road to Liberty Market; and one for an elevated expressway along the stormwater drain from Main Boulevard to Bund Road. None of these three mega projects are part of the Master Plan of Lahore. None of these three projects were provided for in the 2014-15 provincial budget. No independent traffic studies were conducted to assess the feasibility of these projects. And yet these projects seem to have fallen out of the sky, listed as top priority and commenced with great haste.

For its part, our superior judiciary has once again proved its commitment to protect the environment. [The Supreme Court of Pakistan has stayed the cutting of trees along the Lahore Canal](#). The Green Bench of the Lahore High Court could not understand what urgency required the invocation of emergency land acquisition proceedings for an elevated expressway when, in its opinion, it felt that the "public purpose" in the forced acquisition of land should be focused towards other priorities such as health and education. That's where the real emergency is. The legal challenges these projects have and will continue to face reveal the lack of preparation and due diligence. They also reveal a lack of preparation and due diligence expected from a government that oversees the most urbanised province of the most urbanised country in South Asia. Urban management should not be taken lightly. Given the importance which the the LDA has given to these projects and the priority they have been accorded in the provincial development framework, these legal challenges are a scandal. We should be outraged with how Lahore is being managed. Urbanising countries offer significant potential for economic development. What's important to remember is that, like all opportunities, urban development potential can only be tapped once. And it has to be tapped correctly. Or there will be no 're-urbanisation' of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Lahore continues to go without a waste water treatment plant. None of the domestic and industrial effluent of this 10 million person metropolis is treated before being pumped and discharged into what remains of the River Ravi. This effluent, which has rendered the Ravi unsafe for humans and aquatic life, has been poisoning the aquifer that Lahore taps for its drinking water purposes. Pakistani cities now, more than ever, need to be properly and sustainably run in the interest of the health and

safety of their residents. It simply will not do to claim 'development' in the form of road infrastructure when residents of the country's second largest city are finding clean drinking water increasingly difficult to access. There is no claim to integrated [urban planning](#) when large-ticket infrastructure projects remain unconnected and without reference to a larger plan or policy. (The Express Tribune, 10/03/2015)

Karachi Indigenous Rights Alliance launched

A group of nine men have formed the Karachi Indigenous Rights Alliance to protect the city's historic sites, lands, goths, waterways and culture.

The alliance introduced itself at a press conference at the Karachi Press Club on Monday.

The chairman, Saleem Baloch, read out a press release, flanked by heavyweights such as State Minister for Communication MNA Hakeem Baloch, MPA Haji Shafi Jamot of Malir's PS-129, historian Gul Hasan Kalmatti, Jam Abdul Kareem of Malir, well-known activist Yousaf Masti Khan and former nazim Khuda Dino Shah.

Some of these historic sites pertain to Shah Latif ka Taqya, Zoroastrian graves, the grave of Haji Notak who fought the British, 200-year-old graveyards, cup marks, Buddhist Stupas and Stone Age rock carvings in the east of Karachi. These sites are at risk if their land is acquired. Also at risk are their waterways.

Saleem Baloch referred to an order passed by the Supreme Court, on November 28, 2011, saying that the government cannot allot its land to private institutions. Contrary to this

order, however, this has happened.

These developments also contravene the Land Revenue Act 1967 and the Sindh Gothabad Act 1987, he added.

The alliance had met earlier on March 3 at the Malir Press Club where a three-hour marathon seminar was held with several notable Sindhi nationalists such as Riyaz Chandio, Ameer Bhanmbro, Khaliq Junejo and the Pakistan Peoples Party's Raja Razzak. This was followed by presentations at Karachi University on March 4 by Gul Hasan Kalmatti who showed photographs of the sites and Dr Rukhman Palari who spoke of the route taken through Karachi by the figure of Sassui, one of Shah Latif's seven heroines, as mentioned in *Shah jo Risalo* among several other texts.

(The Express Tribune, 10/03/2015)

The cost of courage

"PEOPLE are their own resource." That is what Parween Rahman said to one interviewer not long before she was killed. The force behind the Orangi Pilot Project, Rahman — who had dedicated her life to designing, mapping and then implementing community-based uplift for Karachi's largest slum settlement — was killed two years ago this Friday. She had been leaving her office when she was attacked by gunmen.

In the days before she died, Rahman had been mapping the many goths that exist on the outskirts of Karachi, in an effort to regularise these settlements and provide formal rights to the people who live in them. Two years later, justice has not been done.

In the harrowing moments after the attack, an FIR was filed by Rahman's driver at the police station nearest to where the attack occurred. A petition was filed with the Human Rights Cell of the Supreme Court on behalf of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and other petitioners.

They sought investigation into the murder and protection for the remaining members of the OPP. Drafted by lawyer Muhammad Haider Imtiaz, it reports that an initial inquiry along with an assessment of the crime scene was conducted by an officer of the Manghopir Police Station on the day of the killing.

In March 2013, a report was received by the investigation officer from the forensic science laboratory. This stated that a man named Qari Bilal had been killed in a 'police encounter' in the area of the Manghopir Police Station on March 14, a day after the attack.

Among the things recovered from the dead man was a 9mm pistol with three rounds. After analysis, investigators said that this pistol matched the 9mm empty rounds recovered from the crime scene in Rahman's case.

This led the lab to conclude that the same weapon had been used in her murder.

Hardly anything has emerged since then. Even though the initial FIR clearly alleged that there had been more than one assailant, it seems that no effort has been made to apprehend the others.

Officially, the investigation remains open. Following the filing of the petition, the court appointed a commission and asked for a report from the investigative agencies. Since then, according to attorney Imtiaz, protection has been provided for the other employees of the OPP but no concrete progress has been made on the investigation itself. Its neglect, he points out, is a reflection of the "general inefficiency, un-professionalism and apathy of the law-enforcement agencies."

In interviews she gave in the days before her death, Parween Rehman had alleged that she was receiving death threats from the many mafias opposed to the OPP's work. In her own words, "One day they just came, and from the morning they occupied the roundabout in front of our office. They came with gunmen. About five to six of them sat there at the roundabout, five to six of them went all around, five to six of them went into this courtyard trying to threaten us. And they said today we will occupy this place no matter what. So one of our colleagues was negotiating with them; we said, we won't go, you stay if you want, kill us if you want, kill everybody."

Parween Rehman and her colleagues were lucky that day; but, as we now know, her luck would run out not long after. Her enemies were determined and the stakes were high. They realised that if the project was successful then a community long exploited by the many mafias that are used to extorting money from Karachi's poorest would be set on the path of becoming self-sufficient.

Here was a woman who believed ardently in community resource management, in the virtue and possibility of self-sufficiency, and in the idea that life in a city and even a slum could be transformed if only the people themselves are given the power to transform their living conditions. For this sin, of course, she was extinguished.

Even as Parween Rehman is no longer, the work of the OPP has continued, its longevity ensured by the men and women who worked with her and continue to carry on her legacy. In the two years since her death, the demographics of Orangi are again changing: new actors, equally dangerous and equally uninterested in community empowerment, have arrived on the scene and have begun to claim their own stakes.

It was dangerous to work there before, and it is dangerous to work there now. The community itself, bearing the weight of neglect and demographic change, conflict between political interests, land grabbers and a host of other criminal and even terrorist elements, needs the project's work more than ever before.

The lack of investigation in Parween Rehman's death is a devaluation of a life that was devoted to the uplift of others. It is not that she did not know that the work she did was dangerous; but she had complete faith in the premise that it was a risk worth taking.

In a Pakistan, and particularly a Karachi, where cynicism and even nihilism prevails, she dared to think differently.

Against this courage, we have the callous ineptitude of investigative institutions that have refused her justice, and latched on to an incomplete explanation of what happened and who did it. The message is clear and catastrophic: those who dare to believe in something better, in the possibility of empowerment of the ordinary, will not only be killed but also forgotten, their deaths undeserving of justice or of accountability.

As March 13 approaches again, it is this tragic conclusion that hangs over the city and the slum that Parween Rahman tried to save, and that in return took her life.

(By Rafiz Zakaria, Daily Dawn, 11/03/2015)

On the shores of the Arabian Sea, pollution erodes a way of life

ABDUL REHMAN GOTH, Pakistan — The Arabian Sea was unusually choppy on a recent day, but fishermen here on the outskirts of Karachi needed money. So they packed into wobbly 20-foot boats stacked with nets, bait and enough food to last up to two weeks at sea.

If they are lucky, they will return late this month with enough lobster, tuna and mackerel to earn each of them \$30. These days, however, luck seems to be running out for the fishermen and other residents of this 100-year-old village who are struggling to withstand the sickening [pollution](#) of Pakistan's largest city.

"There are no fish at the shore, and all the fish are at the deep sea," said Ali Muhammad, who, like many villagers, said he does not know his exact age; he guessed about 40. "Earlier we got fish

even in this area, but now we have to travel five, six, seven hours continuously, and maybe there will be lobster or bigger fish."

A fishing crew arrives at the shores of Abdul Rehman village after a seven-day trip on the waters off Karachi. The jugs they carry had held drinking water for the journey. (Max Becherer/Polaris Images for The Washington Post)

Located just 15 miles from downtown Karachi, Abdul Rehman Goth is a hardscrabble community that feels a world apart from the urban chaos nearby. But as Karachi's population continues to swell, that sense of distance is fading, and villagers find it increasingly hard to escape reminders of the encroaching city squalor.

When Muhammad's ancestors settled here after leaving the southeastern province of Baluchistan, the shoreline was dotted with remote fishing colonies and shaded by dense mangrove forests.

But those features eroded as Karachi's population exploded from about 2 million in 1960 to an estimated 22 million today. Much of the waste generated by all of those people — as well as by thousands of textile, plastics, leather and chemical factories — [flows directly](#) into the Arabian Sea. The mangroves that used to serve as a filter, protecting fish and crustaceans, are disappearing because of sprawl and illegal cutting.

The fishermen of the small village of Abdul Rehman live next to the Karachi Nuclear Power Complex. (Max Becherer/Polaris Images for The Washington Post)

Karachi has just two functional wastewater treatment plants, and it is largely up to individual business owners to determine whether industrial waste is stored or dumped into canals,

officials say. As a result, each day, 350 million gallons of raw sewage or untreated industrial waste — enough to fill 530 Olympic-size swimming pools — from the city flows into the harbor, according to Fayyaz Rasool, manager of the Marine Pollution Control Department at Karachi Port Trust.

In addition, about 8,000 tons of solid waste is dumped or washes into the harbor each day. Even more pollution enters the Arabian Sea from the Indus River, which travels the length of Pakistan's sugar cane and industrial belt before [emptying](#) near the Pakistan-India border.

"The Karachi port really is a worst-case scenario for pollution," said Mohammad Moazzam Khan, a leading Pakistani marine biologist and the former head of the country's Marine Fisheries Department. "This is the worst pollution I have seen anywhere in the world, and I have seen many places."

There is an ongoing public debate in Pakistan about the possible dangers an additional nuclear plant may pose. (Max Becherer/Polaris Images for The Washington Post)

In a country where clean water and trash collection are unavailable to most, the polluted sea hasn't dramatically changed daily life for most Karachi residents. During the sweltering summer, tens of thousands of people still flock to beaches to picnic or dip their feet in the water. The wealthy still build beachfront villas, and restaurants that advertise locally caught seafood thrive.

But the pollution threatens a way of life that the fishermen have passed down through generations. Not only are there fewer fish, but villagers also suffer from ailments that they attribute to pollution, including stomach pain, hearing loss, and respiratory and skin infections. Some even say pollution is causing their hair to go gray sooner.

"All that I know, three years ago my hair started to change from black to white," said Waqar Baloch, 16, who wears a "Hang Loose Hawaii" hat to cover up his salt-and-pepper hair.

Located on an inlet known as Hawk's Bay, Abdul Rehman Goth is a few miles from a [small nuclear reactor](#) that Canada built for Pakistan in the 1970s. Some residents blame the plant for their health problems, but officials say repeated testing has shown normal radiation levels around the plant.

Instead, health experts say, it appears the fishermen are being exposed to the same harmful chemicals poisoning the marine life they are trying to catch. Several recent studies have shown that fish near Karachi contain [elevated levels](#) of chromium, cadmium, lead and iron.

"We are seeing a lot of skin problems in communities that live in the harbor area and are directly exposed to the water," Rasool said. "The good thing is, twice a day, the tide comes in and flushes all the pollution out."

Rasool said that Karachi officials hope to build several new wastewater treatment plants but that they will cost a total of \$170 million and take years to complete. In Abdul Rehman Goth, villagers wonder how much time they have.

"My eye burns, I lost some of my hair and I have digestive problems," said Shakeel Ahmed, who estimated his age as 21 and was nursing a bloodshot right eye. "And this is the season of the shrimp, but for the last seven, eight years, day-to-day, there are fewer shrimp."

The bustling port of Karachi can be seen in the distance. But the 6,000 villagers of Abdul Rehman Goth live in one-story concrete houses and wooden shacks stretched across the sand. Many do not wear shoes and wade in and out of the sea dozens of times each day.

Boat builder Naveed Saeed uses a hand drill as he makes a small fishing vessel he and his family will sell for about \$2,000. (Max Becherer/Polaris Images for The Washington Post)



Men who aren't fishing sit in groups stringing nets or meticulously shaping pieces of wood into new boats. Their children, most of whom do not go to school, collect seaweed and make sand castles. As in many other parts of Pakistan, women mostly stay indoors.

In the evening, villagers gather to play cards, lamenting that it has been a while since they've seen a shark or dolphin close to shore.

Even here, basic sanitation is lacking. Much of Abdul Rehman Goth's garbage is dumped outside, creating trails of trash right up to the shoreline. Still, residents wonder why they must go so far to catch high-value fish.

"We just traveled two hours but didn't catch a single fish," Faqueer Mohammad said as he pulled his boat ashore.

Mohammad, who estimated that he is 18 or 19 years old, said he wants a new job. And despite a lack of education and Pakistan's chronically high unemployment rate, there is at least one other job that villagers say they are well qualified for. They boast of being the best swimmers in Pakistan, a claim that sounds believable when hearing their tales of survival at sea after boats capsize.

One resident, Abid Ali, 25, has already given up fishing. He now earns \$75 a month as a lifeguard at a Karachi-area beach.

(By Tim Craig,
www.washingtonpost.com,
15/03/2015)

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The British High Commission has up to six-foot thick walls, topped with barbed wire with rows of concrete blocks, check posts and road blocks. Bilawal House has a 1.1km wall built to protect one person, destroying the socio-economic fabric of an entire neighbourhood. "The five-star hotels have taken over the sidewalks and inducted them into their own private spaces denying right of movement to passers-by," says Dr Noman. Their buffer zones take up to 20 feet of road.

Military establishments are no better. "They have added boundary walls which have actually added several thousand square yards to their property," says Dr Noman. They then make money off renting space on these walls. "What is the legitimacy of this space acquisition under the garb of security," he asks.

Is this kind of security a long-term fix? "Whether planning around the premise is the answer or taking targeted steps based on intelligence to curb the root causes of terror is, is the question," Dr Noman argues "[They] would not then have to physically safeguard each and every installation which is not only a costly exercise but in many cases has proved to be ineffective."

But security is big business. "In our society, the things we are doing for temporary relief includes the concept of the 'walled city'," says Nooruddin Ahmed, a builder. The prices of walled cities have doubled in two years. It started at Zamzama, then came Malir Cantt and Karsaz and then one for the Air Force.

Residents of Askari IV defend their 'fortification'. "We can hang out as much as we want," says one. "No one will come snatch our mobile phone." When all of Karachi shuts down, Askari IV doesn't. "Askari is not linked to the city as such. We are not connected to the outside. We don't know about what is happening outside. If we find out it's just through the news." Residents interviewed in KDA Overseas Society feel the same way.

The Askari IV residents felt safe. "You'll never hear about a murder in Askari," he says with confidence before pointing a finger at DHA where he feels this kind of crime is rampant. If only he had heard of the case in Askari III in February 2012 when a driver took a knife and butchered the family of five he worked for. (The Express Tribune, 08/03/2015)

Continue from Page 1 Perween Rahman remembered

Other speakers shed light on the history of the women's movement. Shahnaz Wazir Ali went all the way back to Zia's era in which anti-women laws, the laws of evidence and Hudood Ordinance were introduced. There were notices issued telling women not to work in places with men, directing them to stay indoors and forbidding them from driving, she said.

Ali showed pictures of the 1983 demonstration of women in Lahore, where they were tear-gassed, beaten and then moved to the police stations. Thus, the foundation of the movement of Pakistani women's was laid, she said.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan chairperson Zohra Yusuf felt that, for women's rights to succeed and become a reality, it is important that the society is secular. Apprehensions with secularism must be removed and people should proclaim themselves as feminists, she said, suggesting that words should be coined for 'feminism' in Urdu and other languages.

Yusuf pointed out that the most vulnerable groups of women were the ones displaced in North Waziristan. "They were prevented by tribal elders from standing in lines for ration and food, and had to beg," she said. (The Express Tribune, 10/03/2015)

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