

FACTS & FIGURES

Chopped down: Karachi loses its trees to growing ignorance

Imagine the Lahore city administration cutting down trees that line the city's idyllic canal to make way for advertisements. Next to impossible, say Lahore residents. Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif will never allow it.

Sindh Chief Minister, on the other hand, not only allows the same in Karachi but looks the other way as thousands of trees are cut down by the city's unrepresentative government stuffed with corrupt bureaucrats.

To add insult to injury, director of parks and horticulture department, Ashfaq Mallah, an unelected bureaucrat whose job is to protect trees, says he has not even noticed the cutting down of trees in different parts of the city. "I will check this tomorrow," he says, when asked to explain.

In broad daylight, thousands of trees have been cut down in Karachi and the massacre continues daily. Outdoor hoarding companies say that they have permission but not to cut the trees. In different areas of the city, municipal employees chop down trees to make way for advertisements despite a court order that forbids this.

One such street, the boulevard that runs in front of Dolmen City Mall in Clifton, has seen almost 250 trees being cut down in three months to make way for advertisement panels.

Standing idle next to the butchered stubs of once lush green trees, 34 advertisement panels attached to street light poles are a sad reminder to the greed of the city government.

One resident said that the city has lost more lungs but no one has taken notice. "Nobody gets punished for such actions," laments Anny Agha, a shopper who was waiting for her car outside the Dolmen mall. "People should run a campaign against it, otherwise the exercise of cutting trees will continue."

Khateeb Ahmed, a member of NGO Shehri, said that such culprits should immediately be stopped through organised steps. But so far no one has raised a collective voice. Instead the civic authorities are looking for excuses to cut down more trees. The cluster of overgrown trees became a hideout for criminals and drug addicts, claim some. This is the justification for more destruction.

Continued on Page 06

Korangi made sixth district of Karachi

The government has carved out a new district in Karachi Division increasing the numbers of districts in the city to six. The newly made Korangi district comprises Korangi, Shah Faisal Colony, Landhi, and Model Colony areas. Previously, Korangi was a part of district East. According to a notification issued by Revenue Department, the government of Sindh has created this new district Korangi Karachi in Karachi Division and also delimited the existing districts which are: South, Karachi East, Karachi Malir and Karachi West of Karachi Division. The Government of Sindh has further created new sub-divisions and talukas and re-demarcated the existing sub-divisions and talukas of above districts of Karachi Division -- including newly created Korangi district. It must be noted that District South Karachi comprises seven sub-divisions including Saddar, Arambagh, Civil Lines, Garden, Lyari, Harbour, and Mauripur.

District Korangi constitutes four sub-divisions namely Model Colony, Shah Faisal, Korangi, and Landhi. District East Karachi makes up four sub-divisions namely Ferozabad, Jamshed Quarters, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, and Gulzar-e-Hijri (Scheme-33).

District Malir Karachi consists of six sub-divisions namely Bin Qasim, Ibrahim Hydri, Shah Mureed, Gaddap, Airport, and Murad Memon. District West Karachi includes five sub-divisions namely Orangi, Mominabad, SITE, Baldia, and Manghopir.

District Central Karachi has five sub-divisions namely Gulberg, Liaquatabad, Nazimabad, North Nazimabad, and New Karachi. (The News, 05/11/2013)

Karachi's journey: From a town to a megacity

The two-day Karachi International Conference, the first of its kind, opened at the Arts Council on Saturday with jam-packed sessions touching upon various aspects of the metropolis.

Visitors from all walks of life came to the halls to get a dose of what seemed an interesting day out, but were disappointed by the monotonous, often too long readings straight out of research papers.

There were a few exceptions, however.

The keynote address was given by Arif Hasan, a renowned architect who is vocal about the rights of the under privileged in the city.

He talked in detail about how present day Karachi had developed out of a fortified trading post in 1729. "Although a new settlement, it had in its neighbourhood important places of worship for the Hindus and Muslims."

Later the British occupied the city in 1838, and a few years later it became the capital of Sindh. "The earliest development under colonialism included building of ports, cantonments and administrative buildings. By the 1860s, after irrigation systems and railways expanded, the Karachi port became the largest exporter of wheat and cotton in India."

As a result of this trade, the town boomed and people from all over India travelled here to seek employment.

The Jews

The most interesting presentation was perhaps made by Gul Hassan Kalmatti, titled "Karachi ke Yahudi – the Jews of Karachi". His decision to speak in Urdu drew a huge round of applause from the audience, who could relate better to the language.

The Jews came to Karachi with the British. At the time of Partition, there were 2,500 Jews in the city. Many made lasting contributions to education and administration, he stated.

For a very long time, Rancho Line was known as Synagogue Street. A prominent Jew named Ibrahim Broman was member of the municipal council and deputy mayor for a few months.

A school named after Ibrahim Benjani exists to date in Khamosh Colony in Liaquatabad. "Perhaps it remains so because Ibrahim is still a Muslim name. I hope it remains there after I read my paper," he laughed.

"At Lawrence Road, a red apartment building called Madiha Square has been built. Till the 1988, it was a synagogue which was burnt down during riots."

Kalmatti recalled how first as a child on his way to his father's shop, and then during his teenage on his way to the SM Arts College, he would see the synagogue everyday. The synagogue he claimed was the only sign of Jews in Karachi which was razed.

Another hidden away memoir, he said, is at the Mewashah Cemetery where a few Jew graves lie. "When Israel was created most Jews migrated from the city. And those who remain in the city hide their identity."

Teachers' education

Dr Nelofer Halai, a professor at the Institute of Education Development, Aga Khan University, read out a paper on the quality of teachers' training institute of the city.

"Very few teachers actually get professional qualification: B-Ed and M-Ed. Mainly because private schools do not require this qualification."

She went on to classify institutes which awarded a degree in education into public sector, private not-for-profit sector and the private for-profit. "The best in terms of faculty were private not-for-profit institutes, followed by the public sector institutes. The private for-profit institutes were so market driven that one of them converted their B-Ed programme into a BBA programme, as the later attracted more students."

She noticed that at many institutes, focus was on teaching a subject rather than how to teach a subject. "For instance in a class of logarithms, teachers were being taught the subject rather than how to teach the topic to a class."

Nightlife of the city

A picture of Fatima Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and the Shah of Iran was flashed on the screen. They were attending the opening ceremony of the Hotel Metropole, where dance and hard drinks went hand in hand.

Sibtain Naqvi, a young research scholar, presented his paper on the nightlife and music of

Karachi, which he mainly collected from oral anecdotes.

“The Taj Hotel at Club Road was constructed in 1962. Among its many customers was the sole Nobel laureate of Pakistan, Dr Abdus Salam.”

International bands and dancers often visited the city. They included famous Lebanese belly dancers and Iranian singers. “The famous dancer Marzi Kanga was a regular at Hotel Metropole.”

The local bands were then dominated by the Christian Goan community.

(By Sidrah Roghay, The News, 03/11/2013)

Urban sprawl: Karachi needs one planning agency with teeth and control of its purse strings

We can't say that Karachi's unplanned and unregulated physical development can be blamed on a lack of planning. In fact, a number of interventions have been undertaken at regular intervals during the pre- and post-Partition eras, but they have had little impact. There are a number of reasons for this.

Among the key reasons for this disconnect is an absence in continuity as each new planning document has taken a new direction to the planning approach but in the intervening period no effort has been made to continuously update the database.

Another reason for the relative failure to plan has been a lack of mechanisms in the planning body to implement and finance its work. Add to this the absence of a political mandate. Other than the Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020, no other plan has been given legal cover. Last but not least, stakeholders have not been consulted.

As a result, land is acquired and developed through means legal and illegal through a powerful nexus between private land developers, politicians and bureaucrats. Land use categories (example: amenity plots for parks) are often violated by encroachments and decisions to change their purpose, plot ratio and other building regulations (reducing the compulsory open spaces etc). Land is often sold at throwaway prices as a means of political patronage.

However as one considers the pattern of development, it is in many ways linked with the concept of supply and demand and there is a genuine need to accommodate certain growth patterns — such as commercialisation of land — within the context of a properly thought out and a legally, technically, administratively and institutionally sound urban policy, planning and development framework.

Looking ahead

It is now time to plan realistically and with a clear vision on how Karachi can continue to perform viably in the role of the commercial engine of the country within a revised planning context. A framework for change has to incorporate the following considerations: Institutional arrangement with public oversight and planning controls. Ideally, the institution most likely to guarantee protection of a city's interests is a strong city government. It is

difficult to have a truly empowered city government in Karachi or for that matter anywhere in Pakistan unless they are truly empowered in matters of policy and finance, in particular, to chart their own course. Presently, many of the local government functions are performed on the behest of the provinces. There is little autonomy in what the local governments can do and their existence is dependent upon their relationship with the provincial governments. Added to this, the presence of multifarious institutions with overlapping functions and boundaries in the metropolitan area of Karachi is a significant reason for the inadequate level and poor quality of services provided in the city.

There is a need to establish a supra Planning & Physical Development Agency with room for formalised input from private experts and civil society (example: Citizens Commissions) that has the authority to cut across this divide by getting all the various land-owning agencies and service providers to sit across the table and plan for the city in a harmonious manner, collectively and not in a disjointed manner as is the case at present.

Such an agency then has to be vested with the powers to not only to plan but also to supervise the financing and implementation of the planning recommendations. For this agency to succeed, it has to act with independence and authority and requires political ring fencing in terms of its access to financing, decision-making and powers of implementation.

The main functions of a planning and physical development agency would include:

Research and documentation of data indicators/trends; analysis

of data; information sharing and consultation with civil society stakeholders; strategising/planning and recommending; supervising the financing, implementation and monitoring.

Planning controls

It is now being suggested that zones specified for either exclusive commercial land use or densification or mixed uses or both are identified in the city to locate the burgeoning commercial growth based on a set of carefully established selection criteria and those zones be planned and governed through sound planning controls and regulatory mechanisms. The criteria for selection should both be established based on a rigorous research and inclusive stakeholder consultation exercise.

(By Farhan Anwar, The Express Tribune, 28/10/2013)

Mumbai runs 2,342 suburban trains daily, Karachi none

Karachi urban transport planners should learn a lesson from Mumbai rail system, which runs 2,342 suburban train services daily to facilitate 7.24 million commuters, while for millions of Karachiites, there is not even a single suburban train service.

Though after Partition, Karachi and Mumbai (formerly Bombay) inherited almost the same rail infrastructure, the administration of Mumbai developed and expanded it successfully. On the other hand, the Karachi bosses destroyed it appallingly.

Today, the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) is a huge failure, while the Mumbai rail system is a global success story with annual riders of more than 2.64 billion, becoming the second busiest rapid transit system in the world. Meanwhile in Karachi, commuters face immense problems after 11:00pm - public transport almost disappears after that. But in Mumbai, trains run from 4am until 1am.

The Mumbai Suburban Railway services have different classes of train services: a local train which stops at every station, another is a "class fast local", which runs express (skipping stops) until a certain station, and from that station onward runs like a local. A fast, super fast, double fast services are also there, which run express for various lengths of route.

Women-only trains (termed ladies) can also be found, and since 1992, there are special trains for the ladies, exclusively for women passengers.

Mumbai currently has four rail corridors for the mass transit system (with separate tracks) totalling 149km. Trains have a headway of 3 minutes during peak hours, ranging from 5 to 10 minutes during the rest of the hours of operation, except late at night, when headway is about 20-30 minutes. Alongside much of the mass transit tracks, the long distance tracks also carry "fast" trains, which do not stop at all stations.

In comparison to the Mumbai rail system, the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) is a sad story. It began regular passenger service in 1969 but was ultimately shut in 1999 due to gross mismanagement. KCR began its operation through the Pakistan Railways, with the aim of providing better transport facilities to

Karachi and the surrounding suburbs. The original KCR line extended from the Drigh Road Station and ended at the Karachi City Station, carrying six million passengers annually.

The KCR was an instant success and made significant profits in its first year of operation. It was at its peak until the 1980s with 104 daily trains, out of which 80 trains ran on the main track, whereas the remaining on the loop line.

During the 1990s, private transporters of Karachi contracted KCR staff indulged in corruption and by 1994 it was in incurring major losses. As a result, a majority of trains were discontinued with only a few running on the loop.

Hence in 1999, KCR operations were discontinued. The result was instant gridlock on Karachi streets. In 2005, revival plans for the KCR were initiated; however, till date, nothing substantial has been done to restart the project.

The government of General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf only paid lip service to the KCR revival; whereas the PPP in support of the MQM also followed the same policy - did nothing during their five-year term. The present governments of the PML-N at the centre and the PPP in Sindh so far have also taken no practical work on this project to the dismay of Karachi commuters.

If the government planners and Pakistan Railway officers study the model of Mumbai suburban rail system, they could easily revive the KCR, as its infrastructure including tracks, railway station, signals and racks are still there. All they need is some good locomotives and a strong political will.

(DailyTimes, 10/11/2013)

Transport system in a mess

People maintain their physical balance with difficulty as a qingqi (pronounced Chin-Chee by locals) negotiates twists and turns in a narrow, rickety, over-crowded road in Ancholi area, a middle-class locality in Karachi.

However, "it is a blessing in disguise. It has provided an affordable solution for people's short distance commutation needs. The ride is not enjoyable, but serves the purpose," Ehsan, a petty office worker who uses this mode of transport from the main road bus stop to his house three miles away, tells Dawn.

"I am too tired to walk three miles after a full-day job and cannot afford to spend Rs50 on one-way rickshaw fare. qingqis charged Rs10 till last month, but after the petrol price hike, the fare has risen to Rs15," he explains.



There are several thousands of vehicles of this new transport mode, which is a cross between a motorcycle and an auto-rickshaw, that ply on roads in cities and towns from Mingora in Swat in the north of the country to the port city of Karachi in the south. Little wonder then, that motorcycles account for as much as 55-60 per cent of the total domestic consumption of petrol.

The fact is that the auto-driven transport system is unsustainable, insufficient, inefficient, economically ineffective, unfair and unsafe for the passengers. It lacks cross modal balance and stunts the country's development.

Lack of investment in infrastructure; influence of interest groups in Islamabad; absence of innovative regulatory framework, and the government's insensitivity to the needs of the people in a transforming economy are hallmarks of the transportation system, which is projected to be the second largest service segment, next only to the financial sector.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2012-13, transport has a share of 24 per cent in the services sector. It is projected to be both means and an end of growth activities in emerging economies. The fact that its growth pace dipped from nine to three per cent in a year, between FY 2011-12 and 2012-13, reflects the direction in which the economy is heading.

Experts believe that the social cost of the lack of an integrated transport policy is higher than the economic cost. The escalation and the changing pricing equilibrium in petrol, diesel, CNG and LPG force operators to make adjustments whose cost often compromises safety and efficiency and is borne by commuters.

"The burden is disproportionately greater on vulnerable, impoverished segments," commented an expert.

The low income urban households (earning between Rs15,000-20,000) spend roughly as much as 20 per cent of their income on

transport. It is the third biggest head, after food and rent, on their family budget.

Families with incomes between Rs60,000-100,000 spend around 10 per cent of that on transport, and the relative percentage falls as incomes go up. This was deduced from a random survey conducted by this writer.

The single biggest factor troubling the populace is the escalating cost of essential services. "The prices of local petroleum products tend to move in tandem with the trend in the international market, because of the country's dependence on imports. However, one needs to factor in the rupee-dollar parity when commenting on the retail price of petrol and diesel. Every depreciation of the rupee hikes the cost of imports. How can it be sold for a price that does not cover the cost," Aftab Hussain, MD and CEO, Pakistan Refinery Limited (PRL), commented on the rising cost of transport when reached over phone.

"Close to 50 per cent of the hike in petroleum products is because of rupee depreciation and government levies. Refineries are under a lot of pressure because of the depreciation, as PRL's balance sheet turned red, from a Rs50 million profit last year to a Rs270 million loss, thanks to the falling value of the rupee," he lamented.

"The country needs a well defined, integrated transport policy, which is properly benchmarked and closely monitored. Unfortunately, we lack both the capacity and willingness," he said.

A draft of the 'National Transport Policy' (NTP), dated July 2009, was found on the website of the National Transport Research Centre (NTRC), which falls under the

federal ministry of communication. "It sure can serve as a starting point," commented an expert.

NRTC chief Mohammad Shamsuddin Qureshi was cautious when reached over phone in Islamabad to find the fate of the draft prepared four years back.

"We forwarded it to the planning commission (PC). It was supposed to finalise the policy document after accommodating the input of all relevant stakeholders and then present it to the cabinet for approval. Unfortunately, that was the last we heard of it," he said.

"A number of reminders have been sent to the PC, but there must be more urgent issues at hand, as its response is still awaited. The last

reminder was sent in September 2013," Qureshi told Dawn.

"The commuters are paying more for less of the quality and quantity of service. Stagflation tends to drive people towards cheap modes and unsafe practices, such as travelling on bus/wagon rooftops. The public sector options are depleting; experiments of public private partnership have not been pursued properly, and private transport operators have not been regulated effectively," said an expert.

"It all adds up to make daily travelling for students and the working population a challenge, and drags down their economic and social well being," he concluded.
(By Afshan Subohi, Daily Dawn, 28/10/2013)

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Continue from Page 1

Zubair Zaheer, the director of an advertising company, Outdoor Unlimited, said that the billboards were installed with the permission of the District Municipal Corporations (DMCs) as well as the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC). The company was not involved in chopping down a single tree in the area, he clarified.

When asked who had cut the trees, Zaheer said that he was unaware about that and only DMC or KMC could answer that query. "I don't know who has cut down the trees. It's not my concern. I have paid tax to DMC and KMC for the hoardings."

Zaheer said that he had no idea about the planning and strategy of the government departments, saying, "I have no issue if the trees are planted again in the area."

Mallah, said that he had recently assumed charge and had no information about this issue. Mallah, however, assured that he would visit the site and would ask the relevant department of the DMC about the matter as the area falls under DMC South's jurisdiction. "Advertisers can take permission for the sign boards but no one has permission to cut down trees. Cutting trees is a punishable crime." So far no one has been punished.

(By Rizwan Shehzad, The Express Tribune, 29/11/2013)

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