

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

*JANUARY TO JUNE 2021*

## HOUSING



## Urban Resource Centre

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## Shelter homes spring up amid cold snap

While Karachi continues to experience a long and intense winter, so much so that the temperature hit a new low, dropping to a record-breaking level on Friday, the city administration has begun establishing temporary shelters for the homeless and needy, most of whom would otherwise spend the night sleeping on rock-hard footpaths, under the bridges and on concrete benches under the open sky.

The metropolis, which is a home away from home for scores of daily wagers who flock to it throughout the year in search of better earning opportunities and survive its fast-pace life without any roof over their heads, ironically, doesn't have a single government-run shelter home.

Consequently, with Karachi and other cities in Sindh facing a rare severe winter season, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah directed divisional commissioners across the province on Tuesday to provide shelter to the needy and homeless.

As a result, the first shelter home was established in Manghopir late on Thursday evening.

The maiden makeshift shelter home has been set up in a community hall, where around 100 charpoys have been placed. However, at the time of the filing of this report, just 35 persons had moved there.

Besides, another shelter home has been set up in Mominabad, assistant deputy commissioner Nasrullah Abbasi told The Express Tribune.

"We have been providing blankets to needy persons and our teams visit different areas late at night. They are out on the roads extending support to the vulnerable," he added.

And so, blankets were distributed among the homeless in Lyari, Garden and old city areas on Friday.

Besides, South deputy commissioner Irshad Ahmed Sodhar said another two shelter homes, which could accommodate 200 persons, were set up in Narayan Jagannath Vaidya High School in Lyari. He added that similar arrangements were made in January last year.

"More such shelter homes will be established if needed," he said.

According to Keamari deputy commissioner Mukhtiar Abro, another three shelter camps will be established today (Sunday) in his jurisdiction.

In this regard, Karachi commissioner Navid Ahmed Shaikh said all relevant officials had been directed to set up shelter camps and distribute blankets among homeless and needy persons.

"We are making all necessary arrangements to help needy people battling the cold weather," he assured.

### No count

While there is no official record of homeless persons residing on the metropolis' footpaths, it is roughly estimated that thousands have been living in the city's two districts, South and West, without any shelter for years.

Confirming the lack of official record, a senior official of the Sindh Social Welfare Department said, "There is no data of homeless persons in Karachi, as we never conducted any survey for the purpose."

According to Edhi Foundation spokesperson Muhammad Bilal, there are over 6,000 homeless persons in the welfare organisation's shelter homes in the city.

He said the majority of homeless persons in the metropolis were concentrated in South and West districts, and explained that it was so because South district had more employment opportunities and West was the choice of those coming to the city from elsewhere, mostly in search of work.

### Showing compassion

Citizens too have risen to the occasion, coming to the aid of those needing protection against the harsh weather.

One such family, which was distributing sweaters and warm clothes in old city areas on Saturday, appealed to others to help the poor as well.

"There are so many people and organisations that provide food, but none provides shelter and clothes," pointed out one among them, acknowledging that the situation was particularly difficult for those living under the open sky.

An elder member of the family, who requested anonymity, noted, "Karachi hardly sees such weather."

He urged the government, non-governmental organisations and the affluent to look after children, elderly persons and labourers sleeping by roadsides in various areas of the city.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 03/01/2021)

### **LHC stays Ravi project till EIA report approval**

The Lahore High Court (LHC) has stayed work on the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project till the approval of its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, besides asking the government to file compliance report with regard to meeting environmental standards in the Naya Pakistan Housing Project (NPHP).

Justice Shahid Karim in a verdict released on Saturday about the Dec 31 hearing of multiple petitions involving different environmental issues said since the process for the grant of EIA of the urban development project was under way, it was directed that no work should be commenced at the site by [Ravi Urban Development Authority (Ruda)] until the approvals were granted by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD).

Additional Advocate General Anis Hashmi on Thursday submitted some record related to the EIA report on the riverfront project and also placed on record a letter written by the Ruda chairman to the EPD director general on Dec 30 seeking information about legal requirements for submission of the EIA report.

Previously, the judge had sought reports from the federal and provincial governments about the compliance with environmental regulations in the project.

Besides the riverfront project, Justice Karim directed an assistant attorney general to apprise the court of the measures being taken to comply with environmental standards regarding the Naya Pakistan Housing Project being built by an authority set up by the federal government. The court sought its compliance report to meet environmental standards.

*Judge seeks report on compliance with environmental standards in Naya Pakistan Housing Project*

#### **Commission report on smog**

About the steps being taken to control smog, a judicial water and environmental commission meanwhile filed a report stating that 38.72 per cent of the brick kilns operating in Punjab had already adopted zigzag technology.

Besides, it said, a number of industrial units had been sealed and their owners booked for violation of the provincial disaster management authority's directions regarding smoke emission.

The report further said a large number of vehicles had been impounded and fines imposed worth Rs69 million for not conforming to the standards of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The judge directed the Lahore Development Authority to launch a campaign against encroachments and illegal parking of cars in Samanabad, Gulshan-i-Ravi, Bund Road and Allama Iqbal Town (Moon Market) as pointed out by the commission.

The public interest petitions were represented by advocates Abuzar Salman Niazi, Azhar Siddique, Sheraz Zaka and Ahmad Rafay Alam. The next hearing would be fixed later by the registrar office.  
(By Wajih Ahmed Sheikh Dawn, 01, 03/01/2021)

### **Past year leaves behind trail of collapsed buildings**

For Ahmed, a resident of Korangi area, losing a house made with meagre wages was not the only resounding blow as he struggled to survive pandemic-hit 2020.

He also lost his 22-year-old son in a building collapse incident in September that year. The collapse of the five-storey building in Korangi's Allah Wala Town was the third of its kind recorded in Karachi in the past year, raising alarm over the dismal state of multi-storey buildings in the financial hub. "My life has lost its meaning since the death of my son. The staggering loss not only hit us financially but also cost us our son. We had built our house penny by penny, earned through trivial wages," shared Ahmed, stifling a sob. Unfortunately, incidents of building collapse have turned into a common occurrence in Karachi due to wayward constructions, some of which are often deemed illegal by the authorities. At least 50 people were killed in the metropolis due to such accidents in the past year alone.

The collapses reportedly occurred due to sheer negligence and rampant corruption. The year 2020 saw nine building collapses in Karachi, with some occurring within days after the other. Meanwhile, officials have blamed illegal constructions in the city for the incidents. Many of the building collapses were concentrated in areas such as Liaquatabad and Sadar Town. Taking a look back, in March, the Dr Jamal Fatima residential building collapsed in Gulbahar no 2, Rizvia Society. Around 27 people lost their lives, including eight women and three innocent children, while dozens were injured. The incident also affected surrounding buildings.

The five-storey building was built illegally, claimed the authorities at the time. The other incident during the pandemic came in June, when a five-storey building collapsed in Lyari, killing 22 people and injuring several others. The building was also allegedly constructed against the rules.

The authorities said that the map of the building was not approved and even the legal requirements were not met at the time of its construction. Barely a month later, a four-storey building collapsed in Liaquatabad, near the Sindhi Hotel. Fortunately, the incident resulted in no casualties as the residents had evacuated the building when it got crooked. A similar incident took place on August 30, 2020, when another four-storey building collapsed at Nishtar Basti. The residents of the building had already vacated the building due to its dilapidated condition, so no loss of life took place. On September 10, a horrific incident occurred in Korangi's

Allahwala Town where a four-storey building, constructed on a plot of only 80 yards, came crashing down. The incident resulted in the deaths of four people and injured several others.

The law does not allow the construction of a multi-storey building on an 80-yard land. Despite the threats posed by shabby buildings and constructions, substandard materials are still commonly used in illegally constructed buildings. On September 13, a single-storey building collapsed at Bihar Colony, Lyari. Two workers lost their lives while 13 were wounded at the time. The building collapsed while it was still under construction, pointing at the shoddy construction practices that caused the irrevocable loss of lives. In wake of these horrendous incidents, a few officers of the Sindh Building Control Authority were suspended. However, a few days later, those officers were reportedly reinstated. The Express Tribune tried to contact Director General SBCA Shamsuddin Soomro, however, he did not give a statement on the matter.  
(By Naeem Khanzada The Express Tribune, 04, 10/01/2021)

### **Culture dept to undo paint job on old buildings on Burns Road**

Three out of six buildings on Burns Road that were recently painted over under a beautification project by the district authorities were identified as listed heritage buildings on Monday.

"All such buildings will be de-coloured," announced Sindh Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Minister Sardar Ali Shah, taking notice of the matter.

Not long after reports surfaced that the district authorities were planning to pedestrianise the famous food street and add colour to the street by painting over the buildings, architect Marvi Mazhar had taken to Twitter denouncing the beautification initiative.

She had called for the culture department's attention over the matter and had maintained that the authorities were not taking into consideration heritage buildings and ancient facades.

Although the work had been initiated following a notification last Wednesday, the painting work has now been halted. Technical experts will soon undo the fresh coats painted over the buildings to preserve their historical value, The Express Tribune learnt.

However, contradictory claims were made by different officials as to how many marked heritage buildings actually exist on the strip of Sharae Liaquat extending from Fresco Chowk and Court Road intersection - the part of the street earmarked for the project.

There seems to be a lack of coordination, said Sindh Archaeology and Antiquities Department Director Abdul Fatah Shaikh, speaking to The Express Tribune. "But I know their intention was to beautify the road."

He added that architects and heritage experts are being contacted to help the department restore the old buildings.

Without naming anyone, Shaikh maintained that a civil society organisation had wanted to colour all the buildings located on both sides of the road. "There are over 60 enlisted buildings. We have asked them to halt the work."

Meanwhile, the provincial culture minister has also constituted a committee under Archeology Director-General Manzoor Ahmed Kanasiro for the purpose. Shah too disclosed that the civil society organisation had coloured the buildings located on Sharae Liaquat without permission.

Earlier, on Wednesday, the district administration had notified the closure of the street for traffic after 7pm as work began to pedestrianise the street. The relevant authorities had been directed to divert traffic towards MA Jinnah Road and the Peoples Square.

Thus far, both sides of the road have been repaired while dozens of different kinds of saplings have been planted.

Paint work had also been initiated on some of the buildings. The ones that were coloured recently are occupied by residents, it was learnt.

"Majority of the residents of these buildings have been living here on rent for years," said Jamaluddin, a resident. "Even the owners of these buildings were not informed of the colouring." Painting over these buildings without repairing them is a joke played on the residents, opined Jamaluddin.

The resident also criticised the authorities for diverting traffic and declaring the area a food street.

Seconding him, another resident, Asif, claimed that the site was not actually a food street. The government had tried to facilitate a few restaurant owners, he added.

Meanwhile, when contacted after the developments on Monday, South Deputy Commissioner Irshad Ahmed Sodhar maintained that only one building has been painted thus far.

With the help of technical and heritage experts, the paintings will be removed, he said, adding that his team would ensure no artificial paint is used during the project.

Contradictions were noted when one senior official, speaking to The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity, maintained that work will continue as planned and that the paint job was part of the beautification process. "There is only one [heritage] building not three," he maintained, adding that the total buildings on the entire road don't add up to 60 either.

The culture minister has maintained, however, that departmental action will be taken against all those officials who did not stop the paint jobs on heritage buildings. In his statement, he also claimed that his department is in close contact with the district administration for the de-colouring process.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 12/01/2021)

### **Ordinance to set up islands development authority has lapsed, SHC told**

A federal law officer on Friday informed the Sindh High Court that the Pakistan Islands Development Authority (PIDA) Ordinance had already lapsed.

Assistant Attorney General Hussain Bohra submitted this before a two-judge bench, headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, during the hearing of a set of petitions challenging the vires of the recently promulgated PIDA Ordinance.

He submitted that the ordinance in question had already lapsed.

The bench adjourned the hearing on the matter till Jan 27 due to absence of the counsel for other petitioners.

Initially, Advocate Shahab Usto had petitioned the SHC that the object of the impugned ordinance was reportedly to establish an authority for offshore islands of Sindh and Balochistan, particularly Bundal and Buddo islands along Karachi's coast.

The petitioner had submitted that the impugned ordinance had sabotaged the constitutional scheme by which the territorial integrity of the provinces had been guaranteed under the Constitution.

*The draft Personal Data Protection Bill has been sent to law ministry for vetting*

In a previous hearing, Attorney General of Pakistan Barrister Khalid Jawed Khan had assured the court that no development works would be carried out on the islands without consultation of the Sindh government.

#### **Mobile users' data breach case**

The SHC was informed on Friday that a proposed law aiming to protect the personal data of Pakistani mobile phone users had been deliberated upon with stakeholders and the same had been finally sent to the law ministry for its legal vetting.

AAG Bohra submitted this before the two-judge bench headed by Justice Mazhar during the hearing of a petition seeking a probe into reports regarding an alleged data breach of 115 million mobile phone users from Pakistan and its sale on the darknet.

On the last date, the judges had asked the federal law officer to appraise the court on the progress with regard to Personal Data Protection Bill, 2020.

During Friday's hearing, Mr Bohra sought more time to submit comments to show further progress in the matter.

Advocate Samina Iqbal for the National Database and Registration Authority submitted a reply, which was taken on record.

By consent, the bench adjourned the hearing till Feb 2 and directed the office to transmit copy of the order to the attorney general of Pakistan and the information technology and telecom secretary for their intimation.

On a last hearing, the interior ministry had informed the SHC that no data related to Pakistani mobile users was leaked on the part of Nadra.

The ministry had stated that an inquiry board was constituted on the purported data leakage and it concluded that the report of M/s Rewterz, a specialised cybersecurity services firm in Pakistan, itself confirmed that data shared was related to Pakistan mobile users and not of Nadra while a detailed forensic analysis through various tests also reconfirmed that there was no data leakage on part of Nadra.

The bench had also directed the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to take all necessary preventive steps to save the mobile users' data.

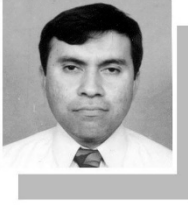
Petitioner Advocate Tariq Mansoor had approached the court, submitting that the Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Act, 2020 and Data Protection Bill, 2020 were under consideration, but the proper legislation had not been done yet.

He submitted that there were reports of Rewterz about the personal data breach of 115m Pakistani mobile phone users allegedly by telecom service providers and the same was being shown on the darknet by some cybercriminals, who were demanding 300 bitcoins (BTC) for the data.

He had further argued that the data, including full names, complete addresses and CNICs of cellular users, was reportedly put for sale online.

(By Naeem Sahoutra Dawn, 13, 16/01/2021)

### Living in Karachi



TIMES are challenging for urban dwellers living in the corridors of the Karachi Circular Railway, nullahs and other similar locations. In keeping with judicial instructions, officials have been evicting settlers and demolishing structures to make way for KCR trains and anticipated wastewater and rainwater flows, while promising to provide alternative shelter. Yet, hundreds of KCR affectees have been living in the severe cold under the open sky. Despite political announcements, the chances of these hapless people acquiring shelter appear very remote. Whenever a rehabilitation and resettlement project has been launched in Karachi, outcomes have been undesirable.

When over 250,000 people were displaced by the Lyari Expressway development, a resettlement project was launched at a hefty cost. But many families were left out and had to attempt a futile pursuit of cash compensation and plots. The project is being investigated for reasons of transparency by a prime minister's inquiry commission. Lack of formal and targeted land supply for housing the urban poor leads to the growth of katchi abadis, many of which are prone to evictions. If evictees acquire some financial strength, they move into squatter settlements of their choice. This is a people-led option of rehabilitation, frowned on by officialdom. But katchi abadis are a response to the government's failed efforts to provide housing for low-income segments.

The absence of choices in large cities has led the poor to inhabit irregular spaces such as nullahbanks and semi-abandoned transit corridors like the KCR. Successive governments have indeed come up with rehabilitation schemes, but these have not kept pace with the growing number of people searching for shelter. Authorities initially attempted to bulldoze settlements but soon realised that it was an impossible task. Thereafter, they looked the other way as people settled at will. The phenomenon continues.

This syndrome is in need of a dispassionate analysis. It is evident that cities are inhabited by all manner of income groups. Cities that take care of only the rich will fail. In healthy cities, the poor have easy access to basic amenities. It is disappointing to note that successive governments have not given enough importance to housing. For example, the pro-poor Sindh Disposal of Urban Land Ordinance, 2002, was aimed at providing land for housing those seeking shelter through a targeted approach. The law led to institutionalisation of land disposal and took away the government's discretionary powers for allotting land in a clandestine manner. It was seen as a move that went against political privileges and was repealed in 2006.

*The poor often end up paying more than middle-income segments.*

Similarly, the present regime announced the upgradation of 100 katchi abadis some four years ago, but no noticeable progress has been made. The idea was to survey the settlements and grant legal ownership, services and amenities. Land supply for lucrative real-estate enterprises is in full swing. Corridor M-9 (Super Highway) is a case in point where a huge suburban enclave is shaping up. But these land and property parcels have been appropriated by investors, not those without shelter.

It is often claimed that poor people need subsidies for housing which the state can no longer provide. This is not true. The poor pay for every service in the context of where they live, even if to the informal sector. Housing is acquired through payments to illegal entrepreneurs, building material providers and contractors. Handsome sums are given to musclemen of various ranks and profiles to ensure security. Water is acquired on higher costs from vendors. In many cases, the poor end up paying more than the middle- or upper-income groups.

Several steps need to be taken without delay. A housing need assessment survey must be carried out for Karachi as the starting point. The 2017 census details, when properly released, may provide empirical information. Such assessments will inform our decision-makers about the scale and characteristics of housing requirements, especially for the poor and low-income groups.

Concurrently, a land management study must be done to examine the availability of land for housing low-income groups. Modified delivery mechanisms, including an incremental housing development approach, may be adopted. The first preference must be given to those who have been periodically uprooted due to evictions within the city. The policy environment, led by the federal government, may be geared towards helping the urban poor. The Naya Pakistan Housing Authority should be asked to prepare a pilot project for the targeted delivery of affordable housing. Such an initiative would ensure the eradication of speculation and corruption regarding land. Housing credit packages must be developed. Housing choices, when generated according to solid preferences and affordability status, can meet the objectives.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 19/01/2020)

### Buildings survey task force formed to check firefighting measures

The district administration of Karachi South on Saturday established a task force to check fire prevention and safety measures in high-rise buildings and commercial establishments in the business district of the city to determine the causes of frequent fire incidents and suggest corrective measures.

Official sources said that the task force formed in compliance with the Sindh High Court order would also ensure corrections in gaps identified in buildings and factories in coordination with all stakeholders.

They said that the chief fire officer of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, deputy director of Civil Defence, deputy director of the Sindh Building Control Authority, assistant commissioners of Saddar, Civil Lines, Arambagh, Garden and Lyari, DSP Police Traffic and Regional Transport Authority secretary were included in the task force.

The sources added that on the directives of Deputy Commissioner South Irshad Ali Sodhar the first meeting of the task force was held with the additional deputy commissioner, South, in the chair.

They said that the meeting participants decided that visits for inspection of safety measures in residential and commercial high-rises shall be carried out and recommendation shall be made where safety measures were inadequate.

The sources said that it was also decided that building/site plans shall only be approved where buildings have fire safety mechanism in the structures and no exceptions would be made in this regard.

They said that the task force decided that completion certificate would only be issued after verification of fire safety mechanism by the relevant authorities.

It was maintained that fire safety trainings would be imparted to the administrations of apartments and commercial establishments. The sources said that the campaign would be launched to sensitise the general public about hazards and fire safety.

Commenting on the issue, the DC South stated that district South was commercial hub where many high-rise buildings were located, besides old and congested residential areas needed proper fire safety measures.

He said that the district administration had launched a campaign after formation of the task force for the implementation of the SHC orders.

The DC further stated that officials of the Civil Defence, fire department and SBCA had jointly conducted the survey of Allah Walla Market and Mustafa Market to ascertain fire safety measures.

He said that all assistant commissioners of South district were assigned to lead the campaign in their towns without any leniency in ascertaining the fire safety measures in residential and commercial buildings.

Mr Sodhar recalled the fire incident in Regent Plaza and said that recent inspection of the hotel found that fire safety measures had been adopted in the establishment.

He said that inspection had been conducted by the task force in Saddar, Mir Mohammad Baloch Road and Lyari.

The deputy commissioner said that the fire department of DMC South was being upgraded with latest equipment and machinery along with training of manpower according to international standards.

He vowed to complete the inspection of commercial and residential buildings in the district at the earliest and ensure corrective measures to save lives and property.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 24/01/2021)

### **Karachi to get four more 'Panahgah' centres soon**

As part of Prime Minister Imran Khan's initiative, the federal government has identified five places in Karachi to set up as many Panahgahs, where underprivileged and other people from poor segments of society will be provided free food and shelter, in a first such move for the metropolis after more than 100 such centres have already been established in different parts of the country, it emerged on Sunday.

Officials said one of the five Panahgahs had already started functioning in Surjani Town without much media fanfare and formal inauguration while four more centres would be established in different areas.

The federal authorities, they said, had selected low-income neighbourhoods and the residential areas of migrant workers to reach maximum number of deserving people.

"Apart from Surjani Town, sites have been selected in Korangi, Lyari, New Karachi and Sohrab Goth," said Naseem ur Rehman, the focal person for the government's Panagah programme.

*After Surjani Town, such centres will be set up in Korangi, Lyari, New Karachi and Sohrab Goth*

"The one in Surjani Town has already started and we hope that within the first quarter of this year Karachi will get all five functional centres. It's being done in line with the vision of the prime minister, who has been a strong proponent of providing all-out facilities to the downtrodden segment of society," he added.

He said the basic concept behind setting up Panahgahs was to support the poor and labour class of the society, which remained shelter-less in urban areas while earning bread for their families mostly living in the rural parts of the country.

The Panagahs, he said, primarily offered them a space with food and shelter amid the best conditions.

PM Khan had last year appointed Mr Rehman, who is an international professional with specialisation in development and humanitarian issues. He brings a wealth of leadership skills and management expertise to the position. As chief executive officer of the Imran Khan Foundation (IKF), he played a pivotal role in strengthening its organisational transformation.

"Some 135 Panahgahs are serving thousands of people across the country," he said. "In Karachi like any other major urban centre, we expect that each centre will be catering up to 500 people or more in food services and around 100 can stay overnight. It's just a beginning and we plan to add more value gradually like we did in Islamabad. In Islamabad, we have launched a free shuttle service to facilitate daily wage earners' travel to the Panahgahs, located on the city's outskirts. It's all about bringing some quality and value in the people's lives with dignity, honour and self respect."

He said the Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal was providing administrative support and in Karachi the federally administered body was also actively engaged in making the centres operational at the earliest.

The provincial administrations across the country, he said, had supported the federal government's initiative in their respective provinces and extended all possible support for its success.

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 25/01/2021)

### **SHC irked at suspension of KDA officers' salaries**

The Sindh High Court annulled on Wednesday the notification informing of the suspension of appointments and transfers at the Karachi Development Authority. Irked at the suspension of salaries of KDA's Grade-17 officers, a two-member bench, led by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, directed the issuance of officers' salaries from KDA accounts.

What was their fault that their salaries were stopped, inquired Justice Mazhar during the hearing of a plea challenging the notification alerting the Grade 17 officers' salaries' suspension.

How will the officers in question earn their livelihood, the judge inquired expressing annoyance at the suspension. If there is no money to pay pensions, will the salaries of officers currently in service be suspended, asked Justice Mazhar.

At this, KDA officers present at the hearing broke into an applause and were refrained from doing so by the court.

During the hearing, relevant officials informed the bench that the KDA plans to auction amenity plots.

The authority will be auctioning 137 amenity plots, said the KDA director-general.

"How can you auction amenity plots," asked Justice Mazhar.

In reply the DG said that the authority's conditions would improve with the money received from auctioning the plots.

The plots will be auctioned in six months, observed Justice Mazhar. "What will be done till then? How will these officers eat during this time," he inquired.

During the hearing the Sindh advocate-general maintained that Rs500 million were given to the KDA in the past year.

At which the bench directed him to ask the Sindh government to consider KDA's request for loans.

The court directed the authority to pay the salaries of current officers from KDA accounts and directed that only the salaries should be paid from these accounts. Besides, the court directed the provincial government to take measures to financially assist the KDA and quashed the notification informing of the suspension of promotions and transfers at the authority.

### **Disputed islands**

The same bench, while hearing the plea contesting the federation's claim on Dingi and Bundal islands, sought a written reply from the Centre over the contract to install a desalination plant on Bundal Island.

The assistant attorney-general of Pakistan maintained that the controversial Pakistan Island Development has lapsed. The Ordinance was promulgated by the federal government on September 22, 2020 and expired on January 3, 2021, he informed the court.

At this, the bench remarked that the matter is over for now and will be considered once a new Ordinance is issued.

Meanwhile, petitioner advocate Shahab Usto contended that the Ordinance may have lapsed but the Centre has signed an agreement with Netherlands to install a desalination plant on Bundal Island.

Following this, the court sought a written reply from the federal lawyer at the next hearing slated for February 17.

Earlier, the bench had directed that Centre must inform the court of its position on the islands after the lapsing of the Ordinance.



**Liquor shop**

Separately, the SHC issued notices to the Sindh government, provincial excise and taxation director-general, police and a liquor shop over a petition contending that a wine shop being opened in a Muslim-majority area.

The petitioner's counsel, advocate Usman Farooq, argued that a wine shop is being opened in a Muslim-majority area in Bufferzone in the vicinity of mosques and madressahs. He contended that this was against the law and the parties should be restricted from doing.

The court sought replies from the parties and relevant authorities by February 10 and adjourned the hearing. (By The Express Tribune, 04, 28/01/2021)

**'Academia, industry linkage to play big role in housing sector'**

It was a marvel of engineering and architecture, on top of also being energy efficient and fireproof. The model house, the inauguration of which was organised at the NED University of Engineering and Technology campus on Saturday, is bright, spacious and comfortable. And the best thing about it is that it is low-cost and can be constructed within six weeks.

Looking to develop energy efficient and low-cost housing facilities in a sustainable way, the Centre for Affordable Housing and Sustainable Built Environment (CAHSBE) and NED University joined hands with the construction industry to come up with the housing model in accordance to the affordable/low-cost housing as envisioned by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

**Fawad says 2021 to be game changer**

"You need to be obsessed with the idea and you need to be enthusiastic to come up with this kind of work," Federal Science and Technology Minister Fawad Chaudhry, who was joining the inauguration through video link, said.

"There was a time when there used to be no link between academia and industry but we were able to combine the two in this case and to see research being turned into practical. The result is quite amazing," he remarked.

*A low-cost, fireproof and energy efficient model house is inaugurated at NED University*

"As far as relationships between academia and industry are concerned, this year will be a game changer," he added.

Earlier, during his welcome address, Prof Dr Shuaib Ahmad of NED University said that one type of construction or construction material cannot suit all regions with different terrains and environment.

"We need housing for rural, urban and peri-urban landscapes. In order to fulfil the requirements of housing for the masses as per the prime minister's affordable/low-cost housing initiative, we have connected with some 28 universities who are researching different housing structure designs constructed from mud, concrete, timber, bamboo, hollow bricks, etc," he said.

While appreciating the model house, Naya Pakistan Housing & Development Authority (NAPHDA) chairman retired Lt Gen Anwar Ali Hyder observed that such houses that come up as a result of a lot of research at universities are of great standard, strong, cheap and can also be built very quickly.

"The academia and industry linkage will play a big part in the country's housing sector," he said.

Zaigham Rizvi, the chairman of the PM Housing Task Force and adviser of the science and technology ministry, said that no country prospers without contributions from academia. "The private sector also needs to step forward in all this," he said.

**'Karachi has turned into a slum'**

Mohsin Sheikhan, former chairman of Builders and Developers of Pakistan, said that those responsible for planning cities have failed.

"The requirement of cities was not fulfilled and you have the example of Karachi which changed into a slum. Housing is everyone's right and if you don't give it to them, they build themselves and that is how a city develops unplanned."

Syed Zakiuddin and Alamdar Hussain also spoke.

In his concluding remarks, Vice Chancellor of NED University Dr Sarosh H. Lodi said that the house model on NED's campus would remain for 50 years and more.

"It is a symbol of academia and industry partnership. It shows the strength and capacity of our team, it shows the honesty, dedication and will to work of our students and professors," he said.

"My mother always praised the energy and will of the students of Aligarh Muslim University, and their contribution in making this country. Now, we have these students of our universities in Pakistan, who we can trust to make Naya Pakistan," he concluded.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 31/01/2021)

### Cost of living

THE prime minister on Sunday spoke about his government's focus on price inflation, saying both headline inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index and core inflation — the change in the costs of goods and services excluding those from the food and energy sectors — had slowed down in January to below the July 2018 level. "More good news on the economic front," read his Twitter account. "CPI and core inflation are both now lower than when our government was formed." This development was then attributed to the economic policies of the current administration as the prime minister stated he had instructed his economic team to remain vigilant and ensure that inflation was under control.

Indeed, the pace of increase in the prices of goods and services has been decelerating for the last four months with CPI and core inflation dropping to their lowest at 5.7pc and 5.4pc in January in more than two years. But it does not mean that the prices of goods and services Pakistanis consumed last month have gone down to below their two-year level. It just means that the prices now appear to be stabilising at a much higher point than the one when the PTI came to power. The overall CPI basket and food prices are estimated by analysts to already have spiked by an average 23pc and 31pc during the last two and a half years. That speaks volumes for the helplessness of the current dispensation in protecting consumers from the impact of rising prices, despite repeated claims to the contrary.

In spite of considerable deceleration in the January inflation rate, CPI has risen by a cumulative 8.3pc in the first seven months of the present fiscal. Many analysts agree that the present trend will be short-lived and headline inflation is likely to begin its upward journey in a month or two under the impact of the recent 17pc increase in the electricity tariffs and petrol prices. The weak response to the unchecked rise in food prices, especially of wheat flour, sugar and vegetables, has compounded the misery of the low-middle-income households that were already facing financial hardship and job losses owing to harsh economic policies and the Covid-19 impact. With food prices going through the roof, housing becoming unaffordable and indirect taxes and energy bills ballooning, a vast majority of households are left with little to pay for their education and healthcare bills. From the moment the government began implementing its economic stabilisation policies, the people knew that improvement would come at a substantial cost to them. But few had imagined they would also have to pay a steep price for poor governance and an ineffectual policy response to inflation. For now the rising prices are testing the economic pain threshold of ordinary people. Soon these might be testing the commitment of the rulers' vote bank. (By Editorial Dawn, 06, 02/02/2021)

### Karachi development

AGGRAVATING the turf war between the centre and Sindh over Karachi, Planning Minister Asad Umar recently complained that the provincial government was creating hurdles in the implementation of development projects in the city. Mr Umar went on to criticise the dysfunctional local bodies for violating the spirit of the Constitution, indicating that this was the reason for Karachi's administrative failures. The minister's acerbic remarks are in stark contrast to the ones he uttered merely two weeks ago when, together with the province's top leadership, he stated that the centre and Sindh had decided to put aside their differences and work jointly towards the welfare of Karachi. But, given his markedly different tone now, it appears that the political consensus has proved to be short-lived. This was only reconfirmed when Mr Umar held another press conference on Monday in Shikarpur during which he blasted the PPP government yet again.

If the federal cabinet has reservations over how development projects introduced by the centre are being handled, these should be discussed with the coordination committee set up to oversee schemes under the Rs1.1tr Karachi Transformation Package that was introduced soon after the urban infrastructure was left in ruins after heavy monsoon rains lashed the city last year. There is no doubt that Mr Umar is correct about the political and administrative vacuum that has been created due to the absence of a working local government system. It is also true that the responsibility for the urban dereliction of many years now lies squarely with the Sindh government which has done little to promote the grassroots empowerment needed to solve civic problems. However, political wrangling between the federal and provincial governments over development in the country's economic hub will only worsen matters for Karachi that is already seen as an 'orphan city'. The time for blame games is long past. The authorities at all levels need to get their act together and focus on improving Karachi before the public's patience runs out. (By Editorial Dawn, 06, 02/02/2021)

### CM to review resettlement plan

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah urged a delegation of the Thar Coal Block-I Power Generation Company on Tuesday to provide employment to local people in the area and resettle the displaced families and said he would soon visit Thar and review the settlement plan.

Meeting a delegation headed by Meng Donghai, the chief executing officer of the Thar Coal Block-I Power Generation Company, the CM said the Thar Coal Block-I project involved the development of a 7.8 million tonnes per annum open pit coal mine and the installation of a 1.3 gigawatt ultra-supercritical coal-fired power plant.

"For the project, more than 40 per cent of the coal mining work has been completed," he said, sharing his plans to visit the site of the project at the month's end.

Briefing the CM on the project's progress, Donghai said the installation of the power plant was under way and the coal mining work was expected to reach completion by the end of 2021. He added that the first unit of the power plant was expected to be made operational in 2022 and it was likely to complete by 2023.

When the delegation apprised the CM that assistance was needed for the disposal of mine water and supplying water to run power plants, the CM directed Sindh Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh to conduct a feasibility study to identify means and sites for the disposal of mine water.

As far as the provision of water for running power plants is concerned, the CM said, a project for the construction of a canal between Nabirsar to Vajihar is launched, which will supply water to Thar-Coal Block-I. He, however, added that the energy department was to finalise the project.

The CM further said the Thar Coal Block-I Power Generation Company would have to sign a water user agreement with the energy department to be able to get water from the canal for Thar Coal Block-I.

As the meeting neared its end, the CM urged the delegation to resettle persons displaced following the development of the project and provide them employment opportunities, acknowledging that the residents of two villages had been displaced following the execution of the project.

At this, Donghai replied, "We are committed to settling them and have already started the resettlement process."

The CM then also urged the delegation to provide local residents of the area employment opportunities.

"I want that the fruits [of the project] be shared with the local people of Thar and they have the foremost right on them," he said, adding that he would soon visit Thar Coal Block-I and review the settlement plan.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 03/02/2021)

### **EPA announces public hearing schedule for Ravi, LDA projects**

Keeping in view the environmental impact assessment reports submitted by the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) and Lahore Development Authority (LDA), the Punjab's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has decided to hold public hearings on the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project and LDA City Naya Pakistan Apartment project to receive objections, suggestions etc from the public at large in this regard.

The public hearings on the EIAs of RUDA and LDA would be held on Feb 21 and 22, respectively.

"Participation of a huge number of people, especially those whose land is being acquired for the Ravi project, is expected in the hearing scheduled for Feb 21 at Bangla Babakwal, Rest House, Irrigation Department, Near Kala Khatai Road, Tehsil Ferozewala (Sheikhupura)," an official source told *Dawn*.

"Let's see what happens on Feb 21 as the affectees, especially the farmers, are staging rallies these days against the acquisition of their land.

"RUDA has already provided copies of the project EIA for the study of public at large at it's the EPA library, National Hockey Stadium, Office of Deputy Director (Environment) and the project head office (51 Gurumangat Road, N-Block, Gulberg II," the official said.

On the other hand, the LDA has also provided copies of the project's EIA for the citizens and stakeholders at three different locations. The report has been made available at the office of the EPA (Hockey Stadium), office of the Deputy Director (EPA) and the office of the Chief Engineer, LDA (Johar Town).

"Public hearing about the EIA report will be held at LDA Sports Complex, Johar Town on Monday, February 22, 2021 at 11 am. All the citizens and stakeholders have been invited for the public hearing," said a spokesman for the LDA.

**CONFERENCE:** A pre-bid conference of the contractors, interested in construction of 4,000 units under the LDA City Naya Pakistan Apartments scheme, will be held on Monday (tomorrow) at the committee room of Engineering Wing, LDA Office Johar Town.

Tenders for this project will be opened on Feb 10, 13, 17 and 20, according to a spokesman.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 02, 07/02/2021)

### **Buildings sans public safety**

Government officials have made astonishing disclosures before the Sindh High Court with regard to public safety in residential and commercial buildings. The director general of the Sindh Building Control Authority informed the court during a recent hearing that rules making the construction of emergency exit ways mandatory in buildings exist in the statute books, but they are not being implemented. An emergency phone helpline had been set up at the Karachi Commissioner Office to address fire incidents and other such happenings, but now it has been deactivated. On a query from the court, the officer's representative said the IT service too was dysfunctional in the commissioner's office and this had rendered the helpline non-functional; now all work in this office was being done manually.

The judges felt displeased over the delay in repair of KMC fire tenders. They expressed annoyance over the prevailing state of affairs at government offices, and instructed officials to do the needful. The court was hearing a petition relating to fire incidents and legislation for emergency exits in buildings, in view of the increasing fire incidents in Karachi and deaths occurring because people cannot come out of buildings on fire due the absence of emergency exits. The lack of proper facilities also hinders fire-fighting operations and makes

it difficult to rescue those trapped in the fire. The court instructed relevant officials to prepare SOPs in consultation with the fire department.

A few days ago, a fire in a factory killed three workers and injured several others mainly due to the absence of emergency exits and other facilities in the factory building. The large number of deaths and injuries in the 2012 Baldia factory fire were also caused due to the lack of proper exit facilities. Such shortcomings come to light after most incidents of blaze. But the grave issue remains unaddressed due to official complacency. Officials admit that laws exist but the issue is their implementation. What is the use of laws when they are not implemented?

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 14/02/2021)

### Community mapping

WHENEVER Karachi floods, the government announces the widening of its nullahs that carry the floodwater to the sea. The decision of the extent of widening is taken in an ad hoc manner. As a result of recent decisions, 5,916 houses along Gujjar nullah, 1,049 along Mehmoodabad nullah, and 992 along Manzoor Colony nullah are to be demolished apart from commercial units. The affectees are not being allocated land or funds for rehabilitating themselves and are becoming homeless, having been declared encroachers by the judiciary in Pakistan.



Affected communities argue that their encroachments are just one of the reasons why Karachi floods. Other reasons are that the nullahs are choked and as such cannot function to capacity, inevitably flooding the areas through which they pass. Communities also claim they have paid corrupt government officials for the land they sit on and in addition paid billions of rupees for legal electricity, gas and municipal

connections and taxes over the last 50 years. Non-government planners are also of the view that another reason for flooding is that three of the major outfalls to the sea at Gizri Creek in Defence Society, Chinna Creek backwaters around Mai Kolachi, and the Kalri nullah at Machhar Colony are blocked and even if the nullahs are widened flooding will still take place.

*Encroachments are only one reason why Karachi floods.*

At a meeting of civil society organisations in September 2020, when demolitions were supposed to begin along the Manzoor Colony nullah, it was decided that the community should undertake its own mapping. Architect Fazal Noor was given the responsibility of arranging this process. Sirajuddin, head of technical training, Resource Centre, an NGO trained in community mapping by the OPP, was given the responsibility of surveying and mapping the Manzoor Colony natural drainage system with community involvement. The Urban Resource Centre was appointed as adviser.

The findings of the community mapping show that the Mehmoodabad nullah drains into the Manzoor Colony nullah and that a network of nullahs passing through 34 settlements (which include Mohammad Ali Society and PECHS Blocks 2 and 6) drains into the Mehmoodabad nullah. The depth of the Manzoor Colony nullah is about seven feet (approximately two metres) of which three to four feet are filled with sewage sludge and silt reducing its effective depth. At 21 points in this drainage network the nullahs are blocked with garbage, debris, and parts of collapsed infrastructure. All this has been mapped with photographs.

The communities are of the opinion that if these obstructions are removed and the nullahs are cleaned and subsequently maintained, flooding will not take place as the capacity of the nullah will be increased by well over 100 per cent. However, government planners point out that for cleaning the nullahs heavy machinery will be required and for that a minimum clear space of 20 feet is required on either side of the nullah. This can be provided in the case of the Manzoor Colony nullah by the removal of 39 houses which can be accommodated within the existing settlement.

But there is another problem. The Manzoor Colony nullah drains into the Defence Society drain in Phase 7 to which the sewage and floodwaters of Phase 2 and 7 of DHA are added. During heavy rains this drain floods Defence Society and at high tide there is a backwash which makes it difficult for the Manzoor Colony network to drain into the sea. The reason for this flooding is that the Defence Society has encroached upon the one kilometre-wide estuary of the Gizri Creek and reduced its width to a 60-foot nullah. Heavy pumping will be required to deal with this situation or alternatively restoring the estuary which would mean the demolition of a large number of posh houses that have been built on it. This is seldom pointed out.

The building of a 20-foot road will keep the settlement as it is. However, a 60-foot road, which has been planned, will invite developers and slowly coerce the inhabitants out of the settlement. Thus a low-income settlement will be lost to the city centre leading to a densification of other katchi abadis or the creation of new ones. It is claimed that such a road will help in the circulation of traffic. However, without a city-level traffic management plan this will be a disaster as we will be creating new congestion nodes just as the construction of signal-free roads have done.

It is suggested that mapping, decision-making, and future management should be done with the involvement of communities and local expertise and on the basis of a vision to promote equity and justice and not on an ad hoc, anti-poor basis. If this is not done it is feared that apart from adding to the ranks of the homeless, the planned upgrading process will result in failure, as it has done so many times in the past.

(By Arif Hasan Dawn, 07, 14/02/2021)

### **KMC restrained from razing leased houses along Gujjar Nullah**

An anti-encroachment tribunal restrained on Monday the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) from demolishing the houses built over duly leased land during an ongoing operation along Gujjar Nullah.



The tribunal, headed by its presiding officer Shakil Ahmed Abbasi, stayed the demolition activity for 15 days on two separate suits filed by residents of Federal B Area and New Karachi against possible demolition of their houses on the leased land along the nullah.

The plaintiffs had cited the local government secretary, Karachi administrator and commissioner, the chairman of District Municipal Corporation East, the director general/chairman of the Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority and the chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as defendants.

During Monday's proceedings, Assistant Commissioner (Central) Dr Muhammad Hasan Tariq appeared before the tribunal and submitted that marking of the unauthorized and illegally raised constructions was within the domain of the KMC in the areas falling within its jurisdiction.

*A tribunal is told rehabilitation of people displaced in an anti-encroachment operation is Sindh govt's responsibility*

An NDMA representative submitted that the Supreme Court had given mandate to the authority to clear the nullahs in the metropolis while identifying illegal constructions and demolishing them.

He said rehabilitation of the people displaced during such an operation was the duty assigned to the Sindh government by the apex court.

A legal adviser for the KMC gave an undertaking that no construction over duly leased lands would be demolished during the operation along Gujjar Nullah.

Following the undertaking and a request made by the plaintiffs' counsel, the tribunal granted an interim stay order, restraining the KMC from demolishing the plaintiffs' houses that had purportedly been built over the land said to have been duly leased by the Katchi Abadi department and the Karachi Development Authority.

The tribunal called reports from the officials of the respective departments till the next date.

In the suit, plaintiff Advocate Khawaja Altaf had submitted that he had built a house in F B. Area's Block 5 after obtaining lease from the provincial Katchi Abadi department upon fulfilling all the requisite legal formalities in 2002.

He said that the department had granted 99-year lease to him in respect of the subject plot. However, the officials of the KMC's anti-encroachment department had marked his house as illegal and he came to know that the same construction would be demolished on Feb 18 or so.

In the second suit, the plaintiffs had submitted that they had built houses in New Karachi after obtaining 99-year lease from the KDA, but KMC officials had marked their houses as illegal and it was feared that the same would be demolished on Feb 18 or so.

They contended that the action by the provincial and KMC authorities was illegal and unwarranted since they possessed proper lease documents in respect of the subject plots, where they had built their houses.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 16/02/2021)

### **Govt asked to declare Bundal Island marine protected area**

Sharing his observations and documentary evidence and highlighting threats to mangroves lying off the city's coast, particularly those existing in and around Bundal Island and Khiprianwala Island, noted architect Tariq Alexander Qaiser on Tuesday made a passionate call for their protection, urging the government to declare Bundal as a marine protected area.

Illegal cutting of forests on Bundal Island, he pointed out, had increased dramatically over the past few months to an extent that it had disturbed the island's ecology.

This emerged during a webinar titled 'Karachi's Hidden Forest on the Edge of Delta', organised by Aga Khan University's Sixth Sense Forum.

"The island of Bundal is extremely important as it has dense forests. In recent winter, we found the whole island resounding with the noise of chainsaws, scaring migratory birds away. It needs to stop," said Mr Qaiser, also an avid photographer, writer and nature conservationist.

He acknowledged, though, locals had been using mangrove wood for a long time in a sustainable manner and there had been times when tree cutting either increased or slowed down. But, now there was too much pressure on the forests as the wood was apparently being used for industrial purposes.

*The ecology of the island is being disturbed because of alarming increase in forest cutting*

He emphasised that the city of Karachi needed green spaces like these islands located off the city's coast that should be preserved to act as carbon sinks.

"If we are to live in this city with a certain quality of life and breathability of life then these are the very places [we should invest in for ourselves and future generations]," he noted.

The topography of Bundal Island, he observed, was such that it could be used to create a very vibrant and large mangrove forest. "I feel so strongly that we have an opportunity to make a difference. If there is a will within the establishment and government, we can create a green, ecologically friendly place. It's an opportunity that needs to be grabbed," he said.

#### **Tale of abuse**

Earlier, the programme started off with the introduction of the guest by Kulsoom Ghais and Sami Sadrudin, representing the AKU's organising committee.

Mr Qaiser has authored two books, *Baltistan — Apricot Bloom* and *Sumandar Par*, both a beautiful compilation of poetry, photographs and essays.

He, the audience was told, is currently working on a four-volume book and documentary on the ecology of Karachi's forests titled *Karachi-Korangi Creeks — Edge of Delta*.

It's about the beauty, quantum and density of Karachi's mangrove forests, their amazing ecosystems and the author's experiences and interactions with the locals who come to work on these uninhabited islands.

Sharing how he developed an interest in exploring mangroves, Mr Qaiser said his focus turned to the forests when his 'fishing career' sort of ended due to a steep decline in the fish stocks in early 2000. This was the time when the government allowed foreign trawlers to sail in its waters that caused enormous loss to marine ecology.

Over the years, Mr Qaiser documented how mangroves and their associated biodiversity was being lost and felt that this issue must be raised and discussed at all forums.

"These ecosystems are incredibly vibrant and have adapted to live with the abuse that we give. The stories of their decay need to be told and discussed," he said, calling for stronger advocacy for their protection.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 17/02/2021)

### **EPA restrained from finalising riverfront report**

The Lahore High Court on Thursday restrained the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) from taking a final decision on the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project.

Justice Shams Mahmood Mirza passed this order on a petition filed by Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan (PILAP) challenging the EIA prepared on behalf of the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) by the Engineering Consultancy Services Punjab (Private) Limited (ECSP), the consultant.

"Learned counsels appearing on behalf of respondents seek a short adjournment to file parawise comments. Allowed. In the meantime, the Environment Protection Agency is restrained from passing any final order on environmental impact assessment in its hearing," reads the order.

On behalf of the petitioner/organisation, Advocate Ahmad Rafay Alam argued that the grounds that ECSP was a subsidiary of the government and not a registered environmental consultant, therefore, the EPA should be restrained from reviewing the EIA. He said it was a matter of concern because the EIA prepared by a non-registered consultant compromises the fundamental rights of the citizens.

Justice Mirza would resume hearing on March 2.

Earlier on Jan 2, Justice Shahid Karim hearing multiple petitions had stayed the riverfront project till approval of the EIA report. In a statement, civil society members expressed deep concern on the process of public hearings of the EIA. They said the whole concept of public hearings appeared to be a sham.

Although as per the regulations all decision making would take into account comments received by the public, the comments were not taken into consideration making public hearing useless. They said it had been seen in the past that EIAs had been approved by regulators and the courts had given verdicts precisely on the basis that the regulatory authority had given its approval.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 02, 19/02/2021)

### **Clifton's iconic Agha's Supermarket shuts doors permanently**

Even after Agha's Supermarket in Clifton was gutted by a fire last year, regular customers kept the faith that it would bounce back and would often go there to see how things were coming along.

It was being said that Agha's was expected to reopen in about two months. Meanwhile, they started home delivery for their customers, which was also much needed and appreciated in pandemic times. Later, as repair work was under way, they also brought out some shelves for people to be able to shop for groceries outside from the service road itself.

People could also take a seat in the sitting area arranged for them there while a representative of Agha's approached them for their order that he carefully noted down before bringing to them whatever they wanted to buy from inside as still not ready Agha's was using its shop space as a warehouse at the time.

Now, the latest about Agha's Supermarket is breaking hearts. The front shutters remain closed at all times. There is a fruit vendor and people constantly approach him to ask about when the supermarket is going to reopen. He informs them that it has been closed down permanently, something that they are not readily willing to digest, especially the residents of Clifton and Defence Housing Authority (DHA). They have been shopping at Agha's since 1978, when the place first opened.

#### **Customers share nostalgic memories**

"At the time, there was another popular supermarket in Clifton called 'Cash n' Carry' that was right across Agha's Supermarket, where you have the Delawalla Centre and toy shops now. But slowly their regular customers, too, started getting drawn to Agha's. And then one day, they went out of business and Agha's was all that there was here," said an old customer of Agha's, who was finding it hard to swallow the fact that now Agha's, too, had decided to close.

#### *The owner rejects rumours about Agha's relocation*

"I was a little girl when we used to live in Clifton Estates, the apartment building near Agha's. From our balcony, we could see the supermarket's entrance. My mother would send me there with money to buy this or that, which she needed in her kitchen. And she would keep an eye on me from our balcony. Often I would get whatever she wanted while also buying some little treat for myself such as candy or chocolate from there," says another regular customer.

"I was only nine or 10 at the time and my mother didn't want me to cross the main road to get to Cash n' Carry. Then we shifted to DHA. The vacant plot in front of our apartment balcony that allowed us a view of Agha's had a building come up there. But we still came to Agha's for all our shopping needs," she remembers nostalgically.

"We used to get great service here. I particularly remember the two brothers at the counters. They were always so pleasant. Then one day my mother showed me a popular English weekly magazine in which the brothers had modelled for a popular clothing brand. We were so excited to spot them there," the customer remembers.

"We learned that the brothers were Feroz and Farid Virani, the owner Noor Ali's sons. The father and their uncle Anwar would also be there supervising in the background. Years went by. We grew up but still went to Agha's for groceries, medicine, etc. Then Feroz and Farid took over the running of Agha's. The supermarket was growing. They also started a meat shop, a chilled fruit and vegetable department, a cosmetics department," she added.

#### **The owner speaks**

Farid Virani had a sad smile on his face when told about the memories shared by their loyal customers. He nodded slowly.

"My older brother Feroz was one-and-a-half-year older than me. Both of us had just returned from the US after completing our studies when our father and uncle made us sit at the counters here to learn the ropes of running the business from the ground up.

We have seen some four generations of customers coming here in the last 43 years," he said.

"Now my uncle and brother are no more and between the fire and Covid-19, along with a family dispute, we have been unable to reopen. I tried repairing the shop after the fire but quite frankly I have run out of money now. Even the insurance amount that we got was not enough as there was also the stock that got burnt along with the shop, which is over three times the insurance money," he explained.

Since the family dispute is a sub-judice matter, he refrained from shedding light on it.

There are rumours on social media that Agha's has moved to another area but Virani said that it is not the case.

"Our old employees were the people I was worried about the most at first when I decided to close business here. I paid them all their dues and was also pleasantly surprised to find that they were able to easily relocate as being Agha's former employees they were snapped up fast by the market," he said.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 15, 21/02/2021)

### **Denso Hall lane being transformed into landscaped walking street**

Even a particularly warm and sunny Sunday afternoon could not stop people from all walks of life to gather on Marriott Road to plant trees and shrubs there. The red clay pavement tiles led the way to the soon-to-be dense Miyawaki forest.

The lane, known as the 'Denso Hall Rahguzar Landscaped Walking Street', an initiative of the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, is no longer open for traffic. There are Makli tiles on either side of the lane with clay disks here and there that carry superimposed sketches of the 12 historic buildings, reminiscent of the Victorian era, that happen to be famous landmarks of this area. And there are trees growing in the middle.

The event on Sunday, organised by the Heritage Foundation in collaboration with Rotary Club Karachi (New Central) and StarLinks, was the third of its kind here. They have already planted two more stretches of trees before this, first by the Heritage Foundation last year and then by shopkeepers of the area in February this year. The shopkeepers are quite excited about it all despite earlier resistance. "They have taken complete ownership of their surroundings and have taken it on themselves to water and care for the plants and trees here," said Shanaz Ramzi of StarLinks, the host for the event.

There will be a total of four urban forest stretches along the street. The project was initiated last year when in order to spread awareness about it the Heritage Foundation would hold street festivals.

Ramzi said that earlier, the buildings in the area were cleaned by the Heritage Foundation. "That was also when the people of this area were made aware of the buildings of historic and cultural importance. The Heritage Foundation also made sure that the wires and cables hanging overhead were removed so that the trees are not hindered by them. The wiring and connections will all be laid underground here," she said, adding that the city government, especially the Karachi commissioner's office, has really cooperated and supported their initiative.

About the clay tile pavements, she said that they have all been made by women, who used to be beggars in Makli. "They were trained by the Heritage Foundation, led by its founder Yasmeen Lari. The tiles have also been tested by laboratories in Switzerland and Italy and are at a par with such tiles abroad, if not better. They are both beautiful as well as durable. There has been no use of cement in joining them to create the pavements as well. It's just clay, mud, limestone and sandstone," she said, adding that about Rs10 million has gone into creating the pavements alone.

There were some 150 trees being planted in the third phase on Sunday. Even the compost being used for them was all organic. One could spot bamboo being used for the purpose.

About the trees being planted in the area, Shahzad Qureshi, of the well-known Urban Forest in Clifton, who was also present there, said that they were following the Miyawaki-style tree plantation in the street. "The style uses indigenous trees and shrubs that are planted in a particular way. "We are planting wild almond, desi mango, jamun, neem, Amaltas, Sukhchain, karhi pata and guava among others here," he said.

The funding for the trees came from Zeeshan Habib, founder member of the Saturday Welfare Group, who offers his services wherever there are such initiatives happening in the city.

District Governor of Rotary Club (New Central) Dr Farhan Essa, the chief guest at the event, said that "Karachi is the business hub of Pakistan and it's the duty its people to take care of the city and contribute to its beauty".

The Heritage Foundation is looking to completely pedestrianise the street by Ramazan. It is expected that once this is done, this place will be just like the popular Covent Garden of London where people would set up stalls and roadside restaurants for others to enjoy the cool environment.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 01/03/2021)

### **Informal sector**

THE size of Pakistan's informal economy is estimated to be as much as 56 per cent of the country's GDP (as of 2019). This means that it's worth around \$180 billion a year, and that is a massive amount by any yardstick.



The country's large black economy is inextricably linked to the levels and quality of governance exercised by the state. In the course of fieldwork for my doctoral research for the University of Southampton, I found that many Pakistani women who were setting out starting their own businesses did so in the informal sector. The reasons they gave usually related to their experience of dealing with the bureaucracy and government machinery in Pakistan which they found to be dominated by red tape and tedious and complicated procedures.

This is precisely what drives many people who want to engage in economic activity towards the undocumented economy. The headache of having to deal with a large bureaucracy, of complying with complicated and long registration procedures, of getting approvals and licences from various government agencies and departments make it difficult for most people to operate within a documented framework.



A large black economy is an indication of misgovernance and indicates a failure of the government to ensure that all businesses and entrepreneurial ventures are included in the formal sector. This failure in turn leads to reduced tax revenue collection since all entities outside of the formal economy do not pay any tax to the government.

*Pakistan's black economy is linked to governance.*

Given that the size of the black and informal economy is estimated at over half of the country's GDP, bringing it under the documented net would bring hundreds of billions in tax revenue. Those funds would then be spent on social sector development projects and help the FBR meet its annual revenue collection targets.

The solution is to increase the size of the formal economy and this can be done by making transparent and efficient those institutions tasked with registering and regulating businesses. Instead of harassing businesses and entrepreneurs, agencies like the FBR should act as facilitators and make it easier for new ventures to be registered and come under the documentation net. This would in turn be good for the FBR because achieving the tax collection target would be easier than if they were in the black economy.

Government requirements for new businesses are linked to the general level of governance. A state whose primary aim is to improve the lives of its citizens will prioritise good governance over all other things and will formulate and implement policies that enable this. In fact, such a state will also be able to realise that having such priorities ends up helping it as well, not least because a happy populace is a more economically productive populace.

Unfortunately, in a country like Pakistan, so far, this has not been the case. A multitude of licences and permissions are required from a wide variety of federal, provincial and local government departments to operate a business or a store. Having to comply with all of these requires not only a lot of time on the part of the entrepreneur but also funds for greasing the cogs of the bureaucratic machinery that regulates businesses and commercial enterprises in Pakistan.

The result of this is that a significantly growing number of entrepreneurs, and especially those that happen to be female, are increasingly veering towards the informal sector. This is both good and bad — good because it enables economic activity to take place, and jobs to be created, away from the unwanted glare of government inspectors and officialdom, and bad because the incomes generated from such activity don't end up getting counted in the national GDP and nor are taxes paid on it.

The size of Pakistan's informal sector is inversely linked to the quality of governance in the country. The higher the quality the smaller is likely to be the size of the informal sector because better governance means more citizen- and business-friendly measures and policies, ones that encourage entrepreneurs to register their businesses with the government and hence become part of the documented economy. That is welcome because having an accurate size of the documented and legal economy allows for more effective policy and decision-making with regard to the macroeconomy as a whole.

Resistance is likely to come from the entrenched bureaucracy because it stands to lose the most when this kind of change happens. It is very much in the interest of the state to institute policies that make it easier for businesses and entrepreneurs to become part of the documented economy and which facilitate their operation and growth because that fosters GDP growth.

It is time that the political parties in charge of running the centre and the provinces understand the benefits of this and help realise this much-needed change.

(By Lalarukh Ejaz Dawn, 07, 04/03/2021)

### **Ravi project**

THE assault by an enraged group of farmers on a provincial revenue team assigned to acquire land for the multibillion-dollar Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project on Tuesday was unfortunate. But it was expected, and may also prove to be a harbinger of worse things unless the government agrees to give the market price of land to the thousands of landowners who would have to relocate because of the rulers' insistence on building a new city on the outskirts of Lahore.

The poor farmers are apparently not against the project, but they rightfully want a fair market price to help them start over since the private developers for whom their land is being acquired will be raking in billions of dollars in profit. Currently, they are being offered only a fraction of the market value of their land. The Punjab government does not appear to be in any mood to listen to the grievances of the affected population, let alone agree to their demand for higher prices.

It is sad that Prime Minister Imran Khan has decided to go ahead with the project although the PTI — when in opposition — had criticised such large brick-and-mortar, high-visibility schemes pursued by its predecessors. Apparently, the painful economic slowdown during the first half of Mr Khan's tenure and the debilitating impact of Covid-19 on growth may have convinced him otherwise.

For the last one year or so, the leadership seems to have pinned its hopes on real-estate development projects for faster recovery before the next general election in 2023. The government may achieve some of its targets but in the process would lose the support of the poor who would be left out.

It is unfortunate that Pakistan's ruling elite has developed a sort of consensus — as well as a deep economic interest — in high-visibility projects as the panacea for the nation's financial woes. Therefore, we see most state resources flowing into expensive schemes offering limited economic dividends and that too mostly to benefit the wealthy. Look at the generous tax and other incentives announced for the construction sector in the name of encouraging low-cost, affordable housing for the poor.

The biggest beneficiaries of these concessions are moneyed people with questionable sources of income who have been given general amnesty and access to more banking credit. The obsession of the elite with real estate has in the last few decades also resulted in shrinking space for the poor and middle-income groups in our sprawling cities. This is not a recipe for progress.

If we are to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth, the government will have to change its priorities and start investing in social infrastructure — schools, hospitals, sanitation, water supply etc. It is time for the government to stop acting as an agent of powerful lobbies and start serving the public at large.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 05/03/2021)

### **Created homelessness**

IN the last 40 years no social housing has been developed in Pakistan except for small schemes by community organisations and NGOs, which is not even a drop in the ocean. Grand plans made by the PPP and PML-N governments during their tenures did not materialise.



So one is forced to ask as to how the poor manage to house themselves?

This process in Karachi has been well-documented. Comparatively cheap land is available on the city's fringe. Living there is unaffordable because of costs involved in travelling to work, absence of education and health facilities, and work for women.

As a result, the old katchi abadis, which are within or nearer to places of work have densified and so have houses along the nullahs. Densification is achieved by building upwards, increasing the number of families in one house, or simply moving part of the family to the street. The more ecologically dangerous places have the cheapest land and so most of the poorest families live in areas subject to flooding or landslides.

*Must development projects leave people without homes?*

There was a time when katchi abadi residents were confident that their settlements would be regularised. However, for the past 15 to 20 years the regularisation process has been abandoned and under the 2014 Sindh Special Development Board Act, katchi abadis can be handed over to developers for demolition and multistorey reconstruction on 'modern' lines. Infrastructure projects have also displaced over 200,000 people in the last decade; as a result, most displaced families are heavily in debt and their children out of school. This has led to extreme insecurity in all low-income settlements in Karachi, which is a major impediment to upward mobility.

As a result of the 2020 floods, the government has decided to bulldoze about 12,000 homes along three nullahs (demolition along other nullahs will follow) that they claim are disrupting the flow of water. In addition, 2,948 commercial units are also to be removed.

There are a number of issues that arise out of this situation. The houses being demolished almost always contain more than one family but compensation is being paid per house. Then the notice given for demolition is too short. These houses have been built over time and have been financed primarily by women through BC committees, savings from household expenses, and sale of dowry items such as jewellery. Once demolished, the owners have no place to store usable items from the rubble or have no space to cook, so many families stay hungry. Given Covid and inflation, and a change of culture, moving in with friends and relatives is no longer an option. Meanwhile, rents have increased due to inflation and a six-month advance is demanded by landlords. The money offered by the government is not even a small fraction of what is required even for renting purposes.

These low-income settlements have an economy that serves the local population and generates jobs. By the removal of commercial activity, this economy and the population it serves are adversely affected.

Surveys of the affected population show that most of them have either lost their jobs or that their businesses have suffered due to Covid. In most cases, one finds one family of six to eight persons living in one room with often one toilet seat for 20 persons. These conditions are enough to shame any Pakistani with a minimum of conscience. With the construction of ML1 (the rail link between Karachi and Peshawar), evictions will increase manifold and will take place all over Pakistan.

One is forced to ask if infrastructure projects have to create homelessness, loss of jobs, debt, and out-of-school children. The construction of Karachi's Malir Expressway is demolishing a large number of old goths including archaeological sites, water reservoirs, and green cover. In the opinion of some experts, there could have been an alignment whereby these goths remained unaffected.

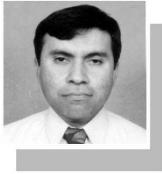
It is imperative that in the future, infrastructure projects should aim at minimising evictions, and either a lump-sum compensation or a housing alternative should be offered to the affected population. This should be a part of the government's current housing programme. At a modest estimate over one million population will have their homes demolished in Pakistan as a result of the ML1 and related infrastructure projects. This population is both poor and homeless. Imran Khan does not have to look for the poor. They are staring him in the face. Also you cannot keep punishing people for the failure of previous governments.

The present demolitions are a watershed in Pakistan's history. They have been supported by Supreme Court judgements. There has been no effective civil society movement opposing them. They are not a hot subject for the media, human rights organisations or political parties. Meanwhile illegal construction by the elites of this country is routinely regularised. It seems that we are happy being an apartheid state.

(By Arif Hasan Dawn, 07, 16/03/2021)

### Disappearing homes

FOR more than three years now, evictions have been underway in different Karachi locations. Dwellings along river banks, nullahs and expanded corridors have been demolished. Hundreds of households along the Karachi Circular Railway corridor and the Gujjar nullah have been evicted and declared 'illegal'. No official quarter responds to the legitimate issue of decent shelter for the affected.



Conversely, official quarters provide a way out when land is occupied by the affluent in illegally developed housing schemes. Going by TV and other media commercials, a new city is emerging along the M-9 motorway, embracing Hyderabad. If one is an overseas or local investor, then the sky is the limit where such bountiful tracts are concerned.

Political interests have been a primary factor in determining the procedure of land supply. This interest superseded urban and regional planning considerations, the objectives and policies of the administration, fiscal liabilities and even legal limitations. Under clandestine pressure from establishment elements, developers and investors, provincial governments continue to allot land at nominal prices to their favourites.

There is no transparency, and bypassing laws, regulations and norms is a routine exercise that obstructs land supply processes. Briefly, land parcels are allotted due to political pressure. Political bribes are also given in the form of land. Government departments, law enforcement, financial institutions and urban development authorities carry out orders from above.

*Political interests have determined land supply.*

Recently, a real estate enterprise of the establishment acquired thousands of acres along the M-9 Motorway. Land sales are being fuelled by profit-making — very low prices are paid to the provincial government. Clan influences, appropriation and possession of land have always had an impact on the direction of development. Landlords have lobbied with public-sector officials to devise development policies/ priorities to maximise their own benefit.

Planning and development of communication schemes, transportation projects and investment in infrastructure plans have been largely manipulated. The fringes of the large cities are the most important choices in this regard. The north-western outskirts of Karachi have been a major location for local landlords to benefit from.

Existing land supply patterns show the disparity between the privileged and disadvantaged classes. Land was procured, developed and sold on the basis of conditions set by public-sector agencies in liaison with powerful interest groups. These groups attempted to maximise their profits by moulding decision-making in their own favour. Thus the unprivileged had to fend for themselves in informal locations as per the availability of land.

There have been many negative repercussions. The inner ring of Karachi within a 10-kilometre radius contains most of the upper-income groups. Larger squatters and low-income localities are far away; the poor have to commute long distances to their place of work via dilapidated transport systems. The provincial government can always direct the Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority to comprehensively survey the squatter settlements within its jurisdiction, and regularise and notify those that fulfil prescribed conditions, thus ensuring security of tenure to the hapless residents.

All these steps are legally permissible but require policy support from those at the top. At the same time, the technical assessment of informally developed high-rise structures can be done across all katchi abadis. These structures can be categorised for possibilities of retrofitting, rehabilitation, demolitions and re-development. If comprehensive katchi abadi regularisation and rehabilitation are done in a poor-friendly manner, millions will benefit. More than half of Karachi's population resides in such settlements.

A 2018 court judgement appears to endorse the view that real estate development can be legalised even if illegally begun. No wonder that procedures of land development and supply and the distinction between the formal and informal sectors are diminishing due to the administration's failure to control the factors governing the land market. De facto ownership of land is now given due regard in development operations and is often temporarily recognised.

Incremental housing development for the poor has been found as the most effective mode of benefiting the poor. For instance, there can be successful replications of the Khuda Ki Basti model in Karachi and other cities. Lessons learnt can be applied to making housing accessible to our teeming millions. The reception area concept to filter and target the real poor for extending shelter benefit is tried and tested and can be used in new land supply schemes with a focus on the urban poor.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 18/03/2021)

### Housing difficulties

PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan's directions to the State Bank and the state-owned National Bank to 'facilitate' people seeking low-cost, subsidised home loans under his Naya Pakistan Housing Programme reflect the slower-than-expected pickup of mortgage financing in the country. Addressing a telethon on Sunday, the premier also instructed the central bank to push commercial banks to ease housing loan processes. What does all this signify?

For starters, it underlines the government's concern about the slow uptake in housing loans, and the fact that aspiring homeowners are facing difficulties in securing bank financing. Second, it shows that the central bank could now put more pressure on unwilling

commercial banks to speed up the processing of loan applications. By doing so, banks would be forced to go for riskier lending in spite of repeated assertions by the central bankers that the State Bank would merely be refinancing loans to expand the mortgage industry and that credit-risk decisions would be taken by the lenders. Still, commercial banks are reluctant to give housing loans as they believe that expanding the mortgage industry is not possible without a strong foreclosure law that lets them repossess the property in case of default on repayment.

The government has time and again promised to improve the foreclosure laws but hasn't done anything about it. Third, it implies that the government may ask NBP to pursue a more liberal mortgage policy to make up for the reluctance of private banks. That will be disastrous for the bank's balance sheet. We still remember the yellow cab scheme launched by the PML-N government in the 1990s. A World Bank estimate says the total national housing deficit is over 10m units, with the gap increasing by 350,000 units annually. The incremental deficit is estimated to rise to 400,000 units. Some believe that an increase in housing and construction pushes growth in 30 to 40 related industries in the economy. One estimate indicates that an increase of 100,000 in housing units in one year contributes to up to 2pc of GDP. Besides, the provision of housing to people significantly cuts health and other economic and social costs imposed by informal urban settlements.

But the development of housing depends largely on a vibrant mortgage market, which is virtually nonexistent here. Most countries that have overcome their housing deficit have done so by creating a functioning mortgage industry and offering ordinary people a range of borrowing options to purchase or build a house. Although the State Bank has taken some important initiatives to encourage banks to extend home loans to support the government's housing and construction industry, the banks remain reluctant. The housing initiative will not take off in a big way until we have a viable mortgage industry. That, in turn, will remain a pipe dream as long as the government does not strengthen recovery laws to protect the banks from potential losses.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 30/03/2021)

### **Tribunal restrains KMC from razing houses built on leased land**

An anti-encroachment tribunal on Wednesday directed the provincial and local authorities to maintain status quo in respect of residential constructions built over leased land likely to be demolished during the ongoing operation to clear encroachments along Gujjar Nullah.

The presiding officer of the tribunal, Shakil Ahmed Abbasi, also directed the local government secretary, Karachi administrator and commissioner, heads of the katchi abadis and anti-encroachment departments of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation to file their respective reports in respect of the subject properties till April 15.

The tribunal was hearing two separate suits filed by some residents of Federal B. Area, Tayyababad, Rehmanabad, Wahid Colony, Kausar Niazi Colony, Peoples Colony, Arafat Town, Qabail Colony, Choona Depot and Liaquatabad.

*Plaintiffs file a suit against city authorities against possible demolition of their houses along Gujjar Nullah*

The plaintiffs submitted through their counsel Khawaja Altaf that they were granted 99-year lease in respect of their plots by relevant departments of the KMC and the Sindh katchi abadis department between 1994 and 2004 upon fulfilment of all legal formalities and payment of dues.

The counsel submitted that subsequently the plaintiffs constructed their houses in a legal manner, but recently KMC officials had marked their houses without issuing any prior notices to them and it was likely that the same would be demolished during the ongoing operation against illegal encroachments along the Gujjar Nullah.

During Wednesday's hearing, the court's bailiff filed a report showing that notices issued on the last date had been duly served upon the defendants.

Advocate Rashid Khan appeared on behalf of the KMC administrator, director of KMC's katchi abadis and anti-encroachment departments. But, he did not file any counter-affidavit/objection to the application filed by the plaintiffs under Rules 39 and 2 of the Civil Procedure Code seeking an interim stay order against likely demolition of their houses built over leased properties.

Naseem Ahmed, the mukhtiarkar of the District Municipal Corporation Central, appeared on behalf of the deputy commissioner Central and requested for time to file a written statement and counter-affidavit.

The provincial LG secretary and Karachi commissioner were called absent.

The tribunal's head observed that in view of the apprehension of the demolition and anxiety of the plaintiffs that the defendants had marked their leased properties, which are allegedly not "encroachment" under the law, and that they filed a suit under Sections 13 and 14 of the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010 for determination whether the subject property is a "public property" or "encroached", an interim stay order is granted till the next date.

Accordingly, the tribunal directed the defendants to maintain status quo and not threaten and take any coercive action against the plaintiffs till the next date.

The presiding officer made it clear that the tribunal was fortified to give such a direction/grant interim stay as in similar matters and on similar facts the Sindh High Court had also granted interim stay orders vide Feb 11, Feb 26 and March 18 in the suit.

The cases were fixed on April 15 for filing of replies on behalf of the defendants.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 01/04/2021)

### **SC reserves verdict on demolition of marriage halls**

The Supreme Court reserved its verdict on Friday on a plea filed by the Korangi Marriage Halls Association against the demolition of marriage halls at Korangi Crossing.

A three-member bench, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Gulzar Ahmed and comprising Justice Ijazul Hassan and Justice Mazhar Alam, was hearing the plea at the SC Karachi registry.

Former attorney general of Pakistan Anwar Mansoor Khan, who was arguing the case on behalf of the association, contended that the Sindh Building Control Authority's (SBCA) rules allow the changing of status of residential plot into a commercial one. Therefore, he argued, the marriage halls at Korangi Crossing are legal.

At this, Justice Hassan remarked that everywhere in the world the master plan of a city is made only once and the city remains the same.

"Won't changing the status of residential plots create issues of water scarcity and faults in the sewerage system of residential areas," asked the court.

"All of Defence Housing Authority has been turned into a commercial area," remarked CJP Ahmed. The entire city will be transformed into a commercial area if this goes on, he added.

Justice Hassan remarked the city had been altered completely by changing the status of residential plots. The court directed the petitioner's counsel to submit his arguments in writing and reserved its verdict on the plea.

#### **Amenity plots**

Hearing another case, the apex court issued notices to the Pakistan Employees Cooperative Housing Society (PECHS) and other relevant authorities over the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's plea pertaining to illegal occupation of amenity plots near Jheel Park.

During the hearing, the KMC's counsel argued that the amenity plots near Jheel Park were being used for residential purposes. This, he contended, was against the law as the status of an amenity plot could not be changed.

The counsel informed the bench that the Sindh High Court had accepted the pleas filed by the allottees. He moved the court to declare the use of amenity plots for residential purposes as illegal.

The court issued notices to PECHS and other relevant bodies, directing them to keep the status of amenity plots as it is.

#### **Dismissed railways employee**

Meanwhile, the bench rejected the plea of a former railway department employee against his dismissal over corruption accusations.

The petitioner, Khan Bahadur, pleaded that he did not commit a fraud of Rs20 million and the allegations against him were false. He said that train tickets were transferred to Lahore but he was held responsible for this.

However, Justice Hassan remarked that Bahadur was found guilty when an inquiry was carried out and the inquiry officer had found him responsible for the irregularities.

The court rejected the plea and adjourned the hearing.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 10/04/2021)

### **Sindh govt restrained from construction on two plots next to SHC building**

The Supreme Court ruled that Sindh government was bound to make provision for expansion of the Sindh High Court at Karachi and restrained it from any construction for expansion of the Sindh Secretariat on two plots adjacent to the SHC building.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed issued the restraining order after it was informed that the two vacant plots on the right and left sides of the SHC building in Karachi were available and the provincial government had proposed to build expansion blocks of the Sindh Secretariat on them.

While hearing an application of the Sindh High Court Bar Association about parking issues being faced by lawyers on the SHC premises, the bench also comprising Justice Ijaz-ul-Ahsan and Justice Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel observed that access to justice was a fundamental right of people.

The bench in its order noted that the present SHC building had already become incapable of accommodating the sitting judges and looking at future increase in the strength of judges of the SHC, there would be no room for expansion within the premises and rather such extension had to be made on the available land around it.

The concerns about parking of lawyers and litigants can also be addressed, it added.

"We may note that access to justice is a fundamental right of people of Pakistan and such a right includes provision of courts. Thus, for meeting the very fundamental right, Sindh government is bound under the constitution to make provision for expansion of Sindh High Court at Karachi and provide land to it for doing so. It is obvious that the Sindh High Court Karachi cannot be shifted from where it is situated now and its adjacent lands, which are vacant, are the only option where new blocks of Sindh High Court building at Karachi can be constructed and provision for parking of vehicles for lawyers and litigants can be made", the bench said in its order.

*Order reserved on a plea of owners of marriage halls in Korangi against demolition*

In these circumstances, it further observed, there appeared to be no option but to retain the two plots adjacent to the SHC building for its future expansion and the provincial government must fulfil its constitutional mandate for this provision.

"The Sindh government shall not create any third party interest or construct any sort of a building or structure on the said two pieces of land until the matter regarding expansion of the Sindh High Court building at Karachi as well as the parking space for the lawyers and litigants is resolved," it concluded.

#### **CJP deplors commercialisation of city**

The same bench of the apex court reserved its order on an application filed against the demolition of marriage halls on Korangi Road near Korangi Crossing after hearing arguments.

Earlier, the chief justice had ordered the demolition of wedding halls since the same were located on the land meant for residential purposes.

The lawyer for the applicants, Anwar Mansoor Khan, submitted that under a policy decision a committee of the Sindh Building Control Authority had recommended conversion of such halls from residential to commercial in 2017 under Section 21-A of the Sindh Building Town Regulations and also issued a notification in this regard.

He argued that the commercialisation of around 25 areas of the provincial metropolis had been made in a similar manner and it was in accordance with law.

The bench remarked that how the SBCA or its committee could modify the status of land and as per the section in question all the regulations had to be consistent with the ordinance/law.

Justice Ahsan said that there had to be a proper mechanism of commercialisation. The chief justice deplored that almost the entire city has been commercialised.

At one stage, the bench noted that Sindh Advocate General Salman Talibuddin was apparently supporting the arguments of the lawyer for marriage hall owners and asked him whether he was adopting the arguments of the counsel for applicants. However, he replied in the negative.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 10/04/2021)

### **Karachi development**

THE Supreme Court has expressed its displeasure over the progress of certain development projects in Karachi and concern at the manner in which building permits have been granted by the regulatory authorities. Government officials have been reprimanded for not taking strict measures to curb the inappropriate utilisation of land along major corridors.



Karachi's development and management issues are complex. But a careful review can lead to workable solutions.

Unfortunately, the key stakeholders are at loggerheads. No possibility of building a working relationship is apparent. Some months ago, the prime minister pushed for projects and federal interventions that possess cosmetic value. This was obviously done to provide cover for its lawmakers elected from Karachi, but who have not improved development. The Karachi Transformation Plan 2020 was launched in the wake of the devastating August 2020 rains. Very little progress has been made in its development outlay.

The provincial government, which commands the bulk of resources after the windfall allowed under the 18th Amendment, only uses the law to safeguard the status quo. It oversees development and management of a province which has a city that accounts for more than one-third of the provincial population and contributes over three-fourths of monetary and taxation resources to the provincial kitty. The Sindh government has left no stone unturned to frustrate the few federal attempts to launch any development venture, terming it a violation of constitutional provisions. Karachi's local government tier nowadays exists as an extension of the provincial government. No LG polls are in sight.

*Solutions can be worked out for the city.*

The majority of planned and unplanned neighbourhoods are a sorry sight. With the exception of a few city roads, most arterial roads, link-ways, major streets and lanes are non-navigable for motorists. The situation of Karachi West is perhaps the worst. Long sections of the roads are no longer there. Ordinary folk, who commute using a shared rickshaw or rickety minibus, get injured due to the jolts received during the course of the journey. The absence of maintenance, poor design and quality of construction, frequent road-cutting and accumulation of sewage water have contributed to the dilapidated conditions.

Many accidents have occurred because of poor road conditions. Ambulances carrying critically ill patients have to brave the worn-out corridors. Talking to this writer, some Karachi residents indicated they have no faith in existing institutional arrangements to deliver the goods. They question the perception that democracy empowers the citizens to influence decision-making for the common public good. Most are disappointed with both government and opposition.

The city is plagued with haphazardly spread garbage. Healthcare professionals say that the scale and intensity of infectious diseases has increased manifold over the past few years. Meanwhile, the weight and volume of waste are increasing exponentially due to growing consumerism. Only a tiny fraction of this waste is disposed of — that too in an improper manner. The remaining is either left unattended or burnt causing more health hazards. One can find garbage burning in locations such as beaches and playgrounds. In the vicinity of large teaching hospitals, medical waste can be spotted in municipal dump sites. It comprises dangerous substances.

The city had a separate healthcare waste collection and disposal system many years ago. At present, it is not functioning properly. While the country and the globe is combating Covid-19, essentials like incinerators, already installed in some public-sector hospitals, must be overhauled and connected to the waste disposal chain of large and medium healthcare facilities.

Our planners must learn that infrastructure and services are essential to economic progress. Solutions are simple. Take the case of sewage. About 450 million gallons of untreated sewage per day is discharged into the sea. Development of small- and medium-scale sewerage treatment plants at the discharging ends of city nullahs can safeguard the marine environment. This enterprise can help generate recycled water for public horticulture and landscaping. Many of our water mains have completed their life and are prone to leakages and organised theft. Fixing leakages will save water.

Immediate rehabilitation of footpaths all along the major thoroughfares is key. While thousands of dwellings have been demolished along the nullahs and rivers, walkability along footpaths remains absent. The court has stressed the revival of the Karachi Circular Railway. But no answer has been provided as to how the authorities will bear the huge subsidy required to run the trains. Upgrading intra-city bus terminals, opening credit incentives for private transporters to procure buses and rationalising route permits can help streamline public transport.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 13/04/2021)

### **It's all about getting the right land price!**

THIS is with reference to the report 'Farmers hit by Ravi project dig in heels' (March 29). People, including the writer and environmental activists, are sitting in the cities with no knowledge of the ground reality in the villages or the environmental impact studies for any project.

There is no consultant registration process in the environment protection department (EPD) in Punjab. Any consulting firm with at least one environmental engineer can submit the critical environmental impact assessment (EIA) report.

The EPD has requirements/guidelines to furnish an EIA report. Whether you hire a local or a foreign consulting firm, the report that needs to be generated remains the same. After getting higher education from the United States and working for over 25 years with international consulting firms, I can say with complete confidence that foreigners are not more qualified than Pakistanis who get hired to do their work.

Our basic engineering knowledge is way more than what American universities teach there. Putting some foreigners' name on the EIA report does not make the report a perfect environmental assessment.

Every farmer — including myself as I am now managing my agricultural lands in Khanewal district — is happy to sell his agricultural land if the price is right since farming is unable to meet his needs owing to higher prices of agricultural inputs, like fertilisers, seeds, etc.

Farmers affected by the said project are raising a hue and cry just to get the right price. A housing scheme in Multan recently cut mango orchards for development; no one complained. And no one complained because the farmers concerned had sold their lands/orchards to the developers. No one had forced them to do that. They had their own reasons.

If the government does not acquire land for the Ravi Riverfront Urban Project today, we will see private housing societies there within 10 years anyway.

I think the government should pay the right price to the farmers affected by the project and the EPD should analyse EIA submitted by the authority in good faith and implement environmental mitigations discussed in the report.

*Tanveer Sahoo*

*Lahore*

(By Dawn Newspaper 07, 16/04/2021)

### **Malik Riaz & the art of the deal**

TOWARDS the end of 2019, something unusual happened at a federal cabinet meeting in Islamabad. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Accountability Shahzad Akbar was allowed to present a 'non-agenda item'; he had with him a sealed envelope that he said contained a non-disclosure agreement. It pertained to a multi-million pound settlement that the UK-based National Crime Agency

(NCA) had recently arrived at with property tycoon Malik Riaz. According to a source present at the meeting, “[Human Rights Minister] Shireen Mazari objected, saying, ‘What approval are we giving when we don’t even know its contents?’ We were told that if it is opened there are implications for national security and the UK government also has reservations”.

The NCA investigates money laundering and illicit finances derived from criminal activity in the UK and abroad, and in the case of the latter, returns the stolen money to affected states. It seems that Mr Riaz had for some time been the subject of a ‘dirty money’ probe by the Agency. On Dec 3, 2019 it announced a £190 million out-of-court civil settlement with Mr Riaz — its largest till date — adding that it “did not represent a finding of guilt”.

In this country, on the pretext of the non-disclosure agreement, the matter was swept under the carpet. Despite its claims of holding the corrupt to account and bringing back ill-gotten gains stashed abroad by Pakistanis, the PTI government has been curiously tight-lipped about the asset forfeiture deal.

More than one year on, the episode remains cloaked in secrecy. With the help of documents obtained by UK-based investigative journalism project Finance Uncovered, *Dawn* has pieced together a more complete picture.

The deal with the NCA took on particular relevance for Pakistani citizens when Mr Riaz tweeted: “I sold our legal & declared property in UK to pay 190M £ to Supreme Court Pakistan against Bahria Town Karachi.” It may be recalled that a few months earlier, in March 2019, the Supreme Court had accepted Mr Riaz’s offer of Rs460bn as settlement dues by his real estate firm Bahria Town Ltd after it was found to have illegally acquired thousands of acres of land on Karachi’s outskirts in district Malir.

The amount, which translates to almost \$3 billion, was historic in scale. But the settlement with the NCA later that year was a travesty because, thanks to the Pakistan government, it afforded Mr Riaz a shocking reprieve.

Lawyer Farrukh Qureshi of Samdani and Qureshi described it thus: “It is as if one is apprehended with the proceeds of a crime, and instead of such proceeds being reimbursed to the person wronged, they are used as reparations for another crime. ...The amount recovered should [have] come straight back to Pakistan, rather than being put back into Malik Riaz’s pocket.”

Indeed, the British law-enforcement agency in this case may have allowed itself to be manipulated by Pakistan’s power brokers. The ‘accountability czar’, Mr Akbar, did not respond to *Dawn*’s questions despite repeated requests.

The settlement included 1 Hyde Park Place, a £50m property. Located in one of the most expensive areas of London, it was bought by former prime minister Nawaz’s Sharif’s son Hasan Nawaz in 2007. Over the next four years a number of high-end firms, including interior designers Tessuto, undertook a massive overhaul of what had been an office building and flats and transformed it into a single residential property. The changes included the excavation of a basement and the building of a swimming pool.

On March 21, 2016 the property was sold by Mr Nawaz for £42.5m to a British Virgin Islands company named Ultimate Holdings Management Ltd. Mr Riaz’s son, Ali Riaz Malik, signed for Ultimate Holdings; he was represented by Mischon de Reya law firm. Mr Nawaz signed for himself, witnessed by his lawyer Jeremy Freeman. (A couple of weeks before the sale took place, Mr Nawaz had been contacted by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists about the Sharif family’s offshore companies that had come to light in the Panama Papers.)

The transfer deed for sale of 1 Hyde Park Place by Hasan Nawaz to Ultimate Holdings.

Interestingly, documents filed with the UK Land Registry show that a charge against the property was registered at the same time as the sale: Mr Nawaz is recorded as a lender to Ultimate Holdings. The terms of the loan were “as per the contract dated March 21, 2016 between the parties”. However the contract itself is not filed with the land registry. The timing of the sale and the loan to Ultimate Holdings suggest that Mr Nawaz was keen to divest himself of the property, the priciest in the Sharif family’s UK portfolio. On Sept 19, 2016, the loan by Mr Nawaz was discharged.

The sale illustrated the mutually beneficial relationships that exist among Pakistan’s rarefied elite.

Document showing the loan by Hassan Nawaz to Ultimate Holdings.

### Enter the Pakistani state

In 2019, Mr Riaz’s £190m settlement in the UK was effected with the use of new civil powers known as Account Freezing Orders (AFOs) which allow law enforcement to target suspected proceeds of crime using a civil rather than a criminal burden of proof. Because it was a civil case, the NCA was able to settle it privately with Mr Riaz rather than going to court to secure a Forfeiture Order.

In August 2019, eight AFOs pertaining to the investigation against Mr Riaz were secured from Westminster Magistrates Court in London. In compliance with the AFOs, more than £100m — which the *Guardian* reported NCA “suspected to have been derived from bribery and corruption overseas” — was frozen on Aug 12. Some £20m associated with the Riaz family had been frozen earlier in December 2018. The AFOs were made out against accounts held by Mr Riaz’s wife Bina Riaz, daughter Sana Salman, son Ali Riaz, daughter-in-law Mubashra Ali, as well as several companies, including Fortune Events and Ultimate Holdings.

Enter the Pakistani state, reportedly at the behest of Mr Riaz.

During September 2019, Mr Akbar is believed to have met Mr Riaz multiple times, at the Dorchester hotel and at the latter’s daughter’s residence. A widely circulated video showed him meeting the property tycoon outside his daughter’s Paddington flat.



According to a London-based Pakistani source well connected with the British political establishment and anti-corruption organisations in the UK: “Mr Akbar advised the NCA to settle with him [Riaz]. Otherwise, he told them, Riaz would finish their prosecution budget [by having high-powered lawyers drag out court proceedings].”

Mr Akbar clearly took up the matter at the very highest levels of the British government. How else can one explain its Home Office’s refusal to share information about the case despite a request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)? An email to the Home Office’s Criminal Finances Team asking for details about Mr Akbar’s meetings with Mr Riaz received a reply requesting more time for a “full response”, which arrived on Feb 1. The gist of the response was: “We neither confirm nor deny whether we hold the information that you have requested.” They based their response on certain sections under the FOIA that allow for exemptions to disclosure if doing so may prejudice relations with another state or prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

(The NCA is exempt from the FOIA and its actions can only be questioned through judicial review proceedings by a court. Even so, judicial reviews are a challenge to the way in which a decision has been made, rather than findings on the conclusion.)

Whatever the approach Mr Akbar adopted, it seems to have worked and the NCA in early December 2019 agreed to a civil settlement with Malik Riaz. While noting this, the NCA’s annual report does not name Mr Riaz but describes him as “a Pakistani national, whose business is one of largest private sector employers in Pakistan.”

The benign spin is remarkable: the Bahria Town behemoth indeed employs a large number of people. However, on May 4, 2018 the Supreme Court in separate hard-hitting verdicts found massive irregularities in the acquisition by Bahria of huge tracts of public and forest land for three of its housing projects across the country, declaring each of them null and void. In its judgement about Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) — which sprawls unofficially over 30,000 acres and is believed to be the largest such project in South Asia — the SC said: “We have been witnessing such nefarious activities in the past at a small level, but we have not even dreamt of such activities at such a huge, massive and colossal level.... Inaction would be disastrous and devastating for the state when the watchdogs of the public property allow the grabbers to grab it for a bone or a piece of flesh.”

It also said: “Grant of land to Malir Development Authority for an incremental [low-cost] housing scheme proved to be a gimmick to accomplish the agenda of Malik Riaz aiming at his personal enrichment at the cost of the state and the people.”

Investigative reports in this paper have detailed how indigenous communities have been strong-armed into ‘selling’ their land. On the one hand, police carry out raids on the goths, and book locals on fake terrorism charges. On the other, they say, Bahria personnel constantly threaten and intimidate them.

*Dawn* made multiple attempts to obtain Mr Riaz’s response to its questions, to no avail.

The Westminster Magistrates Court appointed Essex-based Haslers Accountants as receivers to handle the settlement. On Dec 5, 2019, Mr Akbar announced at a press conference in Islamabad that £140m had been repatriated to Pakistan, into the Supreme Court’s account — presumably the one set up by the court to receive Bahria Town’s liabilities — and the remaining £50m would be transferred later on the sale of 1 Hyde Park Place. When asked how the money could be transferred to the SC account, he deflected the question saying that the government, NCA and Mr Riaz had signed a “deed of confidentiality” which prevented him from elaborating on the matter.

#### **‘The stuff of sheikhdoms’**

This effort to conceal facts on the specious pretext of ‘national security’ amounts to a mockery of the Pakistani people’s right to information in a matter of public interest. Abdul Moiz Jaferii, partner at Haider Waheed Partners said: “In simple terms, it is the stuff of sheikhdoms. An unelected person [Mr Akbar] wields authority unknown to the public to settle a matter hidden from the public on terms sworn to secrecy... . The guise of confidentiality is used as an excuse, even though the only confidentiality that could possibly bind the Pakistani state here would be one it willingly agreed with the accused person, and not one which the NCA has imposed upon them... .”

According to David Corker, senior partner at the Corker Binning law firm in London, confidential settlements like the one in question are the result of a financial crime strategy that increasingly focuses on recovery of funds over criminal litigation. “Law enforcement concerning white-collar and financial crime has become fatigued by trial by jury, with all the attendant delay and costs and are increasingly seeing the re-designation of their effectiveness by how much money they have seized and how many alleged plots they have disrupted. This is the natural outcome of that process: the NCA gets a good result but it is willing to make concessions to get there.”

Back in London, 1 Hyde Park Place was first put up for sale with Knight Frank realtors: their brochure described it as “one of London’s last surviving Georgian palaces”. However, it did not find any takers, apparently because of the high price tag of £45m. According to a source in London, one of the realtors handling the property said that “mid to high £30m” would have been a more realistic number. The property is now being handled by Beauchamp Estates. It raises serious questions whether the price paid for its purchase was purposely inflated. *Dawn* made several attempts to contact Mr Nawaz but received no response.

As of now, however, 1 Hyde Park Place is not on the market. According to a source relevant to the process, “the sale of the property is on hold at the moment.... But it should be on the market soon, it just needs to undergo some due diligence before that happens.”

The NCA has given contradictory messages about the status of the property and the matter remains shrouded in mystery. A senior official from the organisation first told *Dawn* in December 2019 that “The NCA has taken ownership of the property and it will be sold with the proceeds going back to Pakistan,” but then retracted their words in a subsequent email.

Meanwhile, several members of the Riaz family reside in the deluxe Lancaster Gate development just a short walk from 1 Hyde Park Place. Fortune Events Ltd, an offshore company based in the British Virgin Islands, bought nine apartments here between 2011 and 2018 for a total of £35.95m.

There are indications that the Riaz family is the actual beneficiary of the nine apartments. For one, Ali Riaz's email is given as a contact address on one of the title deeds; another lists a Dubai PO Box address which links to Ali Riaz's property at P69 Emirates Hills. The address for the Mischon de Reya law firm is also frequently given as a contact address.

On Nov 22, 2019 Westminster Magistrates Court set aside the eight AFOs dated Aug 12, 2019 and the first one from December 2018 to enable money in the accounts to be repatriated to Pakistan. Two of the accounts belong to Fortune Events, suggesting the Riaz family is indeed the beneficiary of the Lancaster Gate portfolio. The settlement appears to have left untouched his luxury portfolio worth £36m owned through a company served with two AFOs.

Court order setting aside the AFOs.

In the UK, anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International expressed disquiet over the settlement. Rachel Davies Teka, head of advocacy at TI said via email: "Returning stolen wealth is often the most complicated and fraught part of any corruption case, yet it is also one of the most important. It is hard to know whether justice has been served if the return of ill-gotten gains happens behind closed doors and without civil society oversight."

Recently, the NCA has made some significant changes to the way it conducts and publicises its civil financial investigations.

Susan Hawley, executive director of Spotlight on Corruption, a UK based anti-corruption charity, views these measures in a positive light. "The NCA has clearly done some thinking since the Malik Riaz settlement, and the controversy it has generated in Pakistan," she said in an email to *Dawn*. "It is very welcome that it has committed to greater transparency, and to ensuring that any settlement does not damage public confidence. It has also committed to providing greater detail to journalists and NGOs about upcoming hearings in open court which is a major step forward. ...We cannot have another situation where it is widely perceived that money confiscated in the UK has essentially benefitted the perpetrator when it is returned to a country, or that the perpetrator is seen as having got away with it..." The NCA's revised approach, however, will make little difference to the indigenous farming communities affected by Bahria Town Karachi's inexorable advance. For them, the prospect of displacement from their ancestral lands looms closer each day.

A few months ago, some villagers invited a group of journalists to pay a visit to the area affected by the SC's controversial order of March 21, 2019 that allowed Bahria to develop 16,896 acres for its Karachi project. They wanted them to see first-hand how they were being bullied into leaving their land.

The previous evening, a disturbing incident had occurred. Some locals returning from Gadap had found themselves unable to access their village through their traditional route because Bahria guards had locked the gate erected on the BTK periphery and blocked their entry. Going around the development meant an extra 45 minutes of travel. More villagers arrived and a clash ensued. Some Bahria officials appeared on the scene. At least one individual was armed with a pistol that he allegedly began firing in the air to scare the villagers away. "We are encircled like Palestine," said one villager bitterly.

Rustom Gabol, the old school master at Haji Ali Mohammed Gabol goth, pointed out how Bahria was swallowing up the school playground by building a road through it. Behind the decrepit little village school loomed the under-construction five-star hotel in BTK's Golf City that boasts Pakistan's first ever 36-hole PGA standard golf course.

At the same village a few days ago, Bahria bifurcated a natural reservoir for rainwater by dumping tons of earth to create a redundant artificial 'walkway'. This will act as a barrier for rainwater flowing down the Kirthar range and prevent it from collecting in the reservoir, the nearest water source for the villagers and their dwindling livestock. The message for the residents is clear: leave, or die. (By Naziha Syed Ali Dawn, 01, 17/04/2021)

### Absence of urban planning

In an unexpected turn of events, slum dwellers of the Manzoor Colony settlement in Karachi have managed to cease the demolition of thousands of their homes after teaming up with NGOs to map out the drainage network of the area. The fact that they eventually came up with their own conclusion — if the drainage system was properly cleaned and efficiently maintained, the threat of monsoon flooding would be averted — indicates two things in particular: the common man does possess the capability of action and understanding, and that they are willing to work with the relevant people to secure their livelihood.

However, it also begs the question: why did the authorities decide to demolish thousands of houses when a simple flood risk mapping project revealed that at most 40 homes needed to be removed to leave the drains clear? This not only points towards negligence and inefficiency on the part of the government but also highlights the importance of urban planning when dealing with the mega city. With a staggering 12 million people living in vulnerable informal settlements and 550 storm-water drains blocked by illegal construction and waste, planning and strategy becomes central for governance and growth. Karachi is slowly becoming unlivable. Therefore, city management, governance and institutional capacity, and municipal service delivery need to be radically restructured to become sustainable and inclusive. Apart from that, there is a desperate need for a disaster management system to make the city more resilient.

The beautiful mess that is Karachi needs to be redesigned, piece by piece, by focusing on three pivotal sectors: transportation, dispensation of water and electricity, and the proper disposal of municipal solid waste. Development must cater to the needs of the majority which consists of mostly lower-income and lower middle-income groups. Citizens, welfare organisations and relevant officials must collaborate in order to transform Karachi into a livable and competitive mega city for all.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 19/04/2021)

### A land too far

TWO years ago, in March 2019, the Supreme Court had issued a detailed verdict in a case pertaining to Bahria Town Karachi regarding the settlement of 16,896 acres of land in the Malir District of Karachi Division. While accepting the offer of Rs460 billion submitted by the management of Bahria Town, as a settlement for its Super Highway project, the Supreme Court had restrained the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) from filing any reference against the company and the individuals concerned.

In view of third-party rights involving more than 140,000 affected allottees, the Bahria Town management was allowed to acquire the rights of land in question, measuring 16,896 acres in five Dehs, or villages.

During the court proceedings, it emerged that Bahria Town had allotted plots to people on land that was not legally owned by it. According to the court order, any such land stands retrieved and no excess land shall be allowed to be occupied by Bahria Town. As a result, the developer lost land measuring 7,068 acres against which it had made bookings of plots and bungalows.

Bahria Town had given an undertaking in the court to the effect that it would compensate those affected either by providing another plot within the legal boundaries or by refunding the paid amount.

Two years later, the undertaking has not been honoured yet. The company is using delaying tactics. I had submitted my case for refund 10 months ago and I was verbally assured that the deposited money would be returned within six months. To date, there is no payment in sight. I have personally visited Bahria Town offices and have sent various reminders through email in this regard. Instead of getting my money back, I am being put under pressure to get my file merged with some other project. I am sure I am not alone in my sufferings.

Only the Supreme Court may ensure the dispensation of justice to all the victims of this fraud.

*Asgar Soomro*

*Karachi*

(From the Newspaper Dawn, 07, 22/04/2021)

### Housing loan growth

THE State Bank and Pakistan Banks Association have claimed that the housing and construction loans portfolio of banks has grown by Rs54bn to Rs202bn from July to March compared to a stagnant position in the same period last year. "Such growth in housing and construction finance in such a period has never been witnessed in the country's history," the joint statement reads. It says that bank financing for housing and construction is likely to increase significantly as mortgage finance activity under the Mera Pakistan, Mera Ghar scheme picks up. SBP data on house-building loans paints a different picture though. It shows the stock of housing finance to citizens has risen by just Rs13.7bn to Rs93.5bn. If house-building advances to bank employees — the stock of which has grown by Rs25bn — is also considered, the total housing finance portfolio increases by Rs38.8bn to Rs228.3bn. Even construction loans to developers/builders for residential buildings have grown by merely Rs11bn.

Data discrepancies apart, there is little doubt that mortgage finance is slow to grow despite tax and interest rate incentives and housing subsidies announced a year back for developers, builders and potential homeowners. There is broad consensus that the scheme is mostly used by tax cheaters to whiten illegal money. Although the SBP requires banks to boost their housing and construction finance portfolios to at least 5pc of their private-sector advances by end 2021, they appear reluctant to comply. For starters, the banks are not comfortable with the existing foreclosure laws and want a mechanism whereby they can repossess the property without involving the courts in case of a default. Then most potential homeowners are not 'bankable' as they lack a credit/payment history. Moreover, there is a housing supply gap as developers aren't prepared for risks unless they are certain of confirmed demand. The government has recently increased the interest rate subsidy to give another push to affordable housing besides boosting financing limits for prospective homeowners, but the impact won't be known immediately. The statement mentions the measures being taken to redress loan-seekers' complaints and develop a model for income assessment and credit worthiness evaluation based on demonstrated expenses like rent payments, utility bills, etc. But these measures will help only so much. A better idea is to develop more effective foreclosure laws to give banks confidence besides pushing those who have used the amnesty to invest in affordable housing according to the size of the gains they have reaped.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 29/04/2021)

### SHC seeks Hyderabad's map, survey records from 1943 to 1946

The Sindh High Court (SHC) has sought Hyderabad's map and the records of city surveys carried out between 1943 and 1946 to verify dubious claims pertaining to old constructions, said to be encroachments, on state land.

The Hyderabad circuit bench, comprising Justice Zulfiqar Ahmed Khan and Justice Muhammad Saleem Jessar, sought the records in an anti-encroachment case and also constituted a core committee headed by Hyderabad deputy commissioner Fuad Ghaffar Soomro to deal with complaints against the anti-encroachment operation.

The additional registrar of the SHC, the municipal commissioner of the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (HMC) and lawyers representing the petitioners and complainants will be part of the committee. The old map of Hyderabad was sought after some commercial tenants of the HMC claimed that the structures existed at or before the Partition.

"We have decided that the structures, which existed in the old map, won't be touched but the rest will be razed," Justice Khan said in his remarks during the hearing. Advocate Ayatullah Khuwaja, representing a shopkeeper, contended that the HMC itself constructed shops outside the school for the hearing and speech impaired in City taluka and rented out those properties.

"The school's building exists in its original condition but the HMC has been unable to run the school," he said. Another lawyer, Irfan Qureshi, said the corporation had been taking rent even from the owners those shops that had been proved not to be encroachments. "If the building is demolished, around 500 shopkeepers and their thousands of workers will be deprived of their livelihoods," he said and demanded compensation for the tenants if the property was to be razed.

"Empress Market in Karachi was also surrounded by shops. But on court orders, the tenants were issued notices to vacate [the shops] and they complied," Justice Khan said in his remarks, adding that if the lawyers kept defending the encroachments, the operation to retrieve the government land would be affected.

Advocate Arshad S Pathan claimed that he had himself seen city survey records and maps of the years between 1943 and 1946 and he could verify that some of the structures that were being demolished as encroachment existed back then.

Justice Jessar pointed out that the HMC had served notices to its tenants and leaseholders, conveying that both the agreements had been cancelled. DC Soomro complained against the Cantonment Board Hyderabad, informing the court that neither encroachments were being removed, nor power generators placed on the footpaths.

He said the Sindh Building Control Authority was also not cooperating in identifying encroachments and was not sharing the records of its approved and unapproved structures. He also complained that the HMC's machinery for demolishing illegal structures was ineffective.

The SHC directed the DC to submit in writing all the problems he had been confronting in implementing the court order.

#### **Realigning poles**

The court was informed that a committee to decide the cost of the shifting of electricity poles from road centers had been formed, but the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) had refused to become a member of the committee.

The NEPRA maintains that the problem pertains to the Hyderabad Electric Supply Company, which is responsible for power transmission in the areas of its operations.

"It's good that the committee has been formed. But, we want to know what progress has been made so far," Justice Khan asked. The court had ordered the constitution of the committee on March 20, after HESCO and the Sindh government locked horns over bearing the cost of relocation.

The former demanded Rs157 million from the latter, which refused to provide the funds, arguing that HESCO was responsible for the transmission and that the company was also not paying the rent for its installations.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 01/05/2021)

### **KMC begins renovations at Khaliq Dina Hall**

Renovation work of the roof of the historic building Khaliq Dina Hall has been initiated and the affected part of the roof and the resulting leakage would be repaired in the next few days, officials said on Tuesday.

"The work cannot be halted by citing reasons for shortage of funds. Only joint efforts of all of us can preserve historic buildings and heritage," said Metropolitan Commissioner Danish Saeed.

The Metropolitan Commissioner was informed that Rs20 million had been earmarked for this work in 2018 after an advisory board and a technical committee was constituted by the government. He was informed that a work order was issued for work here in 2019 and was started by people with expertise in handling heritage but later funds were not fully provided due to which the renovation work on the roof of the building was halted.

He was informed that out of Rs20 million, Rs6 million has been spent thus far.

Saeed said that he hoped that the remaining funds would be received soon for this work. "It is imperative that historic assets be protected," he added. The metropolitan commissioner noted that special attention needed to be paid to finish the work on wood in the historic building to protect it from termites.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 05/05/2021)

### 'Naya Pakistan'

ALL over the world the pandemic has hit the poor more than anyone else. Especially those who have no homes or who live under the threat of evictions in informal settlements where no piped water or electricity is available and where people do not have secure jobs.



For these reasons the United Nations has asked governments to place a moratorium on forced evictions and provide relief for home renters who are being displaced because of an inability to pay rent.

Many governments have followed the UN advice. London, Lisbon, Vancouver, Amsterdam, Barcelona, for example, had already taken steps to convert hotels, tourist lodges, and commercial premises into homes for the vulnerable. Support for paying rent is also being provided by Thailand, and the Philippines has put a moratorium on evictions. In the United States the policy is that "who have lost their jobs should not worry about losing their homes". As a result, payments for mortgage finance have been suspended. In some other cities, such as San Francisco, temporary housing is being built for vulnerable populations and in Pune (India) redevelopment of semi-serviced slums in the city centre, on high-value land, are planned at the same location — something unthinkable in the past.

However, in Pakistan what is happening is the opposite of the UN advice. There is a continuing demolition of homes of poor people under various garbs and the state of insecurity in an age of increasing poverty is multiplying. Karachi, Sindh's capital, has borne the brunt of these involuntary evictions where 1,100 households consisting of over 12,000 population, are living on the ruins of their demolished homes, without water and electricity. This demolition was carried out by a Supreme Court order which had also mentioned that the establishment would resettle these households within one year. More than two years have elapsed since then but neither plans for rehabilitation have been made nor has the Supreme Court taken any action against the non-compliance of its orders.

*Karachi has borne the brunt of the evictions.*

As a result of the heavy rains of 2020, the government decided to widen the existing nullahs in Karachi. As a result, about 15,000 households are estimated to be displaced. The population was not consulted in the process and through a satellite survey, houses that were to be demolished were determined. The fact that each house contains many more than just one household was ignored. Similarly, since the rooftops of houses are interlinked often two or more houses were taken as one. As the residents say, "This was a survey of buildings and not of people".

Bulldozing was mostly done without any warning and is continuing during Ramazan and lockdown in violation of SOPs. In Hindu neighbourhoods, bulldozing was carried out during Holi, and in Christian neighbourhoods, during Easter. Conversations with the affected population by the Urban Resource Centre show that over 70 per cent have lost their jobs as they were contract labour; it is difficult now to have two meals a day and so children complain of hunger; and bulldozing would eventually affect the schooling of over 30,000 students. As a result, hatred for the government and the elite of this country has reached levels that I have never experienced before.

But the story does not end here. The goths on the periphery of Bahria Town have, for the past seven or eight years, been constantly coerced into selling their land to the contractor. In the past two weeks, attempts at demolishing a number of goths with the help of the police and the goons of Bahria Town have been made. Heavy machinery has been moved into the area and continues to demolish orchards and threaten the locals that if they do not sell, they will be encircled and will not be able to exit their settlements.

It is incomprehensible as to why in the case of the nullah settlements the government has behaved in such a cruel and shameless manner. This problem could have been resolved by involving the community in surveying and in planning alternative accommodation as has been done in the past. It is also not understandable why the Pakistani state should support a developer against its own people in depriving them of land and income.

Perhaps the reasons are deeply entrenched in the system as is evident from two statistics. A Banigala estate was regularised recently at Rs6.66 per square yard whereas a katchi abadi house in Karachi's Orangi is regularised at Rs208 per square yard plus a Rs30,000 bribe. The Supreme Court ordered Bahria Town to pay Rs460 billion for legalising 16,896 acres that it owned. This works out to Rs5,625 per square yard whereas the current price of residential land in Bahria Town is Rs45,000 plus per square yard. Maybe an important step would be to move towards some form of equity in land ownership and transactions.

(By Arif Hasan Dawn, 07, 09/05/2021)

### MPC terms city's Bahria Town project 'anti-Sindh'

A multiparty conference (MPC) on Sunday termed Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) "illegal and unconstitutional" and unanimously rejected it as an anti-Sindh project which, it said, was a modern form of colonisation.

Representatives of nationalist parties of Sindh and Balochistan, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Communist Party attended the event held on the outskirts of the city in Hadi Bux Gabol Goth on the call of the Indigenous Rights Alliance.

The MPC also demanded cancellation of 500 FIRs registered against villagers and action against police officers.

A resolution adopted by the participants said that the BTK had illegally occupied lands and demanded that the construction works be stopped.

The participants were of the view that the Supreme Court itself had in 2018 declared BTK illegal. However, they regretted that the implementation bench of the apex court legalised the BTK project. They urged the apex court to withdraw this decision.

They demanded that all those whose houses and villages had been destroyed be compensated as per the market rate.

They recalled that the Sindh government had given 43 dehs to the Malir Development Authority in 2013 and demanded that this notification be rejected and the dehs be restored to their original position.

The MPC also supported a sit-in to be organised by the Sindh Action Committee at BTK's main gate on June 6 and said that protests would be held in district headquarters on June 27.

The participants said they believed the BTK was part of an invasion of global capitalism.

Prominent among those who attended the MPC were Syed Jalal Mehmood Shah, Dr Qadir Magsi, Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch, Yusuf Masti Khan, Karam Wassan, Illahi Bux, Nawaz Zaur, Riaz Chandio, Gul Hasan Kalmati, Amanullah Shaikh, Aijaz Mangi, Salma Junejo and Pariyal Dayo.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 24/05/2021)

### **Free burial announced at two new 'model' cemeteries in Karachi**

An eight-member central committee, comprising Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) officers and representatives of welfare organisations, set up on directives of city Administrator Laeeq Ahmed to improve condition of cemeteries, decided to take several steps under which gravediggers and other staff working in cemeteries would be registered and they would be issued regular identity cards.

In the first meeting of the central committee many decisions were taken under which persons under age of 18 years would not be eligible to perform any work in graveyard.

Moreover, in two new 'model' cemeteries under construction in North Karachi and along the Link Road National Highway, burial would be done free of cost in collaboration with welfare organisations Saylani Welfare Trust and the JDC and no money would be charged from the people.

The records of these two cemeteries will also be fully computerised.

The meeting was attended by committee convener and KMC senior director media management Ali Hassan Sajid, director cemeteries Iqbal Pervez, Al-Khidmat foundation's coordinator Manzar Alam, Saylani welfare trust's Munawwar Younis, and representatives from other welfare organisations.

On the occasion, the rates of graves and burial expenses in the cemeteries of the KMC were reviewed in detail.

It was decided that official rates for burials in cemeteries would be fixed at Rs9,000 which would be strictly enforced.

In this regard, the gravedigger will be instructed to refrain from charging exorbitant fee for grave preparation and burial from citizens, otherwise action will be taken against them.

It was decided in the meeting that cleaning of graveyards would be the responsibility of the KMC while cleaning of exterior would be arranged by the district municipal corporations concerned.

All cemeteries will be cleaned in phases to facilitate people's visits to burial grounds.

During the meeting, Mr Sajid said the purpose of setting up of the central committee was to improve burial procedure, infrastructure, provision of street lights and tree plantation, prevention of bodies' theft and issuance of burial certificates.

"All these processes will be transparent and efficient," he added.

He said that the central committee would oversee all matters from the provision of graves in cemeteries to the burial of the dead and in the meantime provide full support to bereaved families.

The KMC media director also asked the representatives of welfare organisations to give their suggestions in this regard.

The next meeting will consider and decide the implementation steps and further measures will be taken to improve the condition of cemeteries.

The meeting participants welcomed the steps taken by the central committee.

The convener said that the fee should have been collected in cemeteries in accordance with the sub-rules of 2019, but different amounts were being charged in different graveyards.

The administrator directed the committee to fulfil its responsibilities as per its mandate and take steps in the best interest of citizens.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 04/06/2021)

### **Vehicles, offices in Bahria Town set ablaze**

Two international fast food franchises, several vehicles, a showroom and two offices of estate agents were set on fire in Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) on Sunday after a mob forced its way through the main gate during a protest by the Sindh Action Committee (SAC) against the mega housing project.

Police resorted to teargas shelling and fired rubber bullets to control the situation that turned ugly after thousands of people arrived at the housing project from different parts of the province to stage a peaceful protest against 'land grabbing', 'forced eviction of locals' and 'demolition of villages' in the name of development.

The protesters, however, refused to accept any blame for the trouble, alleging that the BTK staff themselves got hold of some nationalist party flags and set fire to the main gate, the Business Trade Centre, the car showroom, vehicles, motorcycles, and other property on their own to give another colour to their peaceful protest.

As the SAC had given a call for sit-in outside the main gate of BTK on the M-9 motorway in advance, police had already placed containers on roads and temporary barriers to prevent the protesters from getting close to the BTK gate.

'Halo halo [proceed proceed] Bahria Town' was the main slogan that attracted thousands of people from not just Karachi but other parts of Sindh, including Thatta, Jamshoro, Sukkur, Larkana and Hyderabad, to the protest. There were also plans for holding simultaneous sit-ins in the UK and US to raise the issue of the indigenous of Sindh and the snatching away of their ancestral lands.

However, when the police attempted to stop SAC leaders, intellectuals, rights activists and others travelling in caravan of vehicles from moving close to BTK, they staged a sit-in on the highway, affecting heavy traffic flow, officials said.

Witnesses said suddenly protesters started removing barriers and reached the main gate while policemen deployed there did not stop thousands of protesters. The situation worsened as a mob then forced its way through the main gate and set fire to it as well as offices, restaurants, showroom and other property, triggering fear and panic among the residents.

In other acts of vandalism, the glass of offices were smashed with rocks and sticks besides a bank and an ATM were reportedly looted.

Fire brigade official later said they managed to control blaze at five to six places in BTK with the help of five fire tenders.

As arson acts continued for nearly half an hour, there was retaliation from the law enforcement agencies in the form of tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, baton charge, arrests etc., which also resulted in several injuries. Many women and children who were also taking part in the protest and sit-in fell unconscious. Many were taken into custody and were still at the Gadap Town Police Station till the filing of this report.

#### **Police version**

A senior police officer requesting anonymity told Dawn that around 8,000-10,000 protesters arrived and removed temporary barriers before more than 100 of them entered BTK. The police said as per their strategy policemen were unarmed to prevent 'collateral damage'. Therefore, no casualty took place while the police managed to detain around 80-90 persons and FIRs would be registered against them, said the officer.

The officer regretted that the provincial administration or the ruling party had not made any effort to hold talks with SAC leaders before their arrival. He also disclosed that the Malir deputy commissioner had made efforts at the highest level of the government, asking them to engage the protest organizers in talks, without success. "No one was willing in the govt. or the ruling party in Sindh to hold talks with the protesters as two high-ups in the PPP were pole apart on the BTK issue," the officer believed.

#### **Residents' anger**

BTK residents called it an act of terror as thousands of people entered the residential areas and allegedly looted valuables from a whole building. They claimed that the people were armed and set fire to a plaza while there was no police or Rangers personnel for their protection. The residents wondered what sort of land victims were those who subjected them to such terror and violence.

#### **SAC stance**

SAC chief Syed Jalal Mehmood Shah told the media that the people who indulged in violence had nothing to do with his party, claiming that the SAC was not involved in the violence.

He said miscreants by indulging in violent acts tried to give different colour to their peaceful struggle.

Another SAC leader, Dr Qadir Magsi, told the media that there was a possibility of chemical use for the arson attacks and blamed the elements who were known to use chemicals for arson attacks in the past in Karachi for the latest act of violence.

The leaders said that before their arrival at the venue, their workers were stopped in different districts and they had to stage protests on the highways before reaching BTK.

Earlier talking to media, SAC leaders Syed Jalal Mehmood Shah, Dr Qadir Magsi, Sanan Qureshi, Zain Shah, Riaz Chandio and others demanded removal of the Sindh government for 'failing to protect lands of Sindh'. They said BTK had been built 'illegally'.

Vowing to resist the BTK's alleged moves to demolish old villages, the leaders said mega housing projects on the motorway were aimed at bringing a demographic change in the province turning the Sindhis into 'minority'.

"It is colonisation of Sindh by wealthy businessmen, which we reject," said Syed Zain Shah of Sindh United Party.

"The people of Sindh are the rightful owners of their lands. They want their lands back, they want their rivers back," said Jagdish Ahuja, also of Sindh United Party.

Later in the evening, SAC leadership after an urgent meeting held a press conference in Jamshoro and gave a call for province-wide protests on June 9 and a sit-in outside Sindh Assembly against arrest of their workers during the protest against BTK.

Jalal Mahmood Shah, Dr Magsi, Sajjad Chandio, Zain Shah, Riaz Chandio, Masroor Shah and others congratulated the people on the 'successful protest' against BTK and said violence was part of a conspiracy against their protest.

#### **Attempt to sabotage peace**

Minister for information Nasir Husain Shah and adviser to chief minister Nisar Ahmed Khuhro at a presser alleged that the protestors resorted to arson acts during their protest outside the BTK.

The PPP leaders said the buildings in the BTK were damaged due to fire incidents, which "was an attempt to sabotage peace".

"The protestors took law into their hands," Mr Khuhro said, adding that they also blocked traffic on the highway that was clearly an 'illegal act'.

#### **Governor praises Rangers**

Sindh Governor Imran Ismail expressed his regrets over the BTK incident, asking as to why the IG police did not take steps when the protest had been announced several days ago.

He said timely action by the DG Rangers prevented the city from big tragedy. "DG Rangers ensured steps as per professional requirements, which was appreciable.

"The BTK administration should resolve its issues as soon as possible so that the citizens can live in peace and tranquillity," the governor observed.

(By Shazia Hasan & Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 01, 07/06/2021)

### **Miscreants vandalise properties at Bahria Town Karachi**

A protest outside an upscale neighbourhood on the edge of the city turned violent on Sunday, when some miscreants set fire to vehicles and damaged commercial and residential properties within the gated community.

Protesters had gathered at Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) gates on M9 Motorway Sunday morning, responding to the call of the nationalist parties and civil society groups.

Videos circulating on social media showed protestors waving flags and chanting slogans. However, the situation turned haywire in the evening, when vandalism and rioting broke out.

Miscreants barged through the gates of the BTK and set fire to several vehicles and shops inside, according to police and residents. Speaking to The Express Tribune, residents decried the damage to property and called for compensation.

They complained that the police were unprepared and no law enforcers could be seen when the protest turned violent.

"When the call for protest was announced in advance, why were the police not prepared," asked one resident, claiming that they incurred losses worth millions of rupees when the situation escalated.

However, Malir SSP Irfan Bahadur said the police were present throughout and responded swiftly when the situation turned ugly. The perpetrators were dispersed and the fire department was immediately alerted, he said.

The SSP added that police officers, including an SHO, were also injured during the clash between the miscreants and the LEAs. The police initiated action and detained several suspects, said Bahadur.

Meanwhile, reports also surfaced on social media alleging that the police had resorted to tear gas shelling to disperse the protestors. Representatives of the Sindh Action Committee and civil society groups distanced themselves from the vandalism and maintained that their protest was peaceful and that they left the site as soon as the situation turned violent.

The protestors allege that the BTK management is trying to occupy lands in the nearby Noor Muhammad Gabol Goth, Usman Allahrakhiyo Goth, Hadi Bakhsh Gabol Goth and Abdullah Gabol Goth besides other lands in the vicinity.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 07/06/2021)



### **Civil society leaders pledge to resist forcible occupation of goths**

A joint meeting of representatives of civil society and trade unions in the office of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan pledged to continue their struggle against "forced occupation" of goths and land and demanded release of all political workers arrested after the recent protest against Bahria Town.

As per details, the joint meeting of the representatives of civil society and trade unions was held to discuss in detail the situation after the Bahria Town incident.

The meeting participants said: "The protest of June 6 against the occupation of villages by Bahria Town was a peaceful sit-in and it was attended by people belonging to all ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

"They came to show solidarity with the affected local population and made the sit-in a success," they added.

"The sit-in was organised by the local communities of Malir against forced occupation of their land and villages and construction on them for commercial purposes."

"This was a peaceful assembly of people, but just before its end, there were incidents of arson and violence. The organisers of the protest repeatedly announced that they did not belong or support these violent activities. The sit-in speakers also appealed to the law enforcement officials present there to stop and arrest the arsonists. However, the police and private security of the Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) remained silent spectators and let the situation get worse."

The meeting participants expressed deep concern that the police arrested hundreds of "peaceful political workers and implicated them in anti-terrorism cases". They condemned this and demanded the release of all arrested political workers immediately and withdrawal of antiterrorism cases against them.

The meeting also showed grave concern over attack on the house of Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz chairman Sanan Qureshi and his "illegal" detention.

It also condemned filing of antiterrorism cases against Indigenous Rights Alliance leaders Gul Hassan Kalmati, Khaliq Junejo, Murad Gabol, Jahanzeb Kalmati, and others including Jalal Shah, Zain Shah and Qadir Magsi.

The meeting participants condemned a "conspiracy" of some "anti-people, and anti-Sindh reactionary elements" to fan ethnic, linguistic and sectarian hatred in the garb of the BTK incident.

It said that this was a very dangerous trend and it would be resisted at all costs.

The meeting was of the opinion that this is a pre-planned conspiracy.

"This conspiracy would further suffocate society and create anarchy and chaos." The meeting expressed complete support and solidarity with those who are struggling to safeguard their resources, land and goths and pledged to raise voice against land-grabbing mafia.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter 14, 11/06/2021)

### **SC stays construction on land retrieved from sea, seeks report from KDA**

The Supreme Court directed the director general Karachi Development Authority to produce a comprehensive report about a piece of land alleged to have been allotted after it was retrieved from the sea in Clifton and stayed all construction activities on it.

The SC also asked the KDA DG to turn up with the original plan of the KDA regarding Clifton and Kehkashan schemes on Wednesday (today).

The bench also issued notices to the proposed owners of the plots on which Com 1, Com 4, Com 5 malls etc are said to be built.

Earlier, the SC had also put on notice the owner of a recently constructed building (Com 3 Mall) adjacent to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Park in Clifton and sought a report after it was informed that the plot was a part of the park.

*Wapda chairman, K-IV project director summoned with report today*

A representative of a non-governmental organisation, Shehri-Citizens for a Better Environment, had informed the bench that the plot belonged to the park.

Some officials had also argued that the Sindh Revenue Board had allotted the land, but the chief justice said the SRB had nothing to do with it as the land belonged to the KDA.

A three-judge SC bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed in its order issued on Tuesday also passed directives to the Karachi commissioner to implement its earlier orders and remove all encroachments from Kidney Hill Park till Wednesday, and warned that the court would be constrained to pass a coercive order if he failed to comply.

**Shortage of water**

The Karachi Water and Sewerage Board managing director contended before the bench that the provincial metropolis was getting 550 million gallons of water per day against the required 1,200mgd.

The KWSB MD further maintained that 450mgd was being supplied from the Keenjhar Lake and 100mgd from the Hub Dam and added that there was a need of 1,200mgd for the city and the Greater Karachi Water Supply Scheme, commonly known as K-IV, would provide additional supply of 650mgd to bridge the deficit.

He further asserted that the K-IV project was initiated in 2007 and Rs25 billion was approved for its phase-I and Rs11bn had already been spent on it and now the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) had taken over the project on the intervention of the federal government.

The chief justice wondered whether the water supply through K-IV could reach the city as there were apprehensions that the same may be consumed by the housing societies located on the outskirts of the city.

The bench directed the chairman of Wapda and the project director of K-IV to turn up with a report regarding the status of K-IV on Wednesday.

In 2018 a Supreme Court-mandated commission on water and sanitation issues of Sindh had expressed annoyance over the failure of the authorities concerned in providing any substantial material about the 22 realignments in the K-IV project and warned that it might refer the matter to the National Accountability Bureau after an application was filed against the realignments.

A resident of Usman Allah Rakhio Goth in Gadap Town had filed an application before the commission contending that the alignments, approved in 2016, were the only straight and shortest possible time/money-saving route, but the applicant alleged that the realignment of the project was based on mala fide intentions to achieve ulterior motives and to benefit Bahria Town Karachi.

Meanwhile, during the hearing of a matter about water supply to the residents of Defence Housing Authority, the chief executive officer of Cantonment Board Clifton and the KWSB MD told the court that neither the CBC was able to provide water to its residents nor could the KWSB supply water to the residents of Karachi.

They said the CBC was not getting its share of water (9mgd) from the KWSB as was agreed upon in 1999.

**'KWSB should be shut down'**

The CJP came down hard on KWSB MD Asadullah Khan and CBC CEO Saleem Hassan for their failure to provide water and remarked that the KWSB should be shut down as it had failed to achieve the basic purpose for which it had been established.

He also asked the CBC CEO that, admittedly, they were not in a position to provide water to the people then why they were continuously working on the expansion of the DHA.

The CJP further said that the business of water supply through tankers was going on and huge money was being charged from the residents of Karachi and these tankers were taking water from the supply lines of the KWSB.

**Larkana commissioner, Jacobabad DC summoned**

The bench summoned the commissioner of Larkana and the deputy commissioner of Jacobabad with four officials of the education department after an applicant submitted that hotels were built and run on the premises of schools in Jacobabad and the district administration was helpless since some local education officials were very influential.

It directed the district police officer of Jacobabad to ensure that all these officials would appear before the court on Wednesday.

A copy of the application was also provided to the Sindh advocate general, who sought time to obtain instructions.

**Amenity plot**

The bench asked the senior director of the anti-encroachment cell to remove encroachments from an amenity plot after it was informed that the plot located in Block 15, Scheme 16, on Rashid Minhas Road adjacent to the UBL Cricket Ground was encroached upon and some construction work was being carried out on it.

The bench also directed the Karachi commissioner to ensure that a proper park was built on it and the same was not used for any commercial purpose.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 16/06/2021)

**President blames authorities for illegal constructions**

President of Pakistan Dr Arif Alvi said on Tuesday that in the past, amenity plots were used for residential or commercial purposes in connivance with the city's departmental authorities and metropolitan corporations.

Meeting people affected by the apex court's ruling to demolish illegal constructions across the city, the president said the Chief Justice of Pakistan had ordered an end to illegalities in the allotments of plots and construction of buildings on residential or amenity plots.

He urged builders to change their attitude and act responsibly when dealing with such matters. Dr Alvi assured the affected people that he would communicate their legal concerns on different forums.

Earlier, members of the Association of Builders and Developers (ABAD), people affected by the Supreme Court's demolition orders, including residents of Nasla Tower, Gujjar Nalla and Alladin Park, as well as representatives of South City Hospital, briefed the President about their apprehensions.

Dr Alvi was told that about 40,000 to 50,000 families are being affected. They complained that no action was ordered against the officers involved in allowing such illegal constructions. Nasla Towers residents told the president that the building was approved by the concerned quarters.

(By APP The Express Tribune, 04, 23/06/2021)

### Land and power

Courts are duty-bound to judge in line with the law – no matter what. While the instructions from the honourable Chief Justice of Pakistan concerning illegal occupation on the government land risks homelessness and joblessness, they could not have deviated from what the law demands. An estimated 50,000 people are estimated to be affected from the anti-encroachment drive ordered by the Supreme Court along the Gujjar and Korangi nullahs alone. Similar drives that have been and are being conducted across the city have directly affected more than 150,000 labourers, settlers and residents alike — their livelihood vanished in a single blow. What many don't realise is that a humanitarian crisis is in the making.

Illegal construction, china-cutting and land-grabbing have all been rampant practices that have destroyed the rich life of the bustling city. Citizens have to face serious transport, wastage and drainage issues as a result of corrupt practices and gross mismanagement on the part of the authorities concerned. Demolitions of illegal structures are, however, not a viable solution. The reality is that encroachments are of two types: one, done by the poor for the sake of their livelihood to make ends meet; and two, by those in power to enhance their control, wealth and self-interest. They cannot be treated the same. Furthermore, officials cannot outright ignore the massive informal sector as a staggering 12 million people living in vulnerable informal settlements contribute to about 35% of the total economy. The economy needs to be made inclusive.

The anti-encroachment drive itself has taken different forms. Poor settlers and hawkers are completely shunned, middle-class residents are given minimal reparations and no action is taken against the powerful rich. If the government has failed to control and meet the needs of the burgeoning population, why do common citizens have to face the consequences? The court needs to conduct a thorough probe and punish all those involved in corrupt land practices. Only then can the problem be uprooted.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 28/06/2021)

### Land struggles

THE most widespread form of political conflicts taking place across the country these days are struggles over land. Within this larger category, there are three types: disputes over the acquisition and conversion of rural land into (mostly) higher-end residential real estate; displacement from urban informal settlements; and the right to use urban public space.



In a few cases, the antagonists seeking to repurpose land are state actors on behalf of private sector actors, in others it is private actors on behalf of the state, and in some it is state and private actors working collectively. On the other side of these conflicts are people fighting to retain their source of livelihood, their source of shelter, or, failing that, obtain just compensation from public and private authorities.

Some of these struggles have made it to our television screens. The case of Bahria Town's takeover of goth lands in Karachi's outskirts (type 1), the proposed acquisitions for the Ravi Riverfront project (type 1), the Gujjar nullah demolitions (type 2), and the anti-encroachment operations around Empress Market (type 3) are high-profile cases. In previous years, katchi abadi displacements in Islamabad received some attention too.

*In other countries, local movements around land and housing have received tremendous support from political parties and civil society.* But there are many more such cases taking place at a reduced scale across the country. Almost every announcement or press release of a local bureaucrat claiming success in 'freeing up xyz billion rupees of land', or the launch of an 'exciting new investment opportunity' in a housing development is likely on the back of something similar.

Pakistan's experience with this is not unique. Land struggles are a common feature in countries of the Global South. Previously, it used to be the state taking over land for some large infrastructure project like a dam or a highway. In the present, it is usually demographic pressure, the value of land and the desire to profit off it, and the kickbacks, benefits and rents that can be obtained from it that make it a lucrative commodity and a source of conflict. What takes it one step further in Pakistan is land's role as a source of saving and speculative gain, and the attendant societal greed that flocks to it.

Whatever the configuration, the basic story remains that some people need land to ensure their very existence, either as a source of livelihood, or as a source of shelter, while others desire land to line their pockets. And in most instances, it is the latter that prevail.

Urban public opinion, while being charitable to the poor in rhetoric, is generally ambivalent or indifferent to these struggles. Some go as far as to proclaim the inevitability of such transitions. This almost Darwinian argument suggests that coercive or 'market-based'

displacement of rural populations and informal settlements is inevitable and even desirable. Take the defence being offered for the Ravi Riverfront project by well-heeled supporters of the current government, for example. Their argument is that Lahore is facing tremendous amounts of population pressure so establishing a new city on arable land is the right decision for the greater good. Or using a similar logic, how Bahria Town is catering to growing housing demand in Karachi.

Missing from both conversations is a concern over what happens to the literally thousands that are being displaced and who have, through their resistance against the Punjab and Sindh governments respectively, made it clear that they are not on board with this 'greater good'.

The argument that they're getting money for selling their land doesn't hold at all either because it equates a one-time payment that is usually much less than the actual value of the land with a perpetual source of livelihood/shelter. And this does not even hold in the case of those being displaced from informal settlements who are often denied any type of compensation.

That said, the burden of taking a morally and ethically justifiable position does not fall on random citizens on Twitter. It falls on political parties who are, on paper at least, supposed to represent the interests of all citizens, not just property developers and their investors. It is here where Pakistan's case really stands out in stark contrast to most other countries of the Global South. In other places, local movements around land and housing have received tremendous support from political parties and civil society, often forming a key component of their support base. In Brazil for example, the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra/MST) has grown to be a formidable political and social force in rural areas. In urban areas of the country, activism for the right to decent housing and adequate public services in informal settlements now forms the backbone of support for the Workers Party (the PT), and has led to pro-poor policies being adopted by municipal governments.

Within Pakistan's immediate neighbourhood, the Trinamool Congress, whose victory over the BJP in recent Bengal state elections was being (rightly) celebrated by all and sundry here, became popular because of its defence of rural communities in Nandigram against forceful acquisition of land for private companies by the government.

Contrast this with Pakistan, where land developers of all stripes are facilitated by all mainstream political parties and the judiciary. Where sitting provincial and federal governments go to great lengths to point out how this rampant conversion of people's livelihoods and shelter for profits of the few is a central plank of their development strategy. Where the laundered proceeds of real estate development are given safe passage and an 'agreeable adjustment', and where those resisting this injustice like activists of the Awami Workers Party, the Sindhi rights movements, and the farmers' movements in Lahore and Sheikhpura, are subjected to repression, imprisonment, and coercion. There are many aspects of inequity and injustice in Pakistan's political economy, and perhaps no other phenomenon puts them in as sharp a focus as these struggles over land.  
(By Umair Javed Dawn, 06, 28/06/2021)

### **Crumbling apartment building evacuated at midnight**

The district administration evacuated a building on emergency basis late on Sunday night when cracks started to appear in the structure.

The residents were not even allowed to collect their valuables and many people, in their sleeping pyjamas and t-shirts, had to rush out lest the structure might collapse at any instant. "The floor tiles were cracking, the bathroom tiles were falling, walls were cracking, we just rushed out to save our lives," a panicked resident told The Express Tribune.

Many residents of the building went to the homes of their relatives while some people in the locality opened their doors to accommodate their neighbours, particularly the womenfolk, to save them from the embarrassment of standing out in the street in the middle of the night, thinking where they should go.

The residential building located on plot no 374 Allahwala Town Korangi Sector A/31 within the remits of Korangi Industrial Area (KIA) police station will be torn down as per the recommendation of the engineers of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), officials said.

According to the residents, cracks began to appear in the walls of 10 apartments of the four-storey building built on 94 square yard plot nearly at 11:30 on Sunday night.

The area residents promptly called Madadgar police 15. As the news of a building cracking up spread, police, assistant commissioner and SBCA officers reached the site, inspected the structure and, got the residents evacuated completely and locked the main gate to seal the building.

According to the area residents, the building is two-and-a-half year old. At the time of construction of building they had observed that various materials were of substandard quality while the iron bars were also old.

The residents said that although SBCA gives permission for ground-plus-two buildings in the area, builders erect six storey buildings allegedly by greasing the palms of the officers concerned.

The area residents shared that they know the names of the people who would take money from contractors. The residents however feared facing consequences upon sharing the names since similar incidents have happened in the past. The residents were not even allowed to take out their belongings when the building was being sealed. The ill-fated residents went to their relative's homes.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 29/06/2021)