
NEWSCLIPPINGS

JANUARY TO JUNE 2019

HOUSING



Urban Resource Centre

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Plea against SBCA's planned demolition dismissed

The Sindh High Court on Tuesday dismissed an application of a construction firm against the Sindh Building Control Authority over the planned demolition of an under-construction building on the premises of a park.

The firm through its lawyer moved an application against the SBCA and Karachi Municipal Corporation seeking contempt of court proceedings for serving a notice regarding the demolition of an under-construction structure at Bagh Ibne Qasim in Clifton.

The lawyer contended that the SHC had passed a restraining order in 2001 and despite that the SBCA and KMC had served a notice for demolishing the building. The counsel also pleaded for extension in the restraining order.

However, lawyer for the SBCA and KMC Sameer Ghazanfar argued that no previous restraining order was at present in field and the application was not maintainable. He further said that the Supreme Court had ordered the KMC, Karachi Development Authority and SBCA to demolish the illegally constructed buildings on parks and amenity plots after serving a notice.

After hearing both sides, a two-judge SHC bench headed by Justice Mohammad Junaid Ghaffar dismissed the application.

Petition against Arif Alvi

The same bench on Tuesday adjourned the hearing of a petition challenging the candidature of Dr Arif Alvi for presidency till Jan 21. Petitioner Azmat Rehan, who had lost the decades-long civil litigation regarding the ownership of a salt firm against the Alvia Tabligh Trust, contended that Dr Alvi, a co-plaintiff in the suit, was not qualified to be elected president of Pakistan as he had allegedly filed fake and forged documents before the court in the 1977 civil case.

The bench said that the record and proceedings of the civil case be made part of this petition.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 02/01/2019)

SC orders Lahore DHA to develop plots sold in its name

The Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) to develop in the next five years over 11,000 plots in a scheme in Lahore which were offered for sale in the market under its banner.

A three-judge SC bench headed by Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar directed that the scheme be handed over to the DHA to provide relief to the 11,716 affected people. Around 60,000 individuals have been looted in the name of the scheme in Lahore and those behind the scam fled after defrauding the people to the tune of Rs13 billion.

The bench, which had taken up the multi-billion-rupee financial scam on a suo motu, also ordered conducting rendition of accounts between the DHA and the Eden Garden Housing Scheme (EGHS) Lahore after setting aside all the agreements signed between the two developers. The EGHS had launched the housing scheme in the name of DHA.

Is it job of armed forces to develop housing societies, asks CJP

While reserving its ruling on the issue, the apex court also hinted at constituting an implementation bench after the final order. It asked the suspects currently under the custody of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to approach relevant forums.

The housing schemes launched by the EGHS are already under the scrutiny of NAB. Dr Murtaza Amjad, the son-in-law of former chief justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry and chief executive officer of the Eden Housing Limited, fled the country after the scam surfaced.

Barrister Khurram and a representative of the DHA explained before the court that the DHA had limited role in the scam as it sold its name in exchange for 30 per cent of the total shares in the 25,000-kanal project.

But the chief justice regretted that the name of DHA was used and that the human rights cell of the apex court had so far received 109,000 complaints in this regard. "Is it the job of the armed forces to develop housing societies?" the chief justice wondered, asking the counsel to name any country where the army operated housing schemes.

The job of the armed forces was to protect the country's borders, and not to indulge in commercial activities, the court observed. It would have been understandable had the DHA done this for martyrs and widows, it said.

When the court was told by the DHA representative that the Malaysian army also operated housing schemes in their country, the chief justice wondered whether they had only this model to follow.

The name of DHA had been stained every time they launched housing schemes, the chief justice observed, adding that they bought disputed and controversial lands and by doing this they sold their goodwill. He regretted that it seemed that the DHA ran their business by using the names of widows and martyrs as a shield to pocket royalties in their names.

The court also hinted that it might issue an order for the DHA to acquire the land from the EGHS and make payments for the lands Eden Housing gave to the DHA.
(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 01, 02/01/2019)

THE FUTURE OF KARACHI'S SADDAR

For the past 30 years, the future of Empress Market and hence of Karachi's Saddar has been a subject of debate among architects, planners, administrators and politicians. Some have proposed that the building should be turned into a museum, others have wanted it to become an art gallery and, more recently, the planners appointed by the government have proposed that it should be turned into a high-end dining space. There are also those who have said it is, after all, Empress Market (the emphasis being on market). So why should it not remain a market?



All proposals have been accompanied by area plans. The proposal of the present city mayor is simple: Empress Market should be restored to its former glory. To which period "former" belongs to has not been defined.

The future function of Empress Market will, to a great extent determine whether Saddar is to acquire an elitist and sanitised physical and social environment, taking away yet more more space from the middle-middle, lower-middle and working classes of the city, or will it, in some way, reflect its existing populous nature. After the recent demolition of the bazaars around Empress Market, the eviction of shopkeepers from within it, and the removal of the hawkers from Saddar's streets and pavements, the question of its future has become all the more important, not only for Saddar, but for Karachi as a whole. So, a bit of history is necessary.

The recent 'anti-encroachment' drive in Karachi has resulted in the loss of over 200,000 jobs as well as threats to the multi-class social and cultural fabric of Saddar. Eos presents a proposal to ensure that the city's tangible and intangible heritage are both preserved...

A HISTORY OF SADDAR

Saddar was established in 1839, after the British occupied Karachi as a trading post, in competition with the markets of the native city which were located within and on the periphery of the walled city of Karachi, mainly in the areas of Kharadar and Mithadar. After the annexation of Sindh in 1843, the British administrative and military functions were located in Saddar and its environs. The first Church in Karachi was also built in 1843 in Saddar and, between then and the turn of the century, a large number of the important administrative and military complexes were constructed in Saddar along with civic and religious buildings of the Christian and Parsi communities.

The freedom fighters of the rebellion of 1857 against the British were also blown from the mouths of cannons in Saddar on the parade ground where Empress Market is located today and the parts of their blown-up bodies were buried in pits on the parade ground. As such, Empress Market is also their mausoleum. There are many legends associated with the rebellion and they survive with the residents of Chanesar Goth, many of whose ancestors were sent to Kala Paani to die of disease and starvation because they had supported the rebellion led by Ramay Panday, who was from Bareilly (in Uttar Pradesh) and a Subedar in the army of the East India Company.

Empress Market was inaugurated in 1889. It was designed as a meat, vegetable, fruit and household goods market and it was meant for the families of the British administrators and soldiers and Goans and Parsis who inhabited Saddar. The area around the market had posh cafes, bars, and restaurants such as the Saddar Tea Rooms, Elphinstone Restaurant, India Coffee House, the old Todi shop and Café Parisian. Badly dressed persons were not permitted to enter Saddar and it came to be known as the European Quarter of Karachi where the white population could shop in a not unfamiliar environment, often with merchandise brought from home.

Here it is important to note that Empress Market was part of a larger urban design project. It was placed on the axis of Napier Street (Karam Ali Talpur Road). During the same period, the Edulji Dinshaw Dispensary was also built (1882) and it was placed on the axis of Somerset Street (Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road). The Parsi maternity home was built in 1917. These three buildings are built around Jahangir Park, which was inaugurated in 1883 and was the first and last gravel park of Karachi.

A number of other axes were also created by the British. An important one in Saddar is Clark Street (Shahrah-e-Iraq). Christ the King monument and St. Patrick's Cathedral lie on its axis and so does the High Court. Before Partition, there was an important monument on the crossing of Clark Street and Somerset Street emphasising the importance of the axis. The monument has long since disappeared. In any plan for Saddar, the importance of these axes has to be taken into account and respected.

Because of its importance, Saddar also became an important public transport terminal of a city that, by 1941, had a population of 450,000. Bus routes terminated here and it was an important tramway junction.



And so Empress Market and Saddar continued until 1947 when the demography of Karachi underwent a major change due to Partition and the market, along with Saddar as a whole, had to accommodate the needs of a much larger population and also cater to different classes and ethnicities. By 1977, Saddar had 44 pre-Partition businesses still operative, 17 non-text bookshops, 17 bars and nightclubs, 11 billiard rooms, 12 cinemas and four music schools. In addition, it had 37 restaurants and cafes. These facilities catered to different classes and existed side by side. Jahangir Park became

the centre of political and religious activity and a cricket ground, where Pakistan's leading cricketers have played and received training. Thus, a multi-class public space was created which was within walking distance from the federal secretariat on the Artillery Maidaan, Civil Lines (where embassies were located), the university on Baba-e-Urdu Road, and the D.J College, S.M Law College, and N.E.D Engineering College. As a result, a mix of bureaucrats, politicians, intellectuals, students and proletariat became part of Saddar's commercial and intellectual life.

Since Saddar was the destination or transit point for the majority of commuters, the new commercial demands found space around Empress Market and its neighborhood to establish themselves. The state supported this process by regularising and, in some cases, creating the emerging business markets.

With 'Islamisation' in 1977, entertainment and recreation disappeared from Saddar. The night clubs, bars and billiard rooms vanished. With this change, the elite stopped visiting it. The retail markets started to cater almost entirely to the lower and lower-middle class. However, Saddar remained a major bus terminal in Karachi and, as a result, the number of commuters continued to increase with an increase in population. Hawkers emerged to cater to the needs of the commuters and occupied pavements and, later on, even entire streets. In the sixties, trade and commerce expanded rapidly but no place was developed in the city for catering to it. Since Saddar was the destination or transit point for the majority of commuters, the new commercial demands found space around Empress Market and its neighbourhood to establish themselves. The state supported this process by regularising and, in some cases, creating the emerging business markets. So in the process, the tea market (with strong links with Kenya, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh), the bird market (with strong links with legal bird suppliers in Africa and Southeast Asia but also with smugglers in the wildlife trade) and the dry fruit market (with strong links with Balochistan and Afghanistan) were created in 1962. The cloth markets with strong links with Chinese and Indian product importers were created in 1972-1973. The tea, dry fruit and bird markets were specialised markets, and their customers were those who had an acquired taste for these products. All informally created markets, hawkers, beggars and performers paid bhatta (extortion money) amounting to crores of rupees per month to 'collectors' protected by the police.

This entire development was organic and ad hoc, its nature determined by the culture and the financial and technical constraints of

- DEMOLISHED MARKETS**

 - Paan Market and Book Market (both markets were on the same side)
 - Dry Fruit Market
 - Tea Market
 - Umer Farooq Cloth Market
 - Birds Market
 - Kite Market
 - Four hotels
 - Two tea shops outside
 - Ice depot
 - Ali Husain Bazar (vegetable market)
 - Egg Wholesale Market
 - Pansar Market

those who created it. Its "disorganisation" was heavily criticised by planners and city managers. At the same time, the ambience it created was appreciated by many architects and romantics, and especially by tourists. This was because of its strong informal culture and atmosphere of an "oriental bazaar." People from all walks of life kept visiting Empress Market but it was the commuters and Karachi's middle-middle and lower-middle class that were the majority. As the number of predominantly male visitors increased, the number of women visitors decreased and, with the end of elite-related recreation and entertainment, and the creation of alternative bazaars in the elite ghettos, the "begums" ceased to visit it.

WHAT WAS LOST?

It is not possible to determine the extent of loss that the demolition has caused to the informal economy of Karachi, which according to estimates is 30-40 percent of its total economy. Nor is it possible to determine the loss incurred to various chains of production, delivery, wholesale and retail. However, it is possible to determine the number of markets that have been demolished, and the number of jobs that have been lost in the process (a list of demolished markets is given on page 1). Here, it is important to note that 72 percent of all Karachi jobs are informal and the majority of jobs lost due to the demolition are almost all informal.

Estimates vary. However, the figure most quoted is that 1,700 shops were demolished, of which 1,200 were either leased or were paying rent to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. Inside the market, 93 butchers' shops were also destroyed although they were not encroachers. In addition, fruit and vegetable markets were removed from the pavements and so were approximately 3,000 push-cart hawkers. These figures do not include mobile hawkers and those who spread out cloth on the ground and placed their wares on it. It also does not include the musicians and performers who entertained the commuting public, nor the beggars who extracted charity from the visitors. Surveys by NED University students of development studies and the Karachi Urban Resource Centre have established that over 200,000 persons lost their jobs due to the demolitions. These include suppliers of manufactured goods, meat and vegetables; employees of the various businesses; porters, solid-waste collectors, chowkidaars, and 20-30 Hindu women who sold spices on the roadside like their parents and grandparents had done before them.



Visits and meetings with the affected population established that they were poor and, as a result of the demolition, they are rapidly falling into debt, without which they can no longer feed their children or pay their rents.

In addition to the markets, Saddar also has a cultural life revolving around the educational and religious institutions of the Christians and Muslims. The most important Catholic cathedral (St. Patrick's) is located here along with a number of Catholic educational institutions, including St Patrick's High School and St Joseph's Convent High School, set up in 1861 and 1862 respectively. Katchi Memon Masjid, an important mosque and educational institution of Karachi is also located here. Then, there is night cricket played on the streets under floodlights in Ramazan and also on weekends. There are also special bazaars during Eid and people from all over Karachi, including its distant

katchi abadis visit them. And then there is also a Sunday book bazaar at Regal Chowk which has been there since the last 50 years and attracts students and book lovers from every corner of the city.

With the building of the Atrium Cinemas and the commercial area connected to them, a process of gentrification is emerging in Saddar. Owners of properties are being approached by developers, and fast-food outlets are exploring the possibility of establishing themselves here. Some have already done so. This gentrification is welcome and should be guided through appropriate building by-laws and zoning regulations that also promote the reuse of heritage buildings. However, Saddar's present reality and its pre- and



post-Partition history and tangible and intangible heritage should also be protected and promoted so that a multi-class public space can be recreated. For example, a non-obtrusive plaque in a corner of the Empress Market courtyard should be placed in memory of the martyrs of the freedom movement of 1857 and should tell their forgotten story.

Surveys by NED University students of development studies and the Karachi Urban Resource Centre have established that over 200,000 persons lost their jobs due to the demolitions.

THE PROPOSAL

The manner in which this can be done is by accommodating the old markets and bringing back the hawkers in an organised manner so that their presence does not create congestion or obstruct pedestrian and vehicular movement. Popular culture can also be promoted by creating public spaces for performances by young people who constantly demand open spaces in the city centre for their cultural activities and fail to get it. Some occupy space without permission, such as the ghazal singers of Kotari Parade did when Muhammad Bin Qasim Park was open, and the singers and dancers in the Frere Hall gardens. More recently, such space has formally been provided in a park in Sector 11-B of North Karachi, which has been taken over by Habib Bank Limited under the 'Adopt a Park' Scheme.

Keeping the above vision in view, it is proposed that:

1. Bring back the meat, vegetable, spices and household goods shops in the interior of a beautifully restored Empress Market. This was its original function.
2. Create about 800 shops in an organised manner around the building of the Empress Market. These shops can be of metal, dismantle-able and of low height. They can be arranged in a manner that the view of the Empress Market is not obstructed. Even after they have been put in place there will be sufficient space around the market to accommodate events such as weekend bazaars, food courts and cultural happenings (for details see above plans and 3-D models).
3. Where wide pavements are available, such as on Preedy Street, small beautifully designed and dismantle-able kiosks can be placed for commercial activity.
4. Bazaars that cannot be accommodated around the market can be shifted to the City Government District Karachi (CDGK) parking plaza and the open space next to it can be developed in an organised manner as a hawkers' market. To make the plaza and the hawkers' market commercially viable, a number of bus stops should be created next to them on Preedy Street. A pleasant walkway should link the hawkers' market to the Empress Market podium. The walkway should continue to an appropriately upgraded Regal Chowk so that the weekend book bazaar can be held in a more pleasant environment. The walkway should continue to the Burnes Road food street, where pavements can be widened to accommodate roadside eating spaces. The walkway can then turn right to a renovated Urdu Bazaar which is visited by hundreds if not thousands of students and book lovers every day, and then turn left to the open space near the S.M. Law College and the D.J. Science College, and also to Pakistan Chowk. Many such walkways can be created to link students, small businesses, hawkers and different types of eating places with each other.
5. Hawkers' bazaars that are held on M.A. Jinnah Road on Sundays and are visited by low-income groups should also be organised so as to have a better appearance. Spaces for community, cultural and social use should be created wherever open space is available. Perhaps some aspects of the Pakistan Chowk Community Centre can serve as a model.
6. The axes that were created by the British should be enhanced. Pavements on both sides of Karam Ali Talpur Road, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road and Shahrah-e-Iraq should be widened and trees on either side should be planted so as to enhance the axis and integrate important public buildings into a larger plan.
7. The car parking problem in Saddar is less related to the non-availability of space and more to traffic and space management. Space for parking can be considerably enhanced by segregating through and local traffic in Saddar. Proposals for this have been made previously by the Traffic Engineering Bureau.
8. A major constraint in improving Saddar's physical and social environment is related to the poor state of Karachi's public transport vehicles and the pollution they cause, both visually and environmentally. In addition, there is an absence of proper bus stops, pavements and traffic management. If these aspects are not addressed, it is more than possible that Saddar will

go back to being what it was before the demolition. But then, this is not a Saddar-specific problem but holds good for all of Karachi.

THE PROCESS

The above proposals are schematic in nature. They, or any future plans, need to be critically examined and discussed with the Saddar market operators, hawkers' unions and the residents of Saddar. To make this possible, it will be necessary to follow a process described below.

- A. Categorise the activities and markets that have been demolished and those that still exist.
- B. Determine which markets and activities need to be rehabilitated around the Empress Market and those that can function commercially even if they are relocated to the Parking Plaza.
- C. Determine the number of hawkers that can be placed at bus stops and the locations for such placement.
- D. Hire appropriate consultants that have an understanding of the socio-economic aspects of urban development and are acquainted with the evolution and history of Karachi and of the people that inhabit it.

The map shows the proposed walkway linking the hawkers' market to Empress Market and continuing to the Burnes Road food street and Pakistan Chowk



To make any proposal possible, institutional arrangements have to be made. Maybe it is time to have an institution that deals with planning and implementation of developments in Saddar with a vision that it is to be a multi-class city centre, catering to the needs of not only its residents, but of Karachiites of all classes and ethnicities, by providing them the institutional and physical space for setting up their businesses and for expressing their culture. But such an institution has to be subservient to a larger Karachi planning and development agency, which unfortunately does not exist in any effective form.

It also requires a political establishment that is less paranoid of liberal values. A struggle for the creation of such an agency, and for societal values that reflect the aspirations of Karachi's youth, has to be a part of this struggle as well.

(By Arif Hasan Dawn EOS, 01, 06/01/2019)

HERITAGE: AS KARACHI CONTINUES TO VANISH

I do not remember if anyone seriously thought of starting a campaign to save Karachi's old buildings till Hameed Haroon asked Ghazi Salahuddin and me to team up to highlight the need for conservation of the city's architectural heritage in The Star. The occasion was a dinner at the Garden East residence of Mumtaz Rashdi. This was early 1983 — 35 years ago.



It was decided that Ghazi would write the text and I would photograph the buildings. We titled the campaign "Vanishing Karachi" and it ran on the back page of the evening paper The Star every Thursday during 1983 and 1984. In those days, The Star had a galaxy of passionate journalists: Zohra Yusuf and her colleagues, the dear departed souls Saneeya Husain, Ameneh Azam Ali, Vai Ell and Kaleem Omar. Other writers, such as Nusrat Nasrullah, Saher Ali, and my late friends Anwar Enayatullah, Hameed Zaman and Sultan Ahmad, too, picked up their pens and wrote in Dawn, Morning News, The News and Leader. Editorials appeared in various papers

highlighting the importance of heritage for any civilised society.

I remember that Qazi Faez Isa, (I think he had not yet become a judge) on behalf of Shehri (Citizens for a Better Environment), appealed to the Karachi Development Authority to save Ispahani Building on McLeod Road (now I.I Chundrigar Road) from Muslim Commercial Bank (now MCB) getting ready to demolish it. (Alas! The building could not be saved).

Despite a multitude of art lovers in the city, Karachi's architectural heritage is slowly disappearing

'The Vanishing Karachi' series in The Star was followed by other activities of our advertising agency Oscar; a 12-page wall calendar and picture cards were designed and sponsored by Pakistan Cables Limited; exhibitions of photographs of old buildings were held at Pakistan American Cultural Centre, Karachi American School and the Karachi Arts Council. Later, I published a coffee-table book of my photographs titled Vanishing Karachi, with a foreword by Zohra Yusuf. Framed images of these buildings adorn the walls of Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT).

I may quote from its foreword: "... all the statues that once adorned the Frere Hall grounds, including one of Queen Victoria, were removed and dumped in a KMC godown [warehouse] (the removal of these statues from all public places had started as early as in 1949-50) ... There is a lot disappearing in Karachi ... street names that were once a part of the city's history now changed in a denial of the past ... consigning the contribution of the city's non-Muslim forefathers to the dustbin of history ... The multi-culturalism that once defined Karachi has also vanished with its architectural heritage ... Our history textbooks fail to acknowledge the contribution of the Goans, Parsis and Sindh Hindus, the original guardians of this city — from philanthropy to education, to the arts and architecture ..."

I would also like to quote, from the above book, my own lamentation: "With arms folded we have watched from the sidelines, the destruction of some of the most beautiful old buildings of our city: Palace Hotel on Club Road, Bliss & Company on Elphinstone Street (now Zaibunisa Street), Chopsy Building at Pakistan Chowk, Jehangir Kothari Building on Victoria Road (now Abdullah Haroon Road, Victoria Furniture on Dandas Street, all the cinema houses — Paradise, Capitol, Rex, Palace, Mayfair, Plaza, Naz, Nishat, Taj Mahal, Light House, Regal and others — in addition to many old mansions, offices and residential houses in Bath Island, Clifton, Saddar, Civil Lines, Parsi Colony and other areas of the old city."

Another book worth mentioning in this regard is Karachi: Legacies of Empire by Peerzada Salman published in 2015, comprising articles on Karachi's colonial buildings that he wrote for Dawn for four years.

A few buildings survived due to the efforts of some individuals and organisations, such as the Mohatta Palace, Flag Staff House, State Bank Library — and, of course, that remarkable feat of transporting the Nusserwanji building from Kharadar, brick-by-brick, and creating the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Clifton. Recently the Karachi Press Club building has also been renovated by the Endowment Fund Trust, saving further dilapidation of the heritage building.

Some buildings survived by default, on account of their occupation by organisations out of bounds for the common man: Victoria and Albert Museum by the Supreme Court, Jinnah Courts and Mitharam Student Hostels by the Rangers, Hindu Gymkhana by NAPA. But the others surviving, such as the Ghulam Hoosain Khalikdina Hall, the D.J. Science College, the Freemason Hall, the Eduljee Dinshaw Dispensary and the Merewether Tower need to be made presentable and maintained. Needless to say, many old buildings in areas such as Saddar, Bunder Road (now Mohammed Ali Jinnah Road), Pakistan Chowk, Frere Road (now Shahrah-i-Liaquat), etc., are being subjected to slow death in order to make room for shopping and residential complexes.

Having said that, I still fail to understand what keeps the rich corporations or the wealthy citizens of this mega city from owning these architectural wonders? If these were not suitable for business purposes, they could be transformed into museums and art galleries. There is no shortage of art lovers in this city. So, what is it that holds them back to invest in the restoration and conservation of these buildings? Is it some kind of malignant insensitivity and absence of good taste that makes the affluent fellow citizens blind to things beautiful?

(By S.M. Shahid Dawn EOS, 03, 06/01/2019)

Sindh cancels leases of forest land

The Sindh Cabinet cancelled on Monday the leases of 70,000 acres of forest land illegally allotted to different persons across the province and decided to initiate action against influential persons who have been occupying 145,245 acres of forest land illegally.

The decisions were taken in the Sindh Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Monday, which also approved a motion, granting the ability to remove the mayor, deputy mayor, chairperson or chairperson from their office with a 'simple majority' in their respective house.

The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, all provincial ministers, advisers and special assistants. According to Section 27 of the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013, "A mayor, deputy mayor, chairman or vice chairman shall be removed from office if a vote of no-confidence is passed against him or her in the prescribed manner by two third majority of the total number of the members of the council". In this regard, an amendment was moved in the law. Sindh LG minister Saeed Ghani presented an amendment to the existing law saying, "Removal of mayor and deputy-mayor with a two-third majority is against the Constitution.

When the Prime Minister, speakers and other office-bearers can be removed with a simple majority, then what is wrong with the mayor and deputy mayor?" The meeting approved the amendment and substituted the words, "by two-thirds majority", with "simple majority".

Forest land CM Shah directed the Forest department to enlist the support of police and Rangers personnel to retrieve the illegally occupied 145,245 acres of land, for which he would issue the necessary instructions. As far as the 70,000 acres of land, which has been illegally allotted, is concerned, the leases have been cancelled and the Revenue Department and Forest Department would issue the cancellation orders.

To a question of the chair, Forest Minister Syed Nasir Shah said that 13,000 acres have been retrieved from illegal occupants and action was being taken for the retrieval of the remaining land. At this, the chief minister directed him to start an operation against the illegal occupants, for which he would provide him the required police and Rangers personnel. The CM also presented another item for the reconstitution of governing bodies of various development authorities.

The cabinet authorised the local government minister to appoint the remaining members, where required, and report to the chief minister. Besides, the cabinet approved the creation of a separate department in lieu of the Sindh Board of Investment and also approved the renewal of contract of Prof Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan Rajput as chairman of the Charter of Inspection and Evaluation Committee. The Irrigation department presented three names – former secretaries Imtiaz Qazi and Idress Rajput and engineer Abdul Basit Soomro – for the position of Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority Chairman. The cabinet was told that Mr Idress Rajput has already declined while Imtiaz Qazi who has been a member of the Federal Public Service Commission, could not hold any other position. Therefore, cabinet approved the appointment Mr Basit Soomro as SIDA chairman.

Compensation to coalfield affectees Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh told the cabinet that 757 families living within one-kilometer radius of the Gorano Dam and Dukkur Chho pond should be considered as affected persons, apart from the 471 who have been displaced due to the development of Thar Coalfield Block-II.

The chief minister said that these affected people have every right to be compensated. The cabinet approved Rs900 million as donation for Thar Foundation, from which Rs100,000 would be given annually to each affected family for the next 30 years. The Thar Foundation would invest the amount and start paying compensation to the affected people of Gorano and Dukkur Chho. The cabinet also approved a compensation of Rs100,000 to 471

affected families of Thar Block-II. This compensation would be paid by Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company because they were the lease holders. These 471 families are also each being provided a house in two different villages, Senhri Dars and Tharyo Halepoto.

Sugarcane price Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu told the cabinet that the growers were demanding to increase the purchase price of sugarcane as it was stagnant from the last three years at Rs182 per 40 kg. He added that the Government of Punjab has already fixed sugarcane price at Rs180, therefore he recommended that the price should not be lower than Rs182 per maund. The minister also informed the meeting that the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association's representatives were of the view that the price of sugar had come down to Rs48 per kg in the market. The cabinet approved to fix the price of sugarcane at Rs182 per 40 kg. The cabinet also approved to authorise the agriculture minister to appoint Market Committees on his own and inform the cabinet.

Qingqi fare The Transport Department apprised the cabinet that there was no minimum or maximum fare for Qingqi and motorcycle rickshaws. Therefore, it proposed two fare slabs – Rs10 for 0 to six kilometres and Rs15 for any distance above that. The cabinet approved the fare. The chief minister directed the transport department to ensure proper safety precautions in the said rickshaws and also to register them. "Why has their registration been delayed?" he questioned. Excise Minister Mukesh Chawla told the chief minister that their registration process was being started.

Sindh forest dept directed to focus on linear plantation and urban forestry

Govt residences Services and General Administration Secretary Zulfiqar Shah briefed the cabinet on the present status of the allotments of government residences. The cabinet discussed the allotments' status and said that the forced eviction of those who were residing there against the policy would be ethically wrong. Therefore, the cabinet approved a one-time waiver for the present allottees and till their retirement, they would be entitled to stay there. However no allotment against the policy would be made from here on. The chief minister directed the chief secretary to get all the residences inspected to check if there were any outsiders residing in them. "This is unacceptable and I will not allow the misuse of government residences," he said. The secretary told the meeting said there are six residential colonies of the provincial government in Karachi.

Recruitments approved The Sindh government approved the recruitment in government departments from grade 1 to 15. During the meeting, the Services and General Administration department presented an item to seek permission to start recruitments against the vacant posts. The chief minister said that these recruitments would be made purely on merit. The guideline is to publish advertisements in newspapers and then make selection committees. He also said in lower grades, only locals can be recruited, however there would be a 5% quota for disabled and 5% for minorities. In this regard, the provincial government constituted a committee comprising Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh, Law Adviser Barrister Murtaza Wahab and the law and services secretaries to frame the rules for recruitment.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 08/01/2019)

Sindh cabinet cancels allotment of 70,000 acres of forest land

The Sindh cabinet on Monday cancelled allotment of 70,000 acres of forest land and decided to launch an operation to get 145,245 acres of illegally occupied such land vacated from influential persons.



The cabinet meeting also approved a Rs900 million donation for the Thar Foundation for investment to pay Rs100,000 annually to each of the 757 families affected by Gorano reservoir and Dukkur Chho Pond as a compensation.

By another decision, it approved two fare slabs for Qingqi rickshaws — Rs10 from 0 to 6 kilometres and Rs15 for more than 6km per passenger — and approved the amendment in the Sindh Local Government Act 2013 for the removal of a mayor, deputy mayor, chairman or vice chairman from the office if a vote of no-confidence was passed against him with a simple majority.

Amends LG law to remove mayor, others with a simple majority of council members

These were among the decisions taken by the cabinet, which met here at New Sindh Secretariat presided over by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah. The meeting, which lasted for four hours, had an agenda spread over 30 items. Those who attended the meeting included Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, all provincial ministers, advisers and special assistants.

In the backdrop of the order of the apex court to get all forest land vacated, the meeting was informed by Forest Minister Syed Nasir Shah that 13,000 acres out of 145,245 had already been retrieved from illegal occupants. The chief minister asked the minister to get the remaining land vacated at the earliest with the help of police and Rangers.

Compensation

Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh stated that 757 families living in a one-kilometre radius of Gorano reservoir and Dukkur Chho Pond had been affected apart from those 471 who had been displaced owing to the development/excavation of Thar coalfield block-II.

The cabinet also approved a compensation of Rs100,000 for the 471 affected families of Thar block-II to be paid by Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company because they were leaseholders. The 471 families were also being provided with one house in two villages — Senhri Dars and Tharyo Halepoto.

The cabinet asked the chief minister to approach the federal government to pay the affected families from oil and gas fields compensation on the same pattern and ensure local development.

Automatic meter-reading system

The meeting extended the period for the completion of the installation of an automatic meter-reading system till May 2019 by Hesco and Sepco.

Under an agreement for which Rs27.398 billion was paid to Discos (Hesco Rs10.228bn and Sepco Rs17.17bn) to clear all outstanding electricity dues for the period from July 2010 to 2016.

In addition, a monthly amount was also agreed to be paid to Hesco, Rs555.82 million, and Rs513.73m to Sepco, till the installation of AMR systems.

Sugar-cane price

The cabinet on the suggestion of Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu approved the sugarcane price to the growers not lower than Rs182 per 40kg. The meeting also authorised the agriculture minister to appoint market committees.

Approving the two-slab Qingqi fares as suggested by the transport department, the chief minister asked why the registration of the rickshaws was delayed and directed the officials concerned to ensure proper safety precautions in the rickshaws and also register them.

Regarding allotment policy, Secretary Services and General Administration Zulfiqar Shah briefed the cabinet on the present status of the allotments saying that there were six residential colonies of the provincial government in Karachi.

The cabinet discussed the allotment status and said that the forcible vacation of the accommodation from those residing there against the policy would be ethically wrong. Therefore, the cabinet approved one-time waiver for the present allottees and till their retirement they would be entitled to staying there. However, no allotment against the policy would be made onward.

Recruitments

The cabinet approved recruitment for the posts in BPS-1 to BPS-15 on merit. The chief minister directed publication of advertisements in the press and making selection committees. In lower grades only locals would be recruited. However, there would be a five per cent quota for the disabled and 5pc for minorities.

The cabinet constituted a three-member committee under Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh to frame rules for recruitment and to start recruitment.

LG law amendments

The cabinet approved amendments to the Local Govt Act 2013 presented by Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani for the removal of a mayor, deputy mayor, chairman or vice chairman from office if a vote of no-confidence was passed with a simple majority which at present requires a two-thirds majority of the total number of members of the council.

The cabinet authorised the local government minister to appoint the remaining members of the Hyderabad Development Authority and other authorities where required.

By another decision, it approved the creation of a separate department in place of the Sindh Board of Investment and also renewal of contract of Prof Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan Rajput as chairman of the Charter of Inspection and Evaluation Committee.

The irrigation department presented three names, Imtiaz Qazi, Idrees Rajput and Abdul Basit Soomro, for chairman of the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority. The cabinet approved the appointment of Basit Soomro as the two other were not available technically.

(By Habib Khan Ghorani Dawn, 15, 08/01/2019)

Saddar and Goans

THIS is with reference to Mr Arif Hassan's article on Empress Market and the history of Saddar (Eos, Jan 6). While it is a very readable article and gives the readers many facts, he fails to mention the contribution by Karachi's once-flourishing Goan community to the city's cultural life, especially in the Saddar area.

The Goans were an integral part of Karachi when Pakistan came into being and remained so for quite some time till the rise of religious extremism. With their beautiful Portuguese names the Goans were part of Karachi's mainstream life. Goan men and women worked for the government and private firms and were also in police.

There were also Goan businessmen, teachers and lawyers.

The area near we have shops selling accessories for the disabled or the crippled was the hub of Goan activity. There was a cultural centre, a dance hall and a music institute. The area bustled with activity as Christmas and New Year arrived. At least two churches were within a walking distance.

People have all but forgotten the cricket ground ran by the Karachi Goan Association. It used to host international matches. Among the cricketers the Goans produced for Pakistan was Wallis Mathias, who became captain of the national team.

Goan women wore their traditional dress, but with the rise of extremism all of them have switched over to shalwar-shirt. We have lost this wonderful community to migration. I had many Goan friends, now dead or living abroad. I miss them.

Abdul Qadeer Ahmad

(By From the Newspaper Dawn, 09, 11/01/2019)

Mayor asks PM to help resolve issue of govt quarters in Karachi

Mayor Wasim Akhtar on Friday appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan for the resolution of the issue of Martin Quarters and Pakistan Quarters' residents on the basis of equality and uniformity as hundreds of shanty towns and goths had been given a 99-year lease and ownership rights in the past.

He was speaking at a press conference at his office with members of Muttahida Qaumi Movement Rabita Committee Syed Arshad Hassan, Khalid Sultan, Zahid Mansoori and City Council parliamentary leader Aslam Shah Afridi and chairperson of the media management committee Sabheen Ghori with some residents of the quarters.

The mayor said the MQM had asked the prime minister to constitute a committee under the chairmanship of the Sindh governor with non-elected permanent residents of the city belonging to all political parties.

'Occupants themselves maintained these crumbling structures after spending huge amounts annually'

"The committee may be assigned to hear the association of the retired government servants and other affected residents and decide the case once [and] for all to the satisfaction of the agonised retired government servants, their widows and children", he said.

Mr Akhtar said the MQM-P was also reviewing the legalities in this matter to pursue this in the Supreme Court. "The MQM Coordination Committee also stands with us on this issue in the larger interest of the people and we have pledged to raise our voice on this issue at all levels," he added.

Annual maintenance costs

The mayor said that nearly 7,000 government employees were allotted hurriedly-constructed tin-roofed residential quarters by the federal government upon their migration to Pakistan and they continued to live there even after retirement. "Since these quarters were never maintained by any government agency, the occupants themselves maintained these crumbling structures after spending huge amounts annually in the hope that the government would finally transfer these quarters to them or to their widows and children," he said.

He recalled that former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had ordered construction of decent multistorey buildings for the residents of Martin and Pakistan Quarters in the city and elsewhere after the estate department had served them with notices to vacate their residences. "The federal cabinet in its meeting in 1989 resolved that the inhabitants of the government quarters should not be disturbed from their present dwellings."

He said that it was further resolved that the housing ministry would visit the site to examine the possibility of construction of new quarters on 11 acres, while the present inhabitants could be given ownership rights of the dwellings under their use.

The mayor said that again in a meeting held on Sept 28, 2004, under the chairmanship of the then prime minister, it was resolved that four-storey apartments would be built for the residents/occupants of the government quarters.

He said that while the KMC's anti-encroachment drive was in full swing, federal government officials with force came to Pakistan Quarters and threatened to demolish the quarters.

Katchi abadis regularised in the past

The mayor said that 1,400 katchi abadis in the province, including 575 in Karachi, were established by encroachers on government and municipal land and all of them were regularised with encroachers getting permanent ownership rights. "Such orders of regularisation were issued on the orders of the then prime minister in 1985 and also by the Pakistan Peoples Party's government in 2016," he added.

Answering a question, he said the katchi abadis regularised in Karachi were spread over 15,000 acres of government and municipal land. "Similarly, under the Goth Abad Scheme, the provincial government conferred proprietary rights upon those occupants who had established goths on government land without any authorisation," he said.

The mayor said that 26,632 unauthorised goths/villages established on government land had been regularised by 1999.

He said the central government acquired land from time to time in the past from the KMC for specific purposes as well as the construction/establishment of its employees' quarters. "Nearly 40 acres, situated on either side of Jahangir Road up to Golimar, were acquired by the central government from the KMC for the establishment of Martin and Clayton Quarters and Jahangir Quarters," he added.

The mayor said that seven katchi abadis, established between Martin Quarters and Jahangir Quarters, were also given a 99-year lease.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 15, 12/01/2019)

Karachi's Saddar

THIS refers to the article 'The future of Karachi's Saddar' (Jan 6). After the anti-encroachment drive in Saddar, especially Empress Market, we need to make it a heritage sight.

UNESCO needs to be consulted for transforming Karachi's old city area into a heritage sight so that it acquires global recognition.

Akhtar Naveed Syed

(By From the Newspaper Dawn, 09, 15/01/2019)

Sepa to seek 'complete details' of DHA City projects

The Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) will ask the DHA City managers to provide complete details of its ongoing and future projects and carry out a cumulative impact assessment study.



hospital project held

This assurance came from Sepa during a public hearing held on Tuesday where they were quizzed over a lack of information about the DHA City projects.

The public hearing pertained to the environmental impact study of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (SKMCHRC) to be built at the Healthcare City, part of DHA City, in Gadap Town.

Public hearing about environmental impact study of Rs4.5bn Shaukat Khanum cancer

Located near M-9, the project is estimated to cost Rs4.5 billion. It's planned to get operational by 2021 as a 50-bedded facility and gradually have 400 beds for in-house patients.

The programme started off with a briefing on the hospital project. Zahid Hashmi, representing the hospital, said that it would be a third such facility by the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust in the country, which would act as a model institution for treatment of cancer patients in the country's southern region.

"The project would be a state-of-the-art facility and would get accreditation by the Joint Commission International, one of the world's leading patient safety organisations," he said.

At present, there were only three hospitals in the country with JCI accreditation and SKMCHRC Lahore was one of them, he added. Sharing project details, he said the hospital consisting of a basement and ground-plus-six floors would be spread over 20 acres and developed in three stages.

"The hospital will be equipped with the latest cancer care technology, including radiation bunkers fitted with linear accelerators for radiotherapy and nuclear medicine," he said.

Giving a presentation on the project's EIA study conducted by Global Environmental Management Services Pvt Ltd, Syeda Ibtasama Khatoun, representing the consultant, informed the audience that internationally reputed firms were being involved in its building and engineering design and its construction would also be supervised by experts.

"The hospital would have its own underground septic tank from where waste would be discharged into the DHA City sewage channels. Water requirement is estimated to be 12,000 gallons daily which would be met through supplies from the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board, DHA City as well as groundwater," she said.

On the project's environmental impact, it was pointed out that the proposed project site had "low abundance of flora and fauna, so its ecological impact is also low, which made the site ideal for constructing the facility.

"The proposed project won't have any long-term impacts if activities are undertaken as suggested in this EIA report," said Ms Khatoon.

Her presentation was followed by a question-answer session, which began with a Sepa official raising concerns over patient access to the hospital and disposal of refuse, including nuclear waste.

Responding to the concerns, Naved Zaheer, director of the Engineering Consultants International Ltd (ECIL), responsible for the project's detailed engineering design and construction supervision, said that there would be a separate access for patients.

"There would be on-site incinerators and a waste treatment plant, separate from the one to be built by DHA City, whereas nuclear waste would be handled as per the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority guidelines," he said.

The ECIL also specialised in healthcare design and the company had to its credit several hospitals in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Yemen and Pakistan, he added.

He rejected the possibility of any emergency involving nuclear waste leakage and said that radiation activity undertaken at such health facilities were of very low intensity and waste was handled as per the guidelines.

During the session, Sepa officials admitted that they didn't have knowledge of that particular project when they approved the EIA study of DHA City in 2011.

"At that time, plots for residential, commercial and amenity purposes were only earmarked and investors came later in the picture," said Imran Sabir, representing Sepa.

Replying to concerns about the fast-paced infrastructural developments in DHA City and how they would impact the environment, the communities living in surrounding areas and affect Karachi's water resources in coming years, Naeem Mughal, additional director general of Sepa, assured the audience that the agency would ensure compliance with environmental and hospital management rules and regulations in the project/s.

"We will have a meeting with DHA City managers and seek complete details of their ongoing and future projects. We will ask them to submit their updated master plan as well as carry out a cumulative impact assessment of the whole project," he said.

Dr Viqar Hussain, a senior geologist and consultant, urged Sepa to ensure that DHA City must evolve a plan for waste-water treatment and recycling.

Concern over the absence of DHA City's representation was also raised.
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 14, 16/01/2019)

Increasing urbanisation

Urbanisation is a key global challenge. During the 1950s, two-thirds of the world population lived in rural areas and only one-third in urban areas. Now, approximately five per cent of the world's continents are occupied by city centres. They make 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emission and global energy consumption.

For those who are searching for a better quality life, urbanisation is a great opportunity. Therefore, people from rural areas migrate to cities to escape poverty and lack of opportunities. Urbanisation, no doubt, means transformation, globalisation and graciousness, if managed and planned properly.

The major historical discoveries, innovations and technological developments have been initiated in cities. The city phenomenon has given birth to these ideologies: democracy, neoliberalism, capitalism, industrialism and many other political, socio-economic and cultural. A large amount of fiscal and monetary undertakings materialise in cities. The metropolises are the centres of social flexibility and commercial marketisation.

Pakistan is a poor country. It stands at number six on the world's growing population index. For the last two decades, millions of people from rural areas have migrated to cities in pursuit of decent and dignified life. The intensifying urbanisation peril has made cities stunted, overcrowded and devoid of basic amenities. They are not planned properly in sanitation and sewerage, giving way to air, water, noise and plastic pollution at large. This has also led to challenges of resources distribution and management.

As cities grow, slums proliferate that set off a plethora of water, sanitation and health problems. Thus, industrial waste and sewage contaminate water sources further leading to high fluoride and arsenic contents, which trigger off epidemics. Recent studies have revealed that high levels of nitrates and chlorides are found in water sources of Karachi and in many other urban centres that trigger water-borne diseases.

It seems too hard, for the government, even to manage a small town with a maximum of 0.3 million population. Then, how is it possible to plan and manage big urban cities such as Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Quetta? Karachi's population alone has grown by 9.3 million since the 1998 census to 14.9 million in 2017, while Lahore grew by 75.3 per cent.

The urban population of other main cities of Pakistan are — Hyderabad's total population is 2.2 million out of which 1.83 million live in urban areas; Peshawar 4.3 million of which 2.23 million people reside in urban settlements; and Quetta 2.23 million of which 1.3 million people live in urban areas.

It is a common notion that economies rarely grow without their cities growing. But urbanisation has its 'dark side' too. According to a UN survey, a vast majority of policymakers resists urbanisation rather than welcome it. They are of the idea that the increasing urban tide should be stopped and people may return to rural areas. This disaffection with urbanisation reflects more than just nostalgia for simpler times.

To control escalating urbanisation, the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government needs to boost Pakistan's rural economy, bring high efficient irrigation system, reform the agriculture sector and manage water scarcity. Besides, in towns and cities, small industrial units should be promoted to generate additional economic activities.

At the level of union councils and tehsils, people should have opportunities to venture into profitable businesses. Entrepreneurship and vocational education need to be provided and promoted, especially for females. Sharecroppers and farmers of rural areas need to be linked with markets to sell their produce at profitable rates.

In addition, schools for farmers ought to be opened to give information about contemporary irrigation and agriculture practices and methods. The rural youth should be engaged in skills-based training such as plumbing, driving, tailoring, carpentry, masonry, mobile repairing, and motorbike and car repairing.

(By Murtaza Talpur / Iftikhar Ahmed The Express Tribune, 16, 17/01/2019)

Concerns over crises of basic amenities raised at Sepa hearing

Can the city of Karachi plagued by continued crises of basic amenities and facing serious environmental issues bear to have more high-rises?

This question was raised multiple times at a public hearing organised on Friday at a local hotel by the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa).

The hearing pertained to the environmental impact assessment (EIA) study of LaCasa One, a ground-plus-21 floor residential-cum-commercial project with four towers proposed near Lucky One shopping mall in Federal B Area.

It was the first hearing of a high-rise project after the Supreme Court lifted the ban on the construction of multistorey buildings in Karachi.

The hearing started off with a presentation on the project by Saquib Hussain of Environmental Consultants Company, which conducted the EIA study of the project proposed to be built over an area of 3,600 square yards.

He claimed that the project proponents had obtained relevant no-objection certificates, including those required from utility agencies including K-Electric and Sui Southern Gas Company. None of the NOCs, however, had been uploaded with project's EIA report on display on Sepa's website.

"The EIA report was uploaded on Sepa's website on Jan 9, 2019, mere eight days before the hearing. This goes against the fundamentals of Section 11(6) and the principles of holding public hearings. The department should have given ample and fair opportunity to study the report and come up with valid objections," said Syed Ali Raza Gardezi representing Citizens for Environment, a non-governmental organisation.

He also raised concerns related to water, gas and electricity supply to the project in the absence of any commitments from utility agencies.

It came as a shock to most participants when Mr Gardezi disclosed that the project proponents had shown absolute disregard for Sepa rules by starting construction work even before applying for Sepa approval and had also initiated booking process.

According to Sepa rules, "No proponent of a project shall commence construction or operation unless he has filed with the agency an initial environmental examination or environmental impact assessment and has obtained from the agency approval in respect thereof".

Defending the project proponents (LaCasa Builders and Developers) on this point, the EMC representatives said that though the project proponent did start construction before acquiring EIA approval, they stopped it later on Sepa's instructions after which the study was conducted.

The booking process, the project developers argued, had been initiated after "acquiring permission from the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA)".

The violation apparently went without any penalty by Sepa as their representatives couldn't give any satisfactory reply when asked about it.

Sepa was asked to protect public's interest and put an advertisement in newspapers warning the public that no approval had been given to the project as yet and people should not invest until it was approved.

Questions were also raised over the plot's status shown as commercial in the EIA report but was stated to be "actually industrial", and Sepa was asked to investigate the plot's status and its conversion.

Replying to these concerns, additional director general of Sepa Naeem Mughal admitted lack of coordination among departments (Sepa and SBCA) and said that under the law SBCA was bound to consult Sepa before approving any project.

In his opinion, the massive commercialisation of Karachi's roads had created the "havoc the city is experiencing right now". He told the audience that the department would take up the matter with organisations/agencies concerned.

Stakeholders, who raised pertinent concerns over the city's increasing density amid increasing environmental pollution and crises of basic amenities in Karachi, including water, gas, electricity, transport and sanitation system, did not receive any satisfactory reply. (By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 16, 19/01/2019)

No flowers bloom here in Lyari's Phool Patti Lane

Young children on their way to school balance themselves on strategically strewn-about bricks as they trudge through the narrow, unpaved lanes of Lyari's Phool Patti Lane.



Ever so often, a child slips off a brick, falling flat in the filthy gutter water that floods the streets. Like several others in the vicinity, an elderly woman is frequently seen struggling to keep toxic water out of her home.

Having lost her two sons when guns and gangs ruled Lyari, she battles against the disgustingly unwelcome guest in her neighbourhood quite alone.

At least one member, if not more, of every household in the area, has been affected by the stagnating filth, says Akram Baloch, a local resident. Diseases like malaria and typhoid have become commonplace as contaminated water functions as a breeding ground for mosquitos and other sinister bugs and insects, he explains.

Brewing toxicity

For the past couple of months, Phool Patti Lane has neither smelt like flowers nor been graced by petals. On the contrary, the foul stench of sewage water, which has collected in all six lanes of the neighbourhood in the past couple of months, has entrenched itself stubbornly in the area. The pungent smell hits your nose sharply as soon you enter Phool Patti Lane.

Choked sewage lines and the faltering drainage system have resulted in toxic water also seeping into homes that are built in the area. Brewing in the filth, are the likes of mosquitos and other bugs bringing with them the promise of a looming epidemic. Locals have complained about the barely habitable conditions of the neighbourhood to relevant authorities but to no avail.

Lax government response

The residents are of the view that the deteriorating conditions are a consequence of Lyari's recent shift in political allegiance. Historically, Lyari had been a stronghold of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), but the general elections of 2018 saw Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MNA Shakoor Shad and Tehreek-e-Labbaik MPA Muhammad Younus Soomro come into power in the constituency.

Residents complain that the elected officials have only been giving flimsy excuses for their failure to act while former representatives from PPP appear to be disgruntled at the outcome of the elections and are reluctant to help.

Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani visited Lyari two days ago but refrained from going inside Phool Patti Lane. Residents are of the view that PPP-led Sindh government is deliberately neglectful of the area as the residents voted other parties into power.

Residents suffer

Meanwhile, the woes of the residents increase steadily as the sewage water entrenches itself with increasing stubbornness as time passes.

Faisal Raj, who has lived in Phool Patti Lane for decades, claims that the toxic water is now mixing itself with line water.

People are forced to take painstaking efforts to make the water potable, he said, adding that most residents, who already live either at or below the poverty line, are unable to afford clean drinking water from filtration plants.

Local women told *The Express Tribune* that they have been considering shifting in the homes of their relatives and friends.

However, they say, they cannot expect to live off the hospitality of others for too long as their hosts also struggle to accommodate them.

The women maintained that it was a struggle to prepare food from the water which is contaminated by sewage and often children and breadwinners left homes on empty stomachs. The aggrieved residents find their homes unbearable now that their locality has been subsumed in filth.

Many claim that they had been promised Paris in the name of change but instead their hopes in their elected representatives have been crushed horribly.

(By Aftab Khan The Express Tribune, 05, 21/01/2019)

5 million houses

DURING the election campaign Imran Khan had announced that if elected his government would construct five million affordable homes. The media update is that the government has announced two phases of this project in 18 to 19 cities.

In Karachi, construction cost is very high, and it is going up by the day. A large part of the salary of a government employee or a worker in the private sector goes into monthly rents. Most houses, especially flats, lack fresh air. People have been living in such houses for generations.

If government is really serious about solving the housing problem, it should announce the project for Karachi and make speedy progress.

*Munzeer Hassan
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*

(By From the Newspaper Dawn, 09, 22/01/2019)

Housing scheme: 'Eol' from Egypt

Whether or not the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme (NPHP) is doable, especially in a span of just five years, cannot be easily answered with a yes. If the project — featuring the construction of five million affordable housing units for low-income segments of society in line with Prime Minister Imran Khan's election pledge — does take some kind of a shape, it will be a miracle of sorts. We have seen miracles like this happen around the world. And the news like the one coming from a private builder in Egypt is what allows us room to keep our hopes alive.

Naguib Sawiris, an Egyptian billionaire, has reportedly expressed his will to invest in 100,000 housing units in Pakistan under the NPHP. The Ora Developers that Mr Sawiris owns is already engaged in the construction of a multi-billion-dollar housing scheme in Islamabad along with its local partners. So the construction company is no new to the place and the kind of work that needs to be undertaken as part of NPHP. In an interview given to a leading Saudi daily, a representative of Mr Sawiris says that the company wants to 'do more' and 'invest more' in Pakistan, expecting its investment in the country to come to \$10 billion in the next 5 to 10 years.

Mr Sawiris' will to help Prime Minister Imran Khan in his vision towards Pakistan is a heartening news. This reported Expression of Interest (Eol) will help the government tackle, to an extent, an acute shortage of housing units in the country which is currently estimated at 10 million units. But Mr Sawiris' contribution to the NPHP — which is a gigantic five-million-homes project estimated to be twice as costly as the \$50+ billion CPEC — in terms of the total number of housing units that he intends to build makes up 2%. And that means we need to have more and more Sawiris lending a helping hand for realising this colossal vision.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 16, 22/01/2019)

Illegal constructions: SC places ban on conversion of residential, amenity plots

The Supreme Court (SC) has placed a "complete ban" on the conversion of residential and amenity plots in Karachi into commercial ones, besides directing the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) to raze all illegal constructions across the metropolis.

"Who is allowing the construction of plazas, marriage halls and shopping centres in every street?" questioned Justice Gulzar Ahmed, who was part of the two-member bench, hearing the case related to the Evacuee Property Trust at the SC's Karachi registry on Tuesday. "Does this city belong to their father that they can do whatever they want? Should we hand the city's control over to the federal government?" he asked. The other judge on the bench was Justice Sajjad Ali Shah.

As the hearing commenced, Justice Ahmed raised the issue of conversion of residential plots, construction of illegal marriage halls, shopping malls and plazas. The court also barred the SBCA from issuing no-objection certificates (NOCs) for the construction of commercial buildings without the Environmental Protection Agency's approval.

SBCA's incompetence

In its written order, released later in the evening, the SC bench noted that the SBCA Director-General Iftikhar Qaimkhani "admits that much wrong has been done to the city and such wrong is still continuing in that, amenity plots meant for parks, playgrounds and other amenities are being allowed to be occupied, converted and used for commercial exploitation".

During the hearing, the court expressed annoyance with the SBCA DG, warning that he would be removed from the post if their orders weren't complied with. "Go and demolish every structure that is in violation of the city's original master plan and restore [Karachi] to its 40-year-old state," said Justice Ahmed, besides seeking the Sindh government's suggestions to restore the city to its 40-year-old condition. "Let the Sindh government take over the city if the local government can't run it," remarked Justice Ahmed.

The court asked DG Qaimkhani why he was clinging to his post if he was incapable of doing his job. "The SBCA officials focus only on minting billions of rupees," said Justice Ahmed. "Your peon must be a millionaire, if not a billionaire," he told DG Qaimkhani. "Have some shame. You only want the money and don't care about this city even a little bit."

Amenity plots

Citing the examples of Jam Sadiq Ali Park and Abdullah Gymkhana, the court observed that illegal encroachments in the form of marriage halls, CNG stations and other commercial ventures had crept up across the city. It ordered the SBCA to clear the encroachments from Jam Sadiq Ali Park within four weeks.

At one point, the SBCA DG said that efforts to clear encroachments were under way and that the court's orders would be complied with. To this, Justice Ahmed ordered him to "speak less" or he would be suspended. "You are just making money and saving it in American and Dubai bank accounts," said Justice Ahmed.

DG Qaimkhani apologised again, saying the orders would be complied with henceforth.

Master plan

The court also placed a ban on the conversion of residential plots to commercial ones. In its five-page-long written order, a copy of which is available with The Express Tribune, the court ordered a "complete ban on Master Plan Department of SBCA or any other authority of the City Government or Government of Sindh of allowing change in the use of land." No such change of use of land shall be permitted, reads the order, adding that the order shall apply "across Karachi City, including cantonment areas". The written order adds that "any building constructed in violation of the original Master Plan in the City of Karachi shall be ensured to be restored to its original position".

(By Nasir Butt The Express Tribune, 04, 23/01/2019)

SC bans conversion of residential plots into commercial ones in Karachi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday imposed a complete ban on conversion of residential and amenity plots into commercial spaces in Karachi and directed the authorities concerned, including cantonment boards, to review all such conversions allowed by them in the provincial capital.



A two-judge SC bench headed by Justice Gulzar Ahmed also barred the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) from approving multistorey buildings on residential plots as well as amenity spaces and directed it to review the matters of all illegal constructions in the city within one month.

"All constructions which are illegally and unlawfully made in the city of Karachi shall be reviewed by the SBCA within a period of one month and a report in this respect shall be submitted to this court, which should recommend the solution as to how these

illegal and unlawful constructed buildings can be demolished and the plot/land put to its original use and how the people, who are occupying such buildings, will be compensated and provided alternate accommodation by SBCA from the funds generated by its own staff," read the court order.

The ban would also be applicable in cantonment boards; SBCA gets one month to review all 'illegal' constructions

Expressing serious concerns with the SBCA for allowing illegal constructions and conversions, the apex court asked a provincial law officer to take instructions from the Sindh government regarding taking over the authority's functions, including master plan of all cities of the province, and submit its response on the next date of hearing.

The bench also directed the chief secretary to be in attendance on Jan 24 to make a statement in this regard.

During the hearing, SBCA director general Iftikhar Qaimkhani conceded that amenity plots, playgrounds and parks were being allowed to be occupied and converted and used for commercial exploitation.

In a previous hearing, the apex court had directed Mr Qaimkhani to remove and demolish all the illegal constructions including marriage halls, shopping centres, apartments and fuel stations established in Jam Sadiq Ali Park and restore it to its original condition.

However, the bench observed that nothing had been done so far, rather an effort was made to justify the conversion of the park into a commercial plot.

The SBCA chief again stated that he would ensure to restore the park to its original position after removing all encroachments within a period of four weeks.

The bench granted him the required time and asked him to come up with a compliance report.

'Epidemic' of wedding halls, shopping centres

Justice Ahmed observed that besides Jam Sadiq Ali Park, there were so many other amenity plots in the city, meant for parks, playgrounds and other amenity uses as per the original master plan, which have also been allowed to be converted into commercial use.

The SBCA chief must take steps to restore all these amenity plots to their original position, Justice Ahmed said.

He further remarked that there seemed to be an epidemic in the city of wedding halls, shopping centres and fuel stations and houses were being allowed to be converted for these purposes.

Besides placing a complete ban on change of residential and amenity plots' status, the bench asked the master plan department of the SBCA and other authorities concerned of the city to review the allowed conversions and ruled that the ban would be applied across the city including cantonment boards.

Regarding illegal constructions in Lyari, the SBCA DG informed the bench that inquiries against the officials will be finalised in one month. He also ensured the bench that action will also be taken against SBCA officials who played havoc with the city by allowing illegal and unplanned constructions.

His response came against the backdrop of a previous order by the same bench that said: "The cost of relocation of the people occupying such illegal buildings shall be taken from the officials of KBCA which was renamed as SBCA themselves from their emoluments and properties and in this respect the DG shall raise funds and such funds shall include contribution from the DG himself also.

"Further, if these constructions have been carried out during the tenure of any other incumbent official, who has retired or is no more in employment, then after proper notice, recovery from retirement dues and his properties shall be made by the KBCA. The AGPR (accountant general of Pakistan revenue)/Accountant General, Sindh, to be notified accordingly."

On Tuesday, the court directed the accountant general, Sindh to discuss the issue with the SBCA chief as to how the payment of emoluments to the staff of the SBCA was to be released.

KWSB told to demolish officers' club

The bench also ordered the managing director of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) to demolish its officers' club, which is being used as marriage halls, since the plot was meant for amenity purposes.

The apex court further said that the KWSB had built the officers' club on its land near Sharea Faisal and was running marriage halls on it.

Observing that since the land in question was meant for amenity purposes, construction of a club and allowing wedding functions on such land were not permissible by law. The court ordered the KWSB chief to immediately demolish the club and other constructions. There should be a public park on the entire land with proper facilities for the public, it concluded.

Following the SC order, the KWSB administration started demolishing its officers' club and work was under way till late in the evening.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 15, 23/01/2019)

SC rejects Bahria Town's Rs358bn offer for Karachi land

The Bahria Town (Pvt) Limited on Tuesday enhanced its offer to Rs358 billion from earlier Rs250bn for the land it possessed in Karachi's Malir district where it developed an upscale housing society, but the Supreme Court rejected it, terming the bid not reasonable.

A three-judge SC bench headed by Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed fixed the matter for hearing on Jan 29 when it will determine the actual price of the land after hearing all the parties, including the National Accountability Bureau as well as a battery of counsel representing the Bahria Town.

"Please avoid writing 'not appeared to be reasonable'," requested Khawaja Tariq Raheem, one of the lawyers representing the third party interest in the entire project.

Barrister Ali Zafar, the counsel for Bahria Town, explained that out of the total Rs358bn, Rs150bn was for 7,068 acres which the Bahria Town had got from the Malir Development Authority (MDA) in exchange of its land and Rs208bn for 9,828 acres which the developer had encroached upon in the area. The amount will cover the total purchase of land as well as its regularisation.

Court terms bid not reasonable, regrets government departments not cooperating with it

"We have calculated the amount on the latest available price of Rs167 million per acre," the counsel said, adding: "If we calculate the price available under the Colonisation of Government Land Act (COGLA) 1912 during the 2015 period, the rate will be Rs2m per acre."

The counsel claimed that the total revenue the developer had earned from the entire deal in Malir district was Rs492bn. He said the Bahria Town proposed that the complete payment of Rs358bn would be made in instalments over the next eight years, adding that he wanted to give only such commitment which the developer could possibly fulfil.

"In case the land goes back to the MDA, it will turn out to be another Karachi," the counsel said, adding that even the Supreme Court would not be able to run such a gigantic scheme.

At the last hearing on Jan 15, the Bahria Town had offered to deposit Rs250bn to avoid legal proceedings for acquiring land in a questionable manner for its projects in Karachi, Islamabad and Murree. But the Supreme Court had declined the offer.

On Tuesday, the court asked Ali Zafar to consult his client again for improving the offer further.

"You must understand that our hands are tied in view of the May 4 judgement in which the Supreme Court had declared the grant of land to the MDA by the Sindh government, its exchange with the land of the private land developer — Messers Bahria Town — and anything done under the provisions of COGLA by the Sindh government as illegal, void ab inito and as such of no legal existence," observed Justice Azmat Saeed.

The land was granted for launching an incremental housing scheme. But instead of launching the scheme, the MDA exchanged it with the Bahria Town to launch a scheme of its own, the judgement had held. The MDA was created under the Malir Development Authority Act 1993 for the purpose of development of certain areas of Karachi division.

During the hearing, Ali Zafar offered Rs282bn and then raised it to Rs315bn for the entire 16,986 acres of land, saying this was quite a reasonable figure. "My neck is on the guillotine and I want to get out of it fast," the counsel said, referring to the developer. The counsel emphasised that NAB through its entire history would be able to recover a mere Rs226bn only.

During the hearing, the court also took exception to a chunk of land identified as purple in the map presented by the Survey of Pakistan as it showed the land in the possession of the Bahria Town when the latter itself did not claim the same to be there.

The bench regretted that even the government departments were not cooperating with the apex court, warning that the Bahria Town would have to suffer heavily because of the negligence on the part of these departments. "We are convinced that our efforts are being frustrated," Justice Saeed observed, regretting that the custodians of the land had no idea how to protect the state land.

At one stage, the court even hinted at issuing contempt of court notices to the representatives of Survey of Pakistan.

Justice Muneeb Akhtar expressed surprise over the isolated chunk of land in possession of the Bahria Town but surrounded by the state lands shown as purple. He wondered how the developer would have access to these lands — either through a tunnel or what. "Why on earth you will acquire two isolated islands?" Justice Akhtar asked and then hastened to add that it appeared that it was in the mind of the Bahria Town that it would develop these lands in future.

During the hearing, Survey of Pakistan's Karachi director Asad Ali, who was also part of the demarcation process of the lands, presented a huge brochure of Prism Marketing, an authorised dealer of the Bahria Town, and alleged the marketing dealer was still indulging in the sale and purchase of the lands shown in purple colour in the map in violation of the earlier ban imposed by the apex court on all kinds of transactions in the area.

At this, the bench issued a notice to Prism Marketing, asking it to make a representation before the court, and warned that if it was proved that the dealer had indulged in the sale and purchase of the lands, the police would be at liberty to take action in accordance with the law.

The court ordered the Malir deputy commissioner to take control of the land shown in purple in the map and said he would be personally responsible for even one inch of the land.
(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 01, 23/01/2019)

27 years and Rs100m later, Landhi Sports Complex still non-functional

It has been 27 years since the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) initiated the construction of Landhi Sports Complex. It has finally been built with state-of-the-art facilities, including a swimming pool and courts for indoor and outdoor games. However, youth of nearby areas cannot avail these facilities as the complex has not been open to the public. KMC maintains that it is not authorised to hire and approve staff to run the facility hence the complex cannot be opened to public. It does, however, have the authority to outsource operations to a private company. KMC claims it has advertised in this regard but no private company appears interested in running the complex.

Several years in waiting

Officials in KMC informed The Express Tribune that the project was first initiated in 1991 but it faced bureaucratic delays. The basic infrastructure of the central building was completed but left abandoned for 16 years before the construction process resumed. During this time, Landhi Sports Complex, meant as a recreational space served a contradictory purpose. The vacant building was inhabited instead by drug addicts who took advantage of the half-built complex.



The project was revived in 2007 under former Karachi mayor Mustafa Kamal. A budget of Rs65.1 million was reserved in yearly development programme for this project. Most of the work was completed during his term but then the project was at risk of being suspended entirely due to the non-provision of funds.

Officials confirmed that amendments were made in the plans for indoor and outdoor games courts after consultations with national level players and officials from various sports associations. The budget was further stretched as expenditure increased due to the installment of a filter plant for the swimming pool, modern flood lights and other facilities. The total expenditure eventually increased to Rs100m. Construction was finally completed in 2013.

Redundant efforts

Despite the Rs100m expenditure, Landhi Sports Complex remains unused. The public could not benefit from the facility as it remained closed due to lack of staff and electricity. A PMT was installed in 2015 but the absence of essential staff persists. The incumbent Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar visited Landhi Sports Complex in September 2018 and issued directives for its opening within the month. It has been four months since the instructions were given but the complex remains closed to public.

No man for the job

For the Sports Complex to be made functional, it requires an in-charge, coaches, and 19 other officials to ensure day to day activities. According to Sports and Culture Senior Director Rehan Khan, KMC does not have the power to appoint new employees but it has the option to out-source the staff. KMC advertised in this regard three months ago but no private company seemed interested. An advertisement has been issued again and KMC is hopeful that this time they will receive a positive response.

However, Sports and Culture Director Khurshheed Ahmed, told The Express Tribune that there is also some pending repair work for which a tender is being finalised. He was confident that the issues are minor and will be resolved soon.

State-of-the-art facilities

Landhi Sports Complex, if and when operational, will certainly be a welcome addition in the area. Officials in KMC claim that facilities for swimming, diving, tennis, basketball, volleyball, badminton, target practice, squash, snooker, table tennis, judo karate, chess and carom are available in the sports complex. The swimming pool, in particular, has been built in accordance with international standards complete with a filtration plant for the purification of water.

According to Ahmed, inter-district, inter-province and national level tournaments will be organised in Landhi Sports Complex once it is opened to public. Accommodation for sports players has also been accounted for, he said.

The central building houses facilities for indoor games. The badminton court and judo karate hall is on the ground floor while the first floor has table tennis, carom, and snooker facilities along with a chess hall, squash court, offices and cafeteria. On the second floor are the hostels for visiting players. The swimming pool and courts for volleyball, basketball and tennis have been built in the surroundings. Modern flood lights and seats for spectators have been installed around all the courts. Changing rooms, bathrooms and generator and car parking facilities have been provided as well.

(By Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 26/01/2019)

On SC's orders: SBCA cancels orders issued to change status of land use

Days after the Supreme Court banned the conversion of residential and amenity plots for commercial use and ordered to raze all illegal constructions in the metropolis, the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has cancelled all its previous regularisation orders and started issuing notices to proprietors to end commercial activities on residential properties within three days, failing which their structures would be demolished. The authority has also banned the conversion of residential and amenity plots for commercial use henceforth.

The notice, a copy of which is available with The Express Tribune, was issued by the SBCA after the authority's Master Plan department identified 930 commercial establishments, whose land status had been changed from residential to commercial between 2004 and 2019.

The action comes after the SC's hearing on January 22, when the court had expressed annoyance with the SBCA DG, warning that he would be removed from the post if their orders weren't complied with. "Go and demolish every structure that is in violation of the city's original master plan and restore [Karachi] to its 40-year-old state," Justice Gulzar Ahmed had ordered, besides seeking the Sindh government's suggestions to restore the city to its 40-year-old condition. "Let the Sindh government take over the city if the local government can't run it," he remarked.

The list

According to an official of the Master Plan department, who spoke to The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity, the majority of these 930 plots are located on Sharae Faisal, PECHS, North Nazimabad, Tariq Road and Gulshan-e-Iqbal. The 23-page-long report includes details of the plot number and the area in which it is located.

According to the official, these residential plots were converted for commercial use in accordance with the government's policies after their owners had paid billions of rupees in fees. What will be the future of high-rise structures built on these plots?" he wondered.

Implications

As news of the SBCA's notices circulated among property owners, they expressed apprehension over the fate of their investments that had been made through official channels and following all rules and regulations in place at the time.

As many as 26 major thoroughfares have been regularised for commercial use over the years, with the property owners taking advantage of the change in land status and converting their properties for commercial use after submitting the requisite challans prescribed by the government.

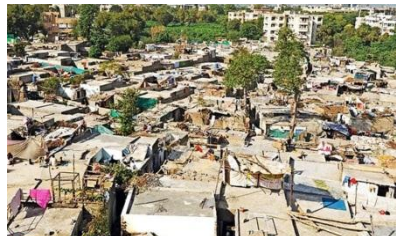
According to the Master Plan department, various roads were declared to be commercial in Karachi for the very first time in 1975. Subsequently, the Sindh government, which handled the land use affairs at the time, had converted several roads in 1978, 1980, 1989 and then 2001.

Hundreds of citizens, who owned properties on these roads, had opted to change the status of their plots for commercial use and had paid billions of rupees in fees for the purpose. The SBCA has now ordered these property owners and tenants to cease all commercial activities on these plots. Failure to do so could result in "demolition, sealing, registration of FIR, prosecution in court of law or any other penal action permissible under the rules," states the notice issued by the authority. When the SBCA DG Iftikhar Qaimkhani was contacted for his comments regarding the authority's future course of action, he excused that he was really busy and couldn't speak on the matter.

(By Naeem Khanzada The Express Tribune, 04, 26/01/2019)

Faults in Karachi's town planning discussed

The issues and their repercussions of the city's planning on the environment and society were the focus of a talk organised by Irtiqa Institute of Social Sciences at their office on Saturday.



Researcher and teacher Mansoor Raza delivered a talk based on a paper by well-known architect and town planner Arif Hasan. He said that the trends in shaping the city included migration and the tremendous urban sprawl seen here was mostly through three corridors of Karachi — the Superhighway, Hub River Road and National Highway. Meanwhile the diversification within the city happened through vertical growth.

"As the city was not as big as it has grown to be now, the katchi abadis earlier used to come up near work centres," said Raza. "But they are now coming up around the city's outskirts, leading to serious repercussions, including social, financial and human resource issues."

'Neighbourhoods too started consolidating on ethnic and sectarian lines'

It was explained how to be accepted as a part of the global economy some former mayors of Karachi coined phrases for the city such as 'world-class city', 'investment-friendly city', etc, while also changing the master plan paradigm of Karachi.

Master plan

"Earlier, the city's master plan would be developed by government institutions such as the KDA, but then even its name was changed to 'Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020' from master plan. Thus they were giving the city a strategic direction but no master plan," said Raza, adding that it meant that they were offering flexibility for the private sector.

So in a way, the city's governing systems became subservient to market forces meaning that they would serve those with purchasing power and those who didn't possess that power would be marginalised.

"The first generation katchi abadis and their struggles were not the same then. Earlier, they were after basic necessities of life but the second generation katchi abadis needed comfort also. Thus there was a vertical growth as expanding families needed more space," he said. "Neighbourhoods too started consolidating on ethnic and sectarian lines," he added.

"How the development plans were implemented was insensitive to the ecological requirements of the city because the basic thing for the authorities was to make the most and earn maximum profit from the city land," Raza said.

Coming to the migrants of the city, he reminded of the three biggest ones — as a result of the partition in 1947, in the fall of Dhaka in 1971 and then in 1978 in the form of the Afghan refugees with several social, political and environmental repercussions. An informal sector to cater to the housing needs of all these people then came about. Civil facilities and services came under pressure. "Karachi has grown 60 times to what it was in 1947," he said.

There was also a lot of encroachment too where the qabza mafia also became active. Then as property in the city became more expensive and katchi abadis started getting regularised with time, the poor people living there decided to sell or rent out their living quarters to move towards the outskirts. This added another problem — transportation.

Transport problem

Commuting took time and the public transport system was also not really catering to the needs of the masses. Thus many bought motorcycles, which added to the traffic congestion. Even though there were more women working now the buses still offer a one-third sitting space for them as men take up two-thirds of the room. Qinqis are a cheap solution, but they also are a traffic nuisance. Besides, women don't like to use them. "For 47 per cent of the city's population, transport has become a deciding factor in the kind of jobs they get," he said.

It was also explained how the recent anti-encroachment drive in Karachi had not just displaced vendors, but also inconvenienced people who needed to travel more now for grocery shopping. "Commuters also need to buy groceries on their way home after work. All over the world there are vendor markets near bus and train stations," he said.

Moving the discussion forward, Dr Noman Ahmed, chairman of the department of architecture and planning at NED University, said there was another master plan also under development these days. "It is the master plan of Gwadar," he said. But explaining how disconnected and out of sync the planners were from the requirements there, he said the discussions and planning for Gwadar took place in Islamabad. "Seeing land as the greatest asset there, they talk about who should get how much land. They don't talk about the overall economic structure of that city or how livelihoods will be generated there and how the indigenous people there would benefit from the progress," he said.

Earlier, Kaleem Durrani of Irtiqa Institute of Social Sciences briefed the audience on the subject.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 14, 28/01/2019)

Illegal land use

ALL sections of the power elite are not equal. It was therefore all the more unexpected when on Thursday, at the Karachi's Supreme Court registry, Justice Gulzar Ahmed demanded answers to certain questions that many dare not articulate, at least in public. This spectacle occurred before a two-judge bench during the hearing of a case pertaining to illegal construction in the city. The judge wanted to know why the armed forces and the Civil Aviation Authority were running wedding halls and cinemas, asking whether it was their job to do so. Driving home his point about the security risks inherent in such ventures, he assailed the existence of wedding halls in the vicinity of the Karachi airport, which was the target of a major terrorist attack in 2014, and the Central Ordnance Depot. He also ordered the wedding hall inside Askari Park to be demolished immediately and the land restored to its intended use.

In a predatory state, the levers of power are concentrated in a few hands, both elected and unelected; a supporting cast of corrupt civil bureaucrats, unscrupulous businessmen, police and local strongmen enables them and maintains the status quo. In this unequal hierarchy, the less privileged live in a state of perpetual insecurity. A recent, particularly harrowing illustration of this was the anti-encroachment drive in Karachi where thousands found their decades-old means of livelihood destroyed. A far bigger travesty than small-time traders trying to make a living in a city that has not provided them the means to do so strictly by the book are the actions by the well connected who derive illegal profits from Karachi's real estate. Using land legally entails it being employed for the purpose for which it was allotted. Yet we see umpteenth examples of 'china cutting', of amenity plots swallowed up by shopping malls and wedding halls, land demarcated for sewerage plants taken over by residential colonies, etc. There must be a reckoning for those involved in such large-scale violation of land-use regulations.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 28/01/2019)

Minister says razing residential buildings on converted, amenity plots 'not possible'

Although thanking the Supreme Court judges for their judgements aimed at regaining the past glory of Karachi, the provincial local government minister on Monday told the Sindh Assembly that the SC order to demolish hundreds of buildings standing on amenity and "illegally converted" plots "is not possible for our government, and will not be possible for any government in Sindh".



"We have demolished marriage halls built on amenity plots; our mayor in Karachi has spearheaded a drive against encroachments and razed shops in the light of the court's directive. We'll clear the footpaths, but the buildings inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people cannot be demolished by us," said Minister Saeed Ghani while giving a detailed statement during the Sindh Assembly session presided over by Speaker Siraj Durrani.

"I can tell you with firm belief that no one can demolish these buildings, not just our government. We are constitutionally bound to abide by the orders of courts, but there are certain things which are not possible for us to do," he said.

He said over the past many years amenity plots were encroached upon and parks were occupied and subdivided to construct residential and commercial buildings. The authorities, he added, had demolished a good number of them.

'No government can be expected to do something that leads to human misery'

He said the anti-encroachment drive had rendered thousands of people jobless. The provincial government was facing a variety of issues in rehabilitating them.

Mr Ghani said the Sindh government had filed a petition to review the order for demolition of houses, which was discharged by the court.

He said the local government ordinance promulgated during the rule of retired Gen Pervez Musharraf had given many departments, including the master plan office, to the defunct City District Government of Karachi. The then city government passed a resolution through its council and approved conversion of residential plots into commercial ones.

He said the master plan bureau was in control of the defunct CDGK till 2011 and since 2004 some 930 cases of conversion had been allowed. Some 454 cases of conversion were made till 2011 till the existence of the CDGK. He said it was "dangerous" to review all such cases, demolish hundreds of them and compensate the people affected by the demolition.

"Hundreds of thousands of people have stakes [in such properties]; they have their houses that they have purchased with their hard-earned money. We should not punish them for the wrongdoings committed by others."

He said those responsible for the present scenario should be identified and punished.

"No government can be expected to do something that leads to human misery. We beseech the honourable judges that we are here to abide by their directives, but we should be given some time. If you want to change the face of Karachi, then it will need years and not weeks. It is clear stance of our government that we will not dismantle these houses.

"The Sindh government's stance should be understood; it is a human issue, which should be seen and handled beyond legality and illegality."

Mr Ghani also spoke on the issue of marriage halls; owners of the halls had called off their strike after some government assurances on Saturday.

"Despite this," he said, "we made it clear to the owners of the marriage halls that those halls built on amenity plots would have to be demolished. However, the ones established on legally converted lands will not be touched".

He said the court should guide the authorities to prepare lists of all such plots and categorise those which should be razed.

Resolution against attack on PTI MPA

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's members created another ruckus at the outset when they asked Speaker Durrani to suspend the day's proceedings and allow a resolution condemning the "attack" on MPA Ramzan Ghanchi. They alleged that the vice chairman of a union committee in Ranchhore Line belonging to the PPP had shot at their colleague during an argument over water.

They kept chanting slogans against the PPP government in front of the chair and tore up copies of the day's agenda.

However, the speaker opted to continue the proceedings and began the Question Hour. Since all the questions were asked by opposition MPAs about the education ministry, the speaker kept calling serial numbers of the questions and concluded the segment in less than five minutes, making it apparently the quickest finish of Question Hour in recent years.

The situation remained the same during the segment for calling-attention notices. However, when Minister Ghani rose to move a resolution on the MPA's issue, the chair advised the protesting PTI MPAs that they should go back to their seats as the resolution they were protesting for was being discussed.

Mr Ghani and Leader of the Opposition Firdous Shamim Naqvi moved the resolution jointly in which the attack on the MPA was condemned and police were told to conduct a fair inquiry into the incident; the Sindh government was asked to submit its report before the house within two weeks.

A number of members spoke on the resolution in which Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's Khwaja Izharul Hasan and Mohammad Hussain said such incidents showed how grave the issue of water shortages had become.

Mr Hussain and PTI's parliamentary leader Haleem Shaikh said they faced serious threats to their lives and asked the government to provide better security to the elected representatives.

The minister said the UC's vice chairman who was accused of the incident had won the LG election as an independent candidate and joined the PPP later. However, he said, his government would have adopted the same stance even if the accused was a known party worker.

He also requested the assembly members that they should not issue water connections on their own as they were not authorised for it. "Even I, the local government minister, cannot issue these connections," he said.

Two bills passed

The house also passed two important bills after they returned from the select committees.

These bills were: The Sindh Institute of Child Health and Neonatology Bill, 2018; and The Sindh Injured Persons Compulsory Medical Treatment (Amal Umer) Bill, 2019.

About the first bill, the house was told that the Institute of Child Health and Neonatology would be established so that under its umbrella numerous branches of child health outlets could be established.
(By Hasan Mansoor Dawn, 15, 29/01/2019)

Builder arrested for ‘usurping’ 124 acres of land

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Thursday arrested a builder and his accomplice, who had allegedly usurped 124 acres of government land, including land belonging to the University of Karachi in Malir and other districts, worth billions of rupees with the connivance of officials concerned, where several housing schemes have been launched.

“NAB Karachi arrested one Javed Iqbal and his accomplice Waseem wanted in an inquiry against Rufi Builders and Developers,” said the spokesperson.

“Accused Javed Iqbal is a builder working under name of Ghani Builders, who is prima facie involved in embezzlement of 19 acres of precious state land situated at Deh Thoming Scheme 33 Malir, by way of managing fictitious entry in revenue record, with the connivance of revenue officials,” added the official.

“Accused Javed Iqbal and Waseem transferred the said land fraudulently to Rufi Builders where an illegal project named ‘Rufi Pearl City’ was launched by Rufi Builders, thus [cheating] public at large.”

The estimated value of the said land was Rs3 billion, revealed the NAB spokesperson.

The builder was also involved in other NAB cases for alleged usurpation of government land in districts East and Malir involving hundreds of acres.

“He executes his offences through modus operandi of getting such illegal lands kept with the titles of his company’s employees like Waseem and later disposes of such properties.”

Iqbal had surrendered to NAB 73 acres of usurped land of Deh Drigh Tappo Drigh, district Korangi in 2015 after “admission” of offence.

In another case he is also facing charges of usurpation of 124 acres of land comprising seven dehs of districts East and Malir, where several “illegal” housing projects have been launched including Fatima Golf Residency.

The NAB official said that the held builder was also involved in misappropriation of land given to the University of Karachi.

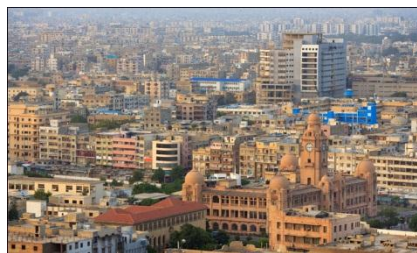
The official pointed out that around 30 years ago the Sindh government had allotted the land to KU for residential purpose but the held builder with the connivance of the revenue officials also usurped the said land for housing scheme (Al-Raheem Villas).

“So far, the builder had embezzled around 124 acres of [government] land in Malir and East districts where several housing projects had been launched to cheat the general public,” claimed the NAB official.

(By The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 01/02/2019)

Experts recommend new master plan for Karachi

Eminent architects and town planners have recommended making a new and independent master plan of Karachi in order to turn it into a beautiful metropolis with developed infrastructure which not only could compete with other metropolitan cities, but could also meet its future requirements.



They also highlighted the need for an efficient public transport system, including revival of Karachi Circular Railway, to facilitate not only public travelling, but also to help visitors to the city.

These recommendations were made in a conference held here on Thursday on the subject of ‘Transforming Karachi’.

The conference, presided over by provincial Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah, was addressed by noted architects and town planners.

Besides Yasmin Lari, Shah Bano, Tasneem Siddiqui, Asad A. Khan, Fazal Noor, Hameer Soomro, Shahid Abdullah, Prof Anila Naeem, Prof Dr Mir Shabbar Ali, Dr Nasir, Dr Noman Ahmad, others who participated in the discussion were Vice Admiral Syed Arifullah Hussaini, Commissioner of Karachi Iftikhar Shallwani and director general of Urban Policy and Strategic Planning of Sindh Faisal Naqvi.

The technocrats, referring to the drive of removal of encroachments and unauthorised buildings, called for developing and implementing a feasible plan not only for restoration of old glory of Karachi, but also to take care of rehabilitation of the affected families.

They highlighted the need for taking effective steps for promotion of cultural heritage of the city.

Other recommendations regarding land-use conversion, restoration of public parks, playgrounds and other public amenities, were also made.

The conference was organised by the Directorate of Urban Policy and Strategic Planning, planning and development department of the Sindh government.

Advocate general of Sindh briefed the participants about the salient features of the moot held against the backdrop of the recent orders of the Supreme Court.

Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah welcoming the participants appreciated the noted architects and urban master planners for their contribution in making the conference a success by their suggestions.

He said the suggestions would help the department improve infrastructure of Karachi and look after its civic amenities.

The chief secretary also invited the noted architects and urban master planners to make recommendations in respect of removal of encroachment/illegal buildings and rehabilitation of the affected families.

The chief secretary said the Sindh government had succeeded in getting 822 parks out of total 1,578 parks vacated and making them functional while efforts were being made for getting encroachments removed from the remaining parks as well.

The conference participants reviewed and discussed earlier Karachi master plans which were prepared in 1922, 1958, 1973-85 and 1996-2000.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 01/02/2019)

Armed men, cops obstruct SBCA operations

The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) staff faced resistance on Friday as they tried to demolish parts of an illegally constructed building in Nazimabad.

As the demolition work began on parts of a building constructed on plot number A-2/1 at Nazimabad-III, the SBCA started receiving threatening phone calls. Later, in the evening, armed men and police officials arrived at the scene to stop the demolition process.

This resulted in a heated argument and SBCA officials informed them that the demolition process could not be stopped and the operation would continue on judicial orders.

The SBCA officials said that the police and armed men were the security guards of a political leader and alleged that the leader threatened them of dire consequences if demolition work was not stopped. They said that the police and armed personnel had pointed their weapons at them and the labourers on site.

According to the SBCA officials, a five-storey building was constructed on the main road at Nazimabad-III, but records showed that they had approved only for ground plus two floors.

The builder had illegally built the third, fourth and fifth storeys. They added that only those parts of the building were being demolished.

Officials said that the building owner did not demolish the illegally constructed parts of the building despite issuance of several notices and thus SBCA took action and demolished the penthouse built on the fifth storey. The third and fourth storeys have also been demolished.

The SBCA director-general (DG) and other related authorities have been informed of the intervention in government operation and a complaint has been registered at the area police station, said the SBCA officials.

They added that video of the armed men and policemen trying to stop the operation had also been recorded which they would provide to the relevant authorities.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 02/02/2019)

Builders, SBCA destroyed Karachi. Why must the poor only pay for it?

Human rights activist Anis Haroon is not one to mince her words.

"Have they [judges] not noticed the large influx of migrants to Karachi? Surely, they must read newspapers," she reasoned.

Haroon's tirade was aimed at the Supreme Court's (SC) recent remarks to restore Karachi to its condition around 40 years ago. The orders have put civic agencies in a fix as they scramble about the city, demolishing any structures they deem to be 'encroachments'.

Set amid the sprawling gardens of the Governor's House located smack in the centre of the metropolis, the irony wasn't lost on the audience that they were hardly a few blocks away from where the latest anti-encroachment drive started – the Empress Market.

The panel discussion, titled 'Karachi – encroachments and demolitions', was part of the Adab Festival being held over the weekend and was moderated by Rumana Husain, author of 'Karachiwala – a subcontinent within a street', among other publications.

The panelists included Muhammad Toheed, an urban planner affiliated with the Karachi Urban Lab at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Noman Ahmed, the dean of the Architecture and Management Sciences faculty at the NED University, Advocate Faisal Siddiqui and Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani.

The issue

Hussain opened the discussion with a synopsis of the anti-encroachment campaign so far. "Within a week's notice of the SC's orders, heavy machinery was deployed to carry out the demolitions," she said. "Almost 11,000 shops and businesses have been razed in around 20 markets," she added.

But what about the human cost of these demolitions, asked the moderator.

Toheed and his team at the Karachi Urban Lab have been looking closely at the social aspect of the campaign. "Normally, when an exercise of this nature is carried out, there is a survey done to ascertain how many people and businesses will be affected," he explained. In this case, there was no survey.

"The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) itself can't decide whether the shopkeepers at the Empress Market were encroachers or their own tenants," he quipped. "Before the SC's orders, they were the KMC's tenants. After the orders, they suddenly became encroachers," he quipped.

Toheed also took issue with the KMC's promises of rehabilitation. "The KMC has announced that the affected shopkeepers will be allocated alternative shops through a balloting process," he said incredulously. These shops will be located in Liaquatabad, Soldier Bazaar and other smaller pockets of the city, where the KMC can find space. "Will their businesses even be able to survive in these obscure places?" he questioned.

Bound by the orders

As the session warmed up, one thing was certain. This wasn't going to be an easy one for Commissioner Shallwani. When it was his turn to speak, Shallwani started off by saying that the SC's orders had to be implemented and that it was their duty to do so. He then listed the difficulties they faced in implementing the orders – the threats of violence erupting and the negotiations held with traders to placate them.

On the human cost of the drive, Shallwani said that they had made a conscious decision not to demolish any human settlements. The drive was only aimed at clearing away encroachments that were commercial in nature, he said, adding that they had been unbiased in their actions, citing the examples of the Customs Club and the encroachments at the Bin Qasim Park, which had been razed as part of the campaign.

Unplanned growth

For Dr Noman Ahmed, the issue is not of encroachments, but of a lack of planning. "Several plans were drafted for the city," he explained. "But they all have one shortcoming – a legal cover to ensure their implementation." In the absence of a legally binding master plan, allotments of land in Karachi were made on an ad hoc basis, particularly to some special interest groups.

"If you were associated with the defence industry, for example, you were entitled to special privileges when it came to the allotment of land," he said. "Those outside the framework of these special interest groups were left out," he explained, adding that in the absence of a political will and legal cover to implement the plans, this issue will not be resolved.

The judges, said Dr Ahmed, referred to an old Karachi. "It was in 1979 that the Association of Builders and Developers (ABAD) came into being. Before that, there were no such issues when it came to land allotments," he said, referring to the nexus between the builders' special interest groups and civic agencies.

The SC's perspective

Advocate Siddiqui, who is a constitutional lawyer, was of the view that the issue is one of perspective and must be seen in context of the underlying circumstances in which the SC's orders came about.

Frist, said Siddiqui, was the vacuum that existed in Karachi's political and administrative set up. "One political party, that had ruled Karachi for so long, had suddenly disappeared," he recalled. Another party, which is in the government, has a parasitic relationship with the city. "In this situation, the SC stepped in," he said, adding that this wasn't the first time that the SC had done so. Remember the 2013 order that started the Karachi Operation?

The biggest problem, according to Siddiqui, is that the people, against whom the action is being taken, have no representation in court. "In this case, there is no due process because the judges are looking at the case from only two angles," he reasoned. One is the judges' own perspective, which is limited to the law. The other voice is that of the executive – the bureaucracy,

provincial government and other civic agencies. The latter simply want to save their jobs and put all the blame on the people, while at the same time, "hide their own incompetence and corruption".

"The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) is one of the most corrupt departments in South Asia, if not the whole world," remarked Siddiqui. "They have taken billions in bribes and destroyed the city," he said, adding that the anti-encroachment drive should start with the SBCA officials who allowed all these encroachments in the first place.

"Not many people are aware that the SC's orders call for these corrupt SBCA officials to be held accountable and the money recovered from them to be used for rehabilitation of affected persons," he said.

For Siddiqui, the issue is quite solvable. The courts must be shown the complete picture and for that, the civil society will have to get involved. "Courts make rash decisions and then take them back. The judges will rectify some of the negative aspects of this ruling if they are provided the relevant information," he predicted.

(By Shahzeb Ahmed The Express Tribune, 04, 02/02/2019)

PTI govt plans new strategy to get federal quarters vacated in Karachi

The Federal government has once again taken up the issue of clearing the federal colonies and quarters in Karachi of illegal occupants and multiple options are being considered to implement the Supreme Court's (SC) orders to get the federal lands vacated.

According to official sources, these options may include engaging the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) and disconnecting water, gas and electricity supplies to compel the illegal occupants to vacate the government residences.

In this regard, a meeting on Friday between Federal Housing Secretary Imran Zeb Khan and Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah was briefed about the status of federal government land and residences illegally occupied in Karachi.

The meeting decided to involve LEAs to remove the illegal encroachments from the federal land as ordered by the SC.

The meeting, which was also attended by Board of Revenue senior member, Sindh home secretary and federal estate office officials, was briefed about illegal occupation and encroachment of federal land in the areas of Martin Road, Liaquatabad, Patel Para, Jahangir Road and Pakistan Quarters.

While lauding the role of Sindh government in its efforts to retrieve federal lands, the federal housing secretary said that 50% of the residential quarters, meant for federal government officials, were illegally occupied.

There are 254 quarters illegally occupied in Pakistan Quarters, 1,987 in the Federal Capital Area, 434 in East Jahangir and 300 quarters in West Jahangir.

The chief secretary asked the Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani to prepare a report with the help of the federal estate office containing details of the illegally occupied federal land.

It should follow a proper action plan to get federal quarters vacated, he said adding the rights of people should be considered while carrying out the operation.

Official sources said that some important decisions were taken about the evacuation of Pakistan Quarters and other Federal government colonies during a meeting held on January 9.

The meeting was chaired by Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and was also attended by the representatives of the Association of Builders and Developers (ABAD).

The meeting discussed several options including the evacuation of Pakistan Quarters spread over an area of 32 acres. According to details there are 394 residential units in Pakistan Quarters including 202 D-type and 192 E-type quarters.

A report prepared for meeting revealed that as many as 254 residential units in Pakistan Quarters were illegally occupied while 68 residential units were under Sindh government's possession.

An empty vast ground was also there in the premises of Pakistan Quarters where the Federal government plans to construct high rise buildings.

An operation for the evacuation of Pakistan Quarters was earlier carried out on October 24, 2018 with the help of police.

However, the operation was suspended following public protest and later SC granted two months' time to the government to execute the evacuation plan.

(By Vakeel Rao 04, 03/02/2019)

Comment by invitation: The challenge of five million houses

'Naya Pakistan' banner has come with a promise of hope; of achieving the impossible. To the cynics, five million houses are empty promises with no hope of actual deliverance. However, if there is any chance to achieve the target, it has to be based on market disrupting solutions.



There are two major challenges to solve: firstly, the pace of delivery, ie how to deliver one million houses every year and secondly how to finance the development.

Buying power for housing

Pakistan has been extremely conservative with its housing finance. With a mortgage financing to GDP ratio below 0.25 per cent, Pakistan falls far behind the average of 3.4pc in South Asia. Furthermore, the provision of such a service to the low-cost bracket is practically non-existent as they are unable to provide consistency revenue stream required by financial institutions. A proactive solution has to be through the involvement of the private sector.

In 1981, the conservative government of UK found the solution through the formation of Urban Development Corporations, which had specific areas designated for urban regeneration. These areas were developed without the involvement of the Government Development Authority rules, although corporations were reporting directly to the parliament. The advantage was quick expedition of decision making required to regenerate urban areas.

The designated areas were visited by the chief executives of financial institutions for finding ways to monetise the urban rehabilitation project. Pakistan could also follow a similar model with specific land banks. Multi-purpose projects can be designed with a mix of commercial and residential areas with a committed proportion of low-income housing. The land provided by the government can essentially be valued equivalent to the cost required for development of low-income housing.

For any such project to have viability, it is essential for financial institutions to find exit strategies for their investors. Although real estate investment trusts (REITs) provide structured development, the parameters required for devising a REIT are so extensive and complicated that they act as a deterrent for small-scale private developers. Yet, the idea of unitisation and securitisation could make the project a viable financial tool for raising investment.

Moreover, since the entire project is a mix of different real estate products, the returns could be determined via the sale of residential and commercial products to middle and upper middle income groups. The returns from these would serve as a blanket to make up for the lower returns in the low-income housing sales. Further, as the whole project would be under a development corporation (DC), the financing provided would be at a lower risk premium than if only low-income housing was provided.

Invariably, the relationship becomes one where the private sector gets involved as a developer working under the DC with a role similar to one of a project manager. However, by aligning them with profits of the project, the developer is driven towards completion of the project through optimised costs and timely delivery. The latent advantage for the developer is the knowledge base that will be brought in by putting the right mix together, with practical experience of marketing and sales.

Financial Institutions, on the other hand, would provide another layer of protection through products such as escrow accounts releasing funds on completion of milestones. They would also provide another revenue stream through property bonds and unitisation thereby reducing the dependency on direct real estate sales.

For legal protection, the DC would be the owner of the housing. The product would be given to deserving families with option to pay rent-to-own. The families could be provided with job opportunities within the DC with the property adjustment against years in service.

Delivery of housing

Low-income housing is for those individuals who require bare essential living space. The actual requirement is for a two-room structure, with emphasis on utility, form and repetitive design with additional finishing fulfilling basic requirements. Higher expense areas, such as bathrooms, could be communal, which would reduce construction and maintenance costs. The most enterprising solution would be the use of pre-fabricated construction (along with traditional construction), whereby we can look towards volumetric or panelised construction.

The challenge to the simplicity of pre-fabricated housing is the staff training. This is where the DC brings a two prong benefit. Firstly, the set up for such a pre-fab factory brings in a new industry, which disrupts the market of the traditional construction methods and a new form of manufacturing is introduced.

The second challenge is one that makes low-income housing sustainable — the training of workers with the skill set required for this form of construction. This option could be provided to those wanting to own a low-income house. As a worker willing to get trained and build the low-income housing, a barter arrangement for a house could be evaluated. This would not only bring the feeling of ownership but act as a catalyst in developing a community. The additional skill set further equips them with a new way of earning.

The attractiveness of the whole system is the blend formed between the government, the real estate developers, and the financial institutions with each bringing their strength to push the development forward, yet mitigating their weaknesses through the forte presented by the other.

The success of development is in provision of a roof and a sustainable way to make a living. Essentially, the solution comes through an intertwined development, rather than working in silos. The challenge of five million houses is exactly that: a challenge waiting to be accomplished.

(By Azam Khan | Raza Khan Dawn, 11, 03/02/2019)

Dawn Investigations: The shaky foundations of ASF Arabian Vista

Political bigwigs, establishment figures and corrupt builders — facilitated by a rotten provincial bureaucracy — make illegal fortunes from the city's precious real estate.

On July 12, 2017, a strongly worded letter landed on the desk of Director General Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), Agha Masood Abbas (since retired). It was from the then deputy director general of the Airports Security Force (ASF), Brig Imran-ul-Haq Rao.

The brigadier's ire had been provoked because SBCA had issued a show-cause notice to the ASF a few days earlier, ordering it to stop "all illegal sale, booking and advertisement activities at once" on its Arabian Vista project in Karachi. The notice directed ASF to revert to SBCA within three days to explain why action should not be taken against it because it had undertaken the aforementioned activities without obtaining the required permissions from SBCA.

In his letter, written in response to SBCA's show-cause notice, Brig Imran harshly asserted that the ASF operated under the Pakistan Army Act, that its housing projects were launched under the ASF Foundation (ASFF) with the approval of the federal government and did not fall under the SBCA. He denounced the show cause notice as "regretful", "uncalled for" and "outrageous". "We hereby strictly call upon you to immediately restrain from making any such publications that damages and harms reputation of prestigious against [sic] ASF Housing Project," concluded the brigadier.

However, underneath the self-righteous posturing on both sides is a sordid saga that is sadly typical of Karachi. Hundreds of construction projects in this city are of highly questionable provenance, the product of collusion between rapacious political bigwigs, establishment figures, their front men (the builders) and a venal land bureaucracy — in short, what is commonly known as the land mafia. By hook or by crook, it seems that everyone wants a slice of Karachi's precious real estate.



ASF Arabian Vista and Saima Arabian Villas, which together occupy a chunk around 270 acres off Surjani Town Link Road in North Karachi, are a textbook case that illustrates the role played by all the moving parts in this racket.

ASF's biggest project, ASF City, is planned on no less than 3,000 acres. The market price of land here is at least Rs10m per acre. Why does a force of less than 9,000 personnel need such huge 'welfare schemes'?

Satellite image of Saima Arabian Villas from October 2017. — Photo provided by author

The projects appear to be independent of each other, but they have a common genesis. Around 12 years ago, Mehmood Trunkwala, the owner of World Group Pakistan, who was said to enjoy close ties with then chief minister Arbab Rahim, began taking possession of land in the area in bits and pieces. World Group then partnered with Saleem

Zaki, the well-known — and recently deceased — owner of Saima Builders, and the Saima Arabian Villas project began coming up on this piece of real estate.

Over time, this land grab expanded further. Some of the land, according to a source well acquainted with real estate shenanigans in the area, was obtained from another encroacher named Sheroo who had built a fortune from his garbage sorting depots near the Jam Chakro landfill. Satellite imagery shows the land occupied by Saima Arabian Villas as measuring around 230 acres.

A couple of years back, World Group brought ASF on board as a partner. It was a win-win situation: the security force was looking to enter Karachi's real estate market, and its clout made it an ideal partner in a project with extremely dubious credentials. That was how the 40-acre ASF Arabian Vista was conceived. The ASF Housing Scheme website markets it as "a grand apartment complex comprising of three, four and five rooms in Karachi".



To reach ASF Arabian Vista, one can either drive through Saima Arabian Villas or access it through its own entrance on the Surjani Town Link Road near the Jam Chakro landfill. A recent visit to the site shows that the main entrance, clubhouse and model apartment are nearing completion. The falling out with SBCA is clearly over.

Hobnobbing with the power elite

Let's take a closer look at the main players behind Saima Arabian Villas and ASF Arabian Vista. Mr Zaki, well known for his mutually beneficial relationship with the politicians who matter — or mattered until not too long

ago — in Karachi, was rumoured to be behind scores of shady real estate projects in the city. It is alleged, for instance, that he constructed the Saima Bridge View apartment complex in North Nazimabad in partnership with MQM's Babar Ghauri — the force behind many such projects in North Nazimabad — by encroaching on land belonging to Pakistan Railways.

Another example is Saima Luxury City in Landhi, constructed illegally on the left embankment of Malir River. (Embankments are required by law to be left undeveloped to make allowance for flooding.) Last June, a Saima project off Superhighway was found by NAB to be illegally built on government land. Some of the villas were demolished by the SBCA after the Supreme Court May 4 verdict against Bahria Town, a project that SBCA had allowed to be developed without even basic NOCs.

The Trunkwalas' connections with Pakistan's power elite have helped World Group grow by leaps and bounds. The company's diverse business empire includes automobiles (World Autos), imports, real estate, etc.

Among those with whom they have cultivated close ties are the ASF. In fact, the Trunkwalas are said to be one of three or four high-profile business families (another being the Tessoris) who get VVIP protocol from the security force, to the extent that their guests have been escorted by ASF personnel right up to the aircraft steps at Karachi Airport. "In Pakistan, there's no respect for the law," said a retired land official who has experienced this 'hospitality'. "You only have to be a good paymaster."

(According to sources, the Trunkwala family patriarch and his sons enjoy a luxurious lifestyle in Madina. A mansion in the vicinity of Quba Mosque, and around a dozen expensive cars, each with its own chauffeur, make for a comfortable home away from home. Interestingly, their iqama sponsor — or kafeel — is no Saudi big shot, but a retired policeman named Afzal.)



The ASF's four real estate ventures — ASF Arabian Vista, ASF City, ASF Airport Residencia and ASF Towers — all in Karachi, were announced during the period of Maj Gen Sohail Ahmed Khan as DG (now retired). Speaking to the media while heading ASF, Mr Khan said that ASF housing was started in order to "generate funds for the welfare of shuhada's families and ASF retirees". It was a specious and misleading claim: the Karachi airport attack in June 2014, whose victims included 12 ASF personnel, is perhaps the sole instance when members of the force have been martyred.

The ASF is an 8,945-strong organisation responsible for the security of all airports in Pakistan. Headed by a serving major general, it has a symbiotic relationship with the security establishment. Its top cadre also includes three brigadiers, two colonels and five majors — officials who by virtue of their service are already entitled to plots at heavily subsidised rates. Despite the small number of army officials on secondment, this military connection comes in handy to browbeat civilian authorities. Notwithstanding ASF Deputy DG Brig Imran's bluster, ASF does not operate under the Army Act, but under the ASF Act 1975, as its own website states. According to the website, the Foundation was "established on 24-04-2014 to provide and generate funds for welfare measures and benefits of serving and ex-servicemen of ASF and their families through various welfare schemes".

When asked why all ASF housing projects happen to be in Karachi, Director ASF Foundation Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Afzal replied with a laugh: "One has to start somewhere, and I'm here to start with big projects and we'll do more and more in times to come."

The land in Surjani Town is presently worth between Rs25 million to Rs35m per acre. That means the value of the land alone — ie, without taking into account the value added by built-up units, apartment buildings, etc — on which ASF Arabian Vista is coming up (40 acres) is worth a whopping Rs1,000m to Rs1,400m.



Interestingly, on the northern side of the Surjani Town Link Road, opposite the main entrance to the complex, one can see a blue steel gate with an "ASF Arabian Vista" sign above it. A long boundary wall extends on either side, parts of which display ASF Arabian Vista signboards. Are the planners of ASF Arabian Vista eyeing yet more state land on which to extend this complex?

Another project, ASF City, part of whose boundary is contiguous with DHA City off Superhighway, is planned on no less than 3,000 acres. The market price of land here is at least 10m per acre. It is worth asking: why does a force of less than 9,000 personnel need such huge 'welfare schemes'?

No title to land

The ASFF office, a new three-storey building emblazoned with huge images of ASF's upcoming real estate projects, overlooks the Karachi airport tarmac — very befitting given ASF's actual, mandated role. As it turned out, Col Afzal had invited Managing Director World Group Muneer Trunkwala to join him during his interview with Dawn. According to Col Afzal: "We manage the Arabian Vista project, while they have provided the land."

For his part, Mr Trunkwala said that ASF's contribution to the project is its "brand name", as well as provision of lifetime management and security. Acknowledging that "title is the most important component in any housing project," he added: "Mash'Allah, where Saima Arabian Villas and ASF Arabian Vista are concerned, it is totally perfect and up to date."

However, the digitised land record on the Sindh government's Board of Revenue (BoR) website (sindhzameen.gos.pk) tells a very different story: it shows the area on which ASF Arabian Vista is coming up and where Saima Arabian Villas stands as being sarkari (government) land. The builders have not met the basic condition of a legitimate real estate enterprise, ie title to land.

Interestingly, the relevant BoR record, has suddenly gone missing from its website. It remained inaccessible until this story went into print.

Sources in BoR confirmed to Dawn that there exists no evidence in its record that this land has ever been allotted. (However, there were a number of dairy farms operating on 30-year leases. These leases were allegedly cancelled without notice to facilitate several unscrupulous developers eyeing the area; around 15 leaseholders have filed petitions in court.)

On Nov 28, 2012, recognising "the rampant corruption and organised crime of land grabbing particularly regarding prime state land and mismanagement/forges in the revenue record," the five-member Supreme Court bench hearing the 'Karachi unrest' case (No.16 of 2011) banned the Sindh government from issuing any lease, or effecting any allotment, transfer or mutation etc of government land "till the entire revenue record [record of ownership] of Sindh is reconstructed". This includes the land record of 878 dehs that were destroyed in the riots triggered by Benazir Bhutto's assassination in 2007.

(Implicitly acknowledged by the SC in the above case is the fact that the land mafia is the 'mother ship' of criminal rackets in Pakistan's chaotic megalopolis, where they find shelter and common cause. In March 2018, a JIT set up on the apex court's orders to investigate Orangi Pilot Project director Perween Rahman's murder in Karachi on March 13, 2013, concluded that land mafia elements were the "clearest beneficiaries" of her death because as a result, OPP's work on helping villagers in district Malir obtain land rights came to a complete standstill.

ASF is responsible for the security of all airports in the country. Although it includes less than a dozen army officials on secondment, this military connection comes in handy to browbeat civilian authorities.

The JIT report touched upon the workings of the racket, stating that despite their political differences, all the groups involved in land-grabbing, which at the time included MQM, ANP and TTP "worked hand in glove, often supporting each other's activities... Big developers in the city would ally themselves with these groups, using [their] militant wings...as their muscle in order to forcibly seize land. Anyone who came in their way was either threatened, or if they refused to back off, killed...often murders that were declared as being politically motivated or acts of terrorism, were in actual fact land disputes that were made to look like political killings".)

In 2013, BoR submitted a consolidated report in the SC asserting that the record of the 93 dehs that comprise Karachi had been reconstructed. According to Iqbal Rehmani, deputy director GIS, BoR, "Records obtained from district commissioners and mukhtiarkars [local land revenue officers] were scanned here and uploaded on the website".

Senior Member BoR Mohammed Hussain Syed conceded there is "considerable tampering in the land record in Sindh at the mukhtiarkar level, particularly where prices of real estate had risen or were likely to do so, such as in Jamshoro, Thatta and Karachi". He added it was precisely to prevent such tampering that the BoR had set up its Land Administration and Revenue Management Information System. So far, under the LARMIS project, 85 per cent of the land record in the 6,093 dehs of Sindh has been digitised.

There remain certain dehs where the record is still to be verified in its totality by local land officials, but Deh Jam Chakro, according to a BoR official, does not figure among them.

As acknowledged by the SC, it is the very custodians of government land in Sindh, protected by their political bosses, who hand over prime pieces of real estate to unscrupulous builders and collude with them to violate every law in the book.

There is BoR, Sindh, the provincial government department that maintains land records and allots land to individuals, and to societies, institutions and development agencies etc, to develop schemes for specific purposes; and the SBCA, which is supposed to approve building plans in line with town planning regulations.

The various development agencies include the Karachi Development Authority, Defence Housing Authority Karachi, Malir Development Authority, Lyari Development Authority (LDA), etc that are responsible for approving layout plans.

The land occupied by ASF Arabian Vista and Saima Arabian Villas falls under LDA's jurisdiction. However, enquiries about these projects have been met either with stonewalling, prevarication or outright hostility.

First, the alleged underhand dealings in the case of Saima Arabian Villas that extended seamlessly into the more recently initiated ASF project. In November and December 2016 and in July 2017, citing the Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016, R.A., a private citizen, wrote to the land officials concerned asking for clarifications pertaining to the Saima project. (ASF Arabian Vista was announced in April 2017.)

Copies of the letters, and proof of dispatch, are in Dawn's possession. They are addressed or cc'd to the DG SBCA, DG LDA, Senior Member BoR, and others.

The letters ask for copies of documents showing the developers/builders' proof of ownership, and for the notices that the land authorities are legally required to place in newspapers to seek public objections before issuing any NOCs. He received no response from any quarter.

R.A. also approached BoR to seek information about title to the land. On Sept 26, 2017, he received a letter from the deputy director (GIS) of BoR's Reforms Wing and Special Cell — which was responsible for digitising Sindh's land records — informing him that "the requested ownership information...is not available in the computerised database... However, the concerned mukhtiarkar will be the relevant authority to obtain the authenticated details of the same."

This was the official response. However, R.A. had already been privately informed by a senior source in BoR Sindh that the land — survey numbers 82,83, 84 and 85 of Deh Jam Chakro, Tapo Manghopir, Gadap Town — was government and not private land. (According to R.A., when his contact in BoR pulled up the satellite image of the area, he was completely taken aback to find construction there — on what he believed was undeveloped government land.)

Nevertheless, R.A. wrote to the deputy commissioner, district West as suggested, with a copy to the mukhtiarkar of Manghopir. There was no response.

He was similarly stonewalled when he wrote to LDA requesting copies of 10 NOCs of layout plans issued by the authority for the project. In his letter, he pointed out, "Please take notice that these NOCs are reportedly issued on some fake / manipulated documents." Again, no response.

When Dawn spoke with DG LDA Aziz Memon, a Grade-18 officer appointed to a Grade-20 post, he first tried to obfuscate and deflect, but when asked point blank why he did not respond to the letters by a member of the public legally entitled to ask questions of a government department, he furiously ordered the correspondent to leave his office.

(Incidentally, Mr Memon wears several hats, including chief engineer LDA, director finance LDA, director land LDA, and more. The authority has been functioning without a full-fledged DG since three years in violation of the SC's landmark judgement in Criminal Original Petition No89/2011, in which a three-judge bench ruled against out-of-turn promotions and the posting of officers on deputation.)

Arabian Vista shenanigans

In early May 2018, the Karachi editions of several newspapers carried a notice from LDA inviting public objections pertaining to nearly 40 acres of land in Manghopir in district West. The notice was fishy in several respects.

For one, although the land was that on which ASF's Arabian Vista project was coming up, the notice made no mention of the project, even though World Group and ASF had already long begun marketing it through Star Marketing. In fact, it named three private individuals, Syed Johar Ali Qandhari, Mohammed Ayub, Arshad Iqbal and others as owners, although according to the government's own record, this is state land. Secondly, how did World Group announce the ASF project in April 2017 and ASF begin marketing it before seeking legally mandated public objections to the ownership of the land on which it was planned?

Former ASF DG Maj Gen Sohail Ahmed has said that ASF Housing is meant to "generate funds for the welfare of shuhada's families and ASF retirees". However, the Karachi airport attack in 2014, whose victims included 12 ASF personnel, is perhaps the sole instance when members of the force have been martyred.



Across the road from the main entrance to ASF Arabian Vista are signs that the planners envision the project's expansion further north of the Surjani Town Link Road. — Photo by author

When asked these questions, Mr Trunkwala and Col Afzal claimed, implausibly enough, that they were at the time under the impression that normal rules of procedure did not apply to ASFF. "We were doing something new," said Col Afzal. "We didn't have the understanding. We thought that as ASFF was created through a government of Pakistan notification, we don't need to involve the Sindh government."



DHA Karachi, also helmed by senior military officers, is the country's most powerful land authority and has been in the real estate business for decades. The ASFF, with its own top tier drawn from the higher echelons of the military, would not have had to go far to seek advice about its "new" revenue generation stream. Unfortunately, it seems that ASF's top bosses, using the security establishment as a cover, believe they enjoy carte blanche to run their business projects exactly as they please. (Consider this: Col Afzal told Dawn that ASFF is dealing with the land authorities, obtaining NOCs, etc. Why is it doing so when by its own admission it is "new" to the business of real estate?)

And the Trunkwalas have been dealing with LDA and SBCA for at least a decade in the context of the Saima project in the immediate vicinity. The partners in the ASF Arabian Vista project are no real estate neophytes.

Dawn also interviewed Additional Director LDA Syed Raheel Ali regarding Saima Arabian Villas and ASF Arabian Vista. In spite of asserting that LDA only issued approvals after getting the required go-ahead from BoR Sindh, Mr Raheel let slip some telling remarks. "I make sure that not an inch of private land is disturbed." (LDA is custodian not only of private land but also public land in its jurisdiction.)

He also criticised the Supreme Court order banning the Sindh government from effecting any allotment, mutation, lease etc on state land, saying, "In such a situation, people find ways to do things". When asked why LDA was allowing World Group and ASF to brazenly publicise and take bookings for a project on land to which neither has title, the additional director LDA's lame response was that "everyone is doing it".

(Incidentally, following a separate Supreme Court verdict on Oct 3, 2018, Mr Raheel is among six LDA employees who were served with termination letters last December; like the others, he had allegedly been appointed chief engineer even though he did not possess an engineering degree certified by the Pakistan Engineering Council.)

Given all this wheeling and dealing, it may seem puzzling that SBCA through its show-cause notice in 2017 had demanded that ASF abide by the letter of the law. But according to a former bureaucrat with decades of experience in land matters, there was more to it than met the eye. "ASF had clearly bulldozed its way over SBCA," he said. "Palms were not being greased, so SBCA threw the book at ASF." Otherwise, why else would SBCA allow the equally dubious Saima Arabian Villas project to proceed thus far without raising the same objections?

Thus ASFF, a subsidiary of a national security force that prides itself on its reputation, is taking bookings for apartments that will mint billions of rupees for its coffers, but which are being constructed on land to which no private organisation or individual has legal title.

The lack of transparency manifests itself on several levels. According to an interview given to a TV channel by then ASF DG Maj Gen Sohail (under whom the four ASF real estate projects were announced), 80,000 people registered with ASFF to become eligible for balloting in the ASF housing schemes. At Rs10,000 per person, that came to a total of Rs800 million in proceeds for the foundation.

However, when Mohammed Irfan, a mid-level employee in the corporate sector, was unsuccessful in the balloting for ASF Towers in Malir Cantonment, it took him almost a year of repeated visits to the ASFF office to finally get his Rs10,000 refund in the form of a cheque.

Curiously however, this cheque, drawn on a Kasur district branch of Al Baraka Bank, did not bear the name of ASFF but that of two individuals, one of whom, Raheel Abbas, had put his signature to it. And, it bounced.
(By Naziha Syed Ali Dawn, 01, 04/02/2019)

Kamal demands implementation of 'SC-endorsed' Karachi Master Plan 2020

Pak Sarzameen Party chairman Syed Mustafa Kamal said on Sunday that those claiming to be the stakeholders of Karachi, including its mayor, were unaware of the fact that the provincial metropolis had a master plan which had been endorsed by the Supreme Court in 2007.



Showing the order of the Supreme Court and other relevant documents, he told a press conference at his party's headquarters, Pakistan House, that former chief justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry had ordered all land controlling authorities in the city to work in accordance with the Karachi Strategic Development Plan-2020 prepared by the then city district government.

He said that the court had ordered all such authorities, which had been providing municipal services in their respective jurisdiction, to form a board of governors which would be headed by the Karachi mayor.

Slams Sindh govt for not empowering districts in accordance with 18th Amendment

It was also ordered that the defence ministry should issue a notification to separate all residential areas from its cantonment boards so that the function of municipal services should be delegated to the mayor, he added.

"All issues of Karachi can be solved by implementing this decision of the Supreme Court," he said, adding that in the light of the SC directives no city authority could frame its own bylaws or rules.

Sindh govt not giving rights to districts

He criticised the Sindh government for not delegating resources and powers to the third-tier of the government.

He said that on the one hand the provincial government was demanding that the federal government issue the next National Finance Commission (NFC) award on the basis of revenue instead of population, but on the other hand it was not giving the districts their rights through the Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) award.

Accompanied by PSP president Anis Kaimkhani and others, he asked the federal government not to issue the NFC award until all provinces submitted a schedule with regard to issuance of PFC award.

He said that the main objective of the 18th Amendment was to devolve powers from the Centre to provinces and from provinces to districts, and it should be implemented in letter and spirit.

Mr Kamal said that he had publicly extended full cooperation to Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan convener Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui for the solution of Karachi's problem.

About the ongoing drive against illegal buildings constructed after changing the land status, he said that his party never supported illegal constructions and land grabbing in the city, but the government should not leave alone the people who were now living in such settlements.

(By Azfar-ul-Ashfaq Dawn, 15, 04/02/2019)

Italian archaeologist says Bhambhore 'is no doubt' Deybul

The ruins of Bhambhore have baffled and challenged scholars, historians and archaeologists since the start of the 20th century. It has been for years visited frequently by historians and archaeologists, who poked and probed to ascertain whether it was the place where Sassui hailed from or, as many historians claim, houses the ruins of Deybul, the city which was conquered by Muhammad Bin Qasim in 712 AD.



And at the hub of this excavation project is a joint Pakistani and Italian historical and archaeological mission where Prof Dr Valeria Fiorani Piacentini, scientific director for the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy, works tirelessly alongside a group of 10 Pakistanis, headed by Naheed Zehra, director for exploration and excavations.

Talking to Dawn, Prof Valeria said that from 2010 five seasons of excavation and research have been conducted, with periods of continual work as well as disrupted seasons. "The licence expired in 2015, and was never extended. Then in May 2017 a formal request from the government of Sindh was forward to the president of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Prof Franco Anelli, which was accepted," she said.

'Bhambhore was at the centre of trade with a large part of the world'

On Oct 20, 2017, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Manzoor Ahmed Kanasro, director general for antiquities, of the culture, tourism and antiquities department, government of Sindh, and Prof Franco Anelli. This allowed the joint mission to carry out research activities in the field of history and archaeology, with specific regard to the sites of Bhambhore and Ranikot. There are also plans to develop a common programme in the field of formation and training (theoretical and on the job) of young officers in the fields of archaeology and research, involving academic and administrative units.

Archaeological and historical fieldwork, research in laboratories and, of course, in libraries has finally resumed in Bhambhore.

"We now have a flesh of what this site and city was," said Prof Valeria, while sharing the discoveries made in Bhambhore which include homes and settlements, cemeteries, pottery, and skeletons with arrowheads or spearheads in the skulls or other parts of the body. "A wealth of artefacts has also emerged such as glass, semi-manufactured shells, manufactured ivory and bones, wood, little objects, pottery, iron and copper tools. All these discoveries indicate that crafts and metallurgic activity were intensely practised in given phases of the peopling of the site."

She recalled the first time she visited Bhambhore: "The site was totally abandoned and little villages made by F.A. Khan were totally collapsing. But the museum situated there was wonderful and a source of invaluable information. It is a jewel because if you want to have an overall idea of Bhambhore, you will find everything there and the artefacts [are] very well looked after. However, F.A. Khan's excavation notes have been lost; all is left are some of his articles and a little booklet still being reprinted, which is perfect and every single thing in it is spot on with regards to the site."

Bhambhore today is a bewildering area, added Prof Valeria. What has been found indicates the area to be an interlacing of different religions and a hub of religious creeds, a remarkable harbour, a cultural hub, a bastion town, a thriving marketplace of luxury goods and at the centre of trade with a large part of the world, including Inner Asia, Eastern Asia, the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean. Intricate network of structures

Prof Valeria spoke about how the campaigns so far have revealed an intricate network of structures belonging to the Sassanian and pre-Sassanian periods, and also the Islamic era. "Under the Sassanian area there was a lot of material coming out, but the water table prevented us from going deeper. However, our findings on Bhambhore with Dr Monique Kervran from France, who worked at the site with me before she became too unwell to continue, indicated that Bhambhore was Barbarikon, which was a Greek name given to a seaport."

Exploring the outside area of Bhambhore is now part of the agenda, said Prof Valeria. "We are planning to concentrate on the industrial area and the stratigraphic sequencing is being finished. We have found unique workshops of ivory which have never been found anywhere in the world. We identified two types of typologies found — one is the cheaper one and the other an expensive one which is truly remarkable and for which the merchants must have paid a higher price.

"Each shop produced a distinct item and then was sold to another person for the next stage of production. Imagine the extent of sophistication of this market economy that existed; it is industrialisation at its best. All the research so far indicates that Bhambhore is in fact Deybul. There is no doubt it is Deybul."

Director general for antiquities Kanasro, when asked whether the joint mission successfully proves that Bhambhore is the historic site of Deybul, said that a confirmation and formal announcement would soon be made while the project continued.

He hailed the project as a great triumph for the teams of researchers who had worked tirelessly and unearthed precious historic information. "The government of Sindh is fully committed to this project and we are helping and facilitating the mission in all ways possible, especially with regards to providing them unfettered access to the area and the right tools to conduct their excavations and conservation. It is a big achievement as a big business hub has been discovered which traded from South Asia all the way to Egypt."

Mr Kanasro also said that opening the site to the public would allow local and international historians and archaeologists to access the ruins and allow them to share input. There are also plans to add on to the museum and extend it further, especially with regards to including the latest findings of the joint mission.

(By Haneen Rafi Dawn, 15, 06/02/2019)

Shelters for the poor

Cold wave has once again taken over Karachi. While people with the means to afford heaters and winter wear are keeping themselves warm, there are many — the homeless, the beggars and the impoverished — who are unable to comfort themselves during this chilly season.

Shelters to keep the homeless warm have been set up in Punjab and other provinces on the orders of Prime Minister Imran Khan. It is requested that the Sindh government too should take such an initiative and set up shelters that include comforters and blankets that can be collected through donations from Karachiites.

Maham Ansari

(By Letter The Express Tribune, 17, 08/02/2019)

Bahria Town theft

ON Jan 11 while I was away in Lahore, thieves broke into my house in Bahria Town phase IV, Islamabad. They took away cash and jewellery under the nose of so-called security for which Bahria Town administration takes huge sums of money from residents.

I have been living in Bahria Town since 2007 and in the current house since 2013. A few years ago, Bahria Town charged each house 50,000 rupees for the installation of CCTV cameras. One security camera was installed in front of my house. In addition to this, I pay Rs3,880 for maintenance and security charges every month.

After the theft when I asked Bahria Town security to provide me the footage of the duration when theft took place, they said that no footage from that time was available.

If this is the case, then what is the use of such CCTV system installed?

I need this footage to help police investigate and find the burglars.

Since Bahria Town has failed to protect and safeguard my property despite levying huge charges, it should immediately refund my Rs50,000 and all monthly charges in the name of security and also compensate for my loss because of theft, for it was its duty to prevent it and they have failed to deliver.

I have also contacted the ASP at Koral police station to draw his attention towards police non-cooperation and refusal to register an FIR.

I was told that media does not publish anything about crime and thefts in Bahria Town because the management has immense influence and get any such news killed. But I have complete confidence in your esteemed media organisation which stands for the freedom of press.

Syed Mujtaba Shahid

Islamabad

(By From the Newspaper Dawn, 09, 08/02/2019)

SC rejects Bahria Town's offer of Rs405bn for Malir land

Bahria Town (Pvt) Ltd on Thursday again increased its offer to Rs405 billion from earlier Rs358bn for the lands it possesses in Malir district of Karachi, to be paid in 12 years.

"Neither the offer amount nor the period of payments appears to be exciting," said Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed while heading a three-judge Supreme Court bench, and postponed further proceedings for Feb 28.

The court had taken up implementation of its May 4, 2018 judgement which held that the land grant to the Malir Development Authority (MDA) by the Sindh government, its exchange with the land of the private land developers — Bahria Town — and anything done under the provisions of the Colonisation of Government Land Act 1912 by the provincial government was illegal.

The land was granted to the MDA for launching an incremental housing scheme, but instead of doing so, the authority exchanged it with the Bahria Town which launched a scheme of its own, the judgement had held.

The court had asked senior lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar, representing real estate tycoon Malik Riaz, to ask his client not to take the apex court other than seriously otherwise the court would not take him seriously.

On Thursday, the court also said it was not restraining the National Accountability Bureau from proceeding against the Bahria Town when Prosecutor General of the bureau Syed Asghar Haider told the court that the executive board of NAB had approved filing of a reference against the Bahria Town, which would be sent to the Karachi office within a week. "After this we will move forward," the prosecutor general said, adding that four more references would follow.

The counsel argued that keeping in view the observations of Justice Faisal Arab, a member of the SC bench, the Bahria Town was willing to offer to purchase 16,896 acres of land in Malir district for Rs405bn on the assumption that the saleable area was not more than 45 per cent of the entire land.

The counsel explained that Justice Arab, in his separate note on the May 4 judgement, had calculated that the profits the developer could have made from the sale of 7,675 acres of land was Rs225bn whereas the profit which could have been made by the MDA was to the tune of Rs135bn.

This calculation of Justice Arab was based on the assumption that 60pc cent of the land was saleable whereas 40pc was not saleable since it was to be used for amenities like road network, the lawyer said.

About the payment schedule, Ali Zafar said that the Bahria Town had already paid over Rs14bn which was lying with the court. "This amount should be adjusted against the payment of Rs405bn while the remaining amount would be payable in 12 years in instalments of Rs2bn per month for the first six years and Rs3bn per year for the remaining six years," he said.

Alternatively the developer could pay half the amount to the Sindh government and build and develop projects like desalination plant, sewerage treatment plant, Blue Line Rapid Bus Transit, improvement of roads and schools, Malir Expressway, renovation or up-gradation of one or two main hospitals, of value equivalent to the remaining amount, the lawyer said. This amount was enough to change the scenario of Karachi, he added.

But the court told Mr Zafar that he should not get the impression that the Rs405bn offer was accepted by the court, adding that the delayed payment would reduce the net value of the money.

Justice Muneeb Akhtar observed that the Bahria Town was not offering any immediate payment since it asked the court to adjust Rs14bn and that the rest of the money would be paid in 12 years.

"You should remember that the court and the Bahria Town are not sitting on a negotiating table," Justice Saeed told the lawyer, adding that the sun was setting in the twilight zone and that the destiny was charged against the Bahria Town.

At this Mr Zafar requested the court to guide the developer what was the possible calculation.

"We have a feeling that the sand under your feet is slipping away rather has gone," Justice Saeed said, adding that it was not his headache to suggest the use of the money and that it should be left with the provincial government to spend it on whichever way it chose.

Since the court was not satisfied with the proposal and required the counsel to revise it, Mr Zafar said that he would come up with a fresh offer after revisiting the Rs405bn offer.

Senior counsel Khawaja Tariq Raheem also assured the court that the fresh proposal would be in accordance with the expectation of the Supreme Court.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 01, 15/02/2019)

NAB investigating 53 housing scams across Sindh

The National Accountability Bureau, Karachi, on Friday decided to expedite its efforts to give back plots to the victims of 53 housing scams.

A high-level meeting of NAB reviewed over 53 housing scams, majority of which were located in Karachi, and decided to expedite inquiries/investigations to restore lands to original allottees and prevent such frauds.

Participants of the meeting also observed that "weak regulations and poor legal framework" had put enormous burden on NAB in terms of number of complaints.

A spokesperson for the anti-graft watchdog said that the Karachi director general of NAB chaired the meeting "for review of cases under inquiries and investigation that pertain to housing scams".

It was pointed out by the directors of the investigation wings that the highest number of cases related to housing scams pertained to cooperative housing schemes.

It was further stated that there were total 53 cases of various cooperative societies in which thousands of people had been deprived of their rightful titles of properties by “way of fraud and cheating perpetrated by office holders of societies in connivance with regulators and officials of the Sindh cooperation department”.

Out of 53 cases, 12 are under inquiry, 19 under advanced stage of investigation and 22 references are being tried by accountability courts of Karachi and Hyderabad.

Out of these cases, 44 societies are located in Karachi and nine in Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Jamshoro, etc.

“It was also apprised that weak regulation on the part of government authorities and poor legal framework have exacerbated the state of affairs. It leads to enormous number of complaints pouring in at NAB against cooperative societies,” said the spokesperson.

The NAB DG issued directions to the combined investigation teams (CITs) to expedite the cases, recover the lands and restore to their rightful owners as early as possible in order to allay the plight of the poor people seeking return of their hard-earned money.

He also issued directions to the awareness and prevention (A&P) wing “to engage with the Sindh cooperation department to pursue measures on their part to prevent more offences in cooperative societies and take stringent actions against delinquent registrars, assistant registrars and administrators involved in irregularities and conniving with land grabbers”.

He appreciated the director of the investigation wing-I for executing plea bargain in the Pak Punjab Cooperative Society for return of plots and issued directions to prosecutors to vigorously pursue prosecution in trial courts to ensure conviction of culprits.
(By The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 16/02/2019)

Yasmeen Lari - the woman who taught Pakistan how to build for the poor

To an outsider, Yasmeen Lari has lived the perfect life. Born into privilege, to an Indian Civil Service officer in pre-partition Dera Ghazi Khan in 1941, Lari was granted all the avenues to build a successful career. She was schooled in elite institutions, had a British governess and hardly ever wanted for anything.



It is of no surprise then, you would think, that a woman of Lari’s stature would become the first female architect of Pakistan. Here, you would be wrong. For even Lari’s privileged upbringing did not allow her to escape the harsh realities of the patriarchal setup prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. Despite having qualified as an architect from the prestigious Oxford School of Architecture, Lari’s judgments and professional dealings were constantly questioned by contractors and even labourers on account of her gender.

A time of chaos

Today, Lari is best known for her unique approach to her work – the intersection of architecture and social justice. To understand her ideals, however, you would have to travel back in time to her early childhood days, which left a lasting impact on her personality.

Soon after Partition, Lari’s father, Zafarul Ahsan, was posted as the deputy commissioner of Lahore. It was a time of great misery and total anarchy, as hundreds of thousands of refugees travelled to either side of the border with little more than the clothes on their backs.

“There was a passion,” she reminisces, “in every person to do their bit for the country given to us by the Almighty.” Her parents, both actively involved in the relief work for migrants, would discuss the situation at home. Here is where Lari learnt her lessons of empathy.

“There was also anger,” she says, referring to the trains filled with bloodied corpses that pulled into the Lahore station. “People wanted to hurt those fleeing to India,” she remembers. “But my father always intervened in these situations.”

Her mother, meanwhile, would frequently visit the refugee camps and ask after the migrants. “It was winter season and people needed warm clothes and blankets.”

A privileged upbringing

Lari acquired her primary education from the Queen Mary’s School – one of the most prestigious institutions in the city. She then got enrolled in Adabistan-e-Soophia, where she got her first indoctrination in the Persian language. This institution, says Lari, served as her awakening to the prevalent conditions in the country and her responsibilities toward it.

After completing her studies at Adabistan-e-Soophia, she got admitted to the Kinnaird College in Lahore. She was in the second year of the intermediate level, when her father was posted as the head of Pakistan International Airlines. The posting gave ample opportunity for travel and the whole family, including Lari’s elder brother and two younger sisters, decide to move to London for better educational facilities.

Starting off in Karachi

In 1963, Lari graduated from the Oxford School of Architecture. "I had developed an interest in architecture, drawing inspiration from my father's work as chairperson of the Lahore Improvement Trust and the Thal Development Authority," she reminisces. "He often said that Pakistan needs many talented and highly educated professional architects," she adds.

Soon after her graduation, she returned to Pakistan with her husband, Suhail Lari, whom she had wedded during the course of her studies in London.

The young couple moved to Karachi, where Yasmeen, now 23, opened her architecture firm, Lari Associates. In 1969, Lari became an elected Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

She had officially become the first female architect of Pakistan – a title that was initially more a curse than a blessing as the male-dominated industry was reluctant to accept her. "It was a time when young people were driven by a passion to serve the country and they returned to Pakistan after completing their education," she says. "We had witnessed the sacrifices rendered to create Pakistan, which is why we valued it," she adds.

In Karachi, the young couple busied themselves with the literary circle, rubbing shoulders with famous artists of the time such as Shakir Ali, Sadequain and Gul Jee, among others.

Few people know that Yasmeen Lari is an expert at playing the Sitar – a plucked stringed instrument, originating from the subcontinent and used in classical music. She is the first Pakistani woman to play the Sitar live for a BBC London show.

Early career

Lari kicked off her career by designing the houses of close relatives and friends. Her first project was her brother's house. As her reputation grew, largely through word of mouth, she was commissioned more projects over the next few years. "Opportunities for young people, especially women, were quite limited at the time," she says. Again, her family came to her assistance. "It wasn't that difficult for me because I had my family's support," she says. In all, she designed around 24 houses.

Lari got her first big break when was commissioned by the Pakistan Navy to design a complex on Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan Road. Although she has always been a critic of high-rise buildings, saying they limit the social connection and are especially ill-suited for women, she undertook the project and gave it her own personal touch. The structure was designed keeping in mind the mobility of women and children.

This ideal was also reflected in her flagship project – the Anguri Bagh Housing scheme in Lahore, comprising 787 low-cost dwelling units arranged in 14 clusters of single, two-storey, and three-storey blocks.

She has since been the brains behind some of the most iconic buildings in Karachi, including the Taj Mahal Hotel in 1981, Finance and Trade Centre on Sharae Faisal in 1989 and the Pakistan State Oil House in 1991.

Social work

The Laris set up the Heritage Foundation in 1980, with the aim to preserve the cultural heritage that comes with structures of historic significance. Over the next 14 years, the NGO recorded over 600 historic buildings that required maintenance and preservation. "This was very hard work and required a lot of patience," she smiles.

Finding these buildings, making their sketches and then collecting documents detailing their historical significance was an uphill task.

But their fervent efforts finally bore fruit when in 1994, the Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act 1994 was approved for the preservation and this work was advanced through Sindh Culture Department. Now, the number of these protected buildings has reached 1,600.

Her efforts were recorded in the form of a book, 'The Dual City: Karachi During the Raj', by her son. The book features unique pictures of historical buildings of Karachi and their historic references. A guide book was also compiled in 2000 which included details of these heritage buildings.

Lari launched the Karavan Initiatives in 2001 in light of the book to raise awareness about these buildings. Sittings were organized on the city's footpaths to highlight the importance of the cultural heritage. Hundreds turned up to these sessions. In fact, one session, within the boundary wall of the Empress Market drew a crowd numbering into the thousands.

Giving back

Since retiring from professional practice in 2000, Lari has undertaken a number of projects to improve the living conditions of the less-privileged strata of society.

"My most important project is the nature-friendly stove designed for the women of Makli [a small town in Sindh]," she says. "It is even more important than the FTC building because it improves the lives of the poor and improves the status of women," she explains.

The stove reduces carbon emissions and it uses biological waste, instead of wood for burning. Its design incorporates safety standards for women and children and has been installed in over 40,000 homes to date.

Laari is also working to improve the living conditions of the beggars' community in Makli under the Barefoot Village Entrepreneurs Programme. The scheme offers a clean room, bathroom and an environment-friendly stove for a family and a combined water supply facility shared between five such houses. Each house costs between Rs25,000 and Rs30,000, which is supported by several international NGOs, besides the Heritage Foundation. "The beggars' community, which was spending their life under the open sky, is now able to live a better lifestyle and is also adopting different ways to earn," she explains.

Currently, 231 residents of eight villages are being trained in the construction of such houses. These include 43 persons with disabilities. Once their training is complete, they will be the master trainers, who will impart their skills to others.

Karachi's dilemma

According to Lari, it is the collective behavior of citizens that is responsible for the disproportional constructions and eradication of public spaces in Karachi. "There used to be more places to walk," she recalls of Karachi in the 70s. "The construction style of houses was more spacious and people used to socialise in the streets and parks," she adds.

But now, there is an abundance of cars and the government and city administration only focus to keep the flood of cars flowing. "Roads, underpasses and bridges are being constructed but spaces for citizens to socialise are becoming extinct," she laments.

On the recent anti-encroachment drive being conducted in the city on the Supreme Court's orders, Lari opined that it was a good effort to revive public spaces. "Some people are being affected by it, but it must be remembered that these places belong to everybody," she reasons.

One of the major reasons for Karachi's constant housing crisis is the influx of migrants from rural areas. "But this is not the people's fault, she cautions. "It's common across the world that port cities face population influx in the same manner," she says.

But this requires proper town planning on the government's part to ensure everyone has access to basic amenities. "Unfortunately, successive governments have never fulfilled this responsibility and slum areas emerged in the city," she says. "Everyone has the right to live and find an income in Karachi but the illegal occupation of others' places is not justifiable in any way," says Lari. "There is a great contribution of corruption in it. This city is a generous city but the slum areas continued to expand due to absence of planning," she adds.

For Lari, what Karachi needs is modern construction techniques and urban planning. She also has a suggestion for Prime Minister Imran Khan relating to the federal government's plans to construct low-cost housing units. "Their estimate for each housing unit comes to around Rs1.5 million to Rs2m," she says. "How can the poor afford this?" she questions, adding that her project provides housing for the less-privileged for a maximum of Rs30,000.

Architect par excellence

It is impossible to list Yasmeen Lari's accomplishments on these pages or even describe her contributions to the field of architecture in Pakistan as well as her social work for the under-privileged. Her publications, 'Slums and Squatter Settlements: Their Role and Improvement Strategy' and 'Our Heritage in Muslim Architecture', just to name a few have enlightened thousands of young architects. Her work for the preservation of heritage buildings has at the very least raised awareness on a societal level and to a large extent, stopped their decay due to official apathy.

She has received numerous accolades from both local and international organisations. In 2002, the Heritage Foundation received the UN Recognition Award for its efforts to promote historical preservation. In 2006, Lari was awarded the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, one of the country's highest civilian awards, in recognition of her services to the profession and for the conservation of heritage sites in Pakistan. In 2016, she received the prestigious Fukuoka Prize for Arts & Culture.

For Lari, however, her biggest reward is in Makli. When women improve their status in the community by making a living through the stove she designed. When the poor are able to sleep under a roof. This was what she learnt from her parents. This is what she has been striving for all these years.

(By Kashif Hussain The Express Tribune, 04, 18/02/2019)

Tribunal summons SBCA chief in Bath Island building construction case

The Sindh environmental protection tribunal has summoned the chief of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) along with relevant record of an under-construction commercial plaza in Clifton after the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) informed it that it had cancelled the initial environmental examination (IEE) approval granted to the builder for the project.

The three-member tribunal, headed by its chairman retired Justice Sadiq Hussain Bhatti, directed the SBCA director general to appear along with layout plan approval granted to M/s Burj Builders to build luxurious apartments on Feb 28.

Prof Shahjahan Katpar had approached the tribunal challenging a no-objection certificate (NOC) issued by Sepa deputy director (Technical-II) Mohammad Imran Sabir on Aug 15, 2017 for the construction of a 15-storey commercial plaza on a residential plot No A-40, Street No. 4, Bath Island, Clifton.

The complainant submitted that he had sent a letter to Sepa seeking cancellation of its decision of according IEE for the construction of the building on a 2,000-square yards residential plot adjacent to his house, but no action was taken.

The multistorey building is being constructed on a residential plot

He said that the issuance of the NOC for the construction of the proposed project fell in the category (i)2 of Schedule-II under which the agency could issue an environmental impact assessment (EIA) instead of the IEE, which is issued in respect of the projects to be built on land measuring less than 2,000 square yards area and below 15 floors.

He added that the actual size of the plot, as per the record of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, was more than 2,000 square yards and it was residential in nature. The layout plan of the SBCA showed that the proposed commercial high-rise would comprise of 15 floors or above, he said.

The complainant argued that Sepa had issued IEE in respect of the proposed project in violation of the SEPA Act, 2014 and sought a direction for its cancellation.

The complainant had submitted that the agency failed to take any action against the project, which could cause environmental and civic issues in the residential locality.

In response to the tribunal's notice, Sepa director general Naeem Mughal furnished a report stating that a show-cause notice was issued to the proponent — the owner of M/s Burj Builders and Developers — on Feb 1 and a departmental committee was constituted for conducting an enquiry into the matter on the same date.

The report stated that the committee investigated/enquired the matter and submitted its report with observations that the subject project fell within the schedule of the EIA.

In view of the plot size, it added: "The IEE report concealed and misrepresented the facts of the project before this agency due to mala fide intentions to escape from the EIA review project."

M/s Burj Builders filed a reply to Sepa through counsel, who argued and placed his contention before the tribunal against the show-cause notice on Feb 14.

The Sepa chief mentioned that after hearing arguments advanced by the counsel and in view of the findings of the inquiry committee he was of the firm opinion that the builder had failed to provide realistic facts to the agency about the project and had failed to give justified and satisfactory reply during the proceedings held on Feb 14.

Therefore, Mr Mughal submitted that in exercise of power conferred under Regulation 21 of IEE/EIA Regulation, 2014 the approval of Sepa issued in favour of the IEE report of the project submitted by the builder was cancelled/withdrawn.

He added that the builder was also directed under Section 21(2) of the Sindh Environmental Protection Act, 2014 to immediately stop construction work on the project and submit an EIA report within one month of issuance of the direction.

He also submitted an inquiry report, which found that during a site inspection project manager Haris Memon informed it that the land measured 2,000 square yards and contained 15 floors.

The committee found that the complainant's residence was adjacent to the project site, where the construction work was continuing and had reached up to third parking floor.

The committee evaluated the IEE report prepared by M/s Environmental Management Consultants (EMC) Pakistan Private Limited from which it specifically transpired that the total area of the subject plot was 1,980 square yards (17,820 square feet) and total number of the upper floors was mentioned as basement and ground plus 14-storey residential development.

The report stated that the measurement of 1,980 square yards explicitly contradicted the measuring size of the plot given by the SBCA to be 2,000 square yards.

It mentioned that the builder failed to turn up along with the relevant record of the project despite issuance of notices repeatedly, adding that the consultancy firm's representatives were summoned to appear and file comments, but they sought time.

The inquiry body concluded that the project in question fell in IEA category while the relevant officer Imran Sabir did not go through the relevant rules and regulations.

As far as the role of the consultant was concerned, the inquiry committee concluded that the consultant misrepresented the report about the project to Sepa and placed misstatement regarding the actual size of the plot and floors of the building. Therefore, it recommended that the competent authority may take appropriate action, as per law.

In view of Sepa's report, the tribunal's head directed the SBCA chief to appear along with the relevant record of the proposed project on Feb 28.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 16, 19/02/2019)

Sindh govt to develop master plan for 15 districts of province

Eventually realising the consequences of the haphazard expansion of the urban and semi-urban towns in the province, the Sindh government has embarked on a programme to control and manage the diffusion of these settlements.

In this regard, the Sindh planning and development (P&D) department has undertaken the exercise of developing master plans for 15 districts of the province after notifying the same for Karachi and Sukkur recently.

At a marathon consultation workshop, divided into five sessions for as many districts of Hyderabad division, in Hyderabad on Thursday the officials shared details of the tentative master plans. A team of the directorate of urban policy and strategic planning and EA Consulting (Pvt) Ltd briefed the officials of various government departments of Dadu, Jamshoro, Tando Muhammad Khan, Matiari and Tando Allahyar districts.

The directorate's Deputy Director Zulfiqar Ali said that the team was preparing master plans for 15 towns of 14 districts of Hyderabad, Shaheed Benazirabad and Mirpurkhas divisions. One district headquarters town from each of the district has been selected for the plans except Tharparkar whose two towns, Mithi and Islamkot, have been included. Each district in Sindh has at least three to four semi-urban or semi-rural towns, but the project has selected only one town from each district.

Strangely, Hyderabad district is not part of the exercise. "Hyderabad's master plan was prepared in 2007 and its current status is neither approved nor rejected," he said. Hyderabad's plan was prepared when Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) Deputy Convener Kunwar Naveed Jamil was the city Nazim. Ali said the plan appeared out-dated and needed revision.

In the second phase of the project, the plans will be prepared for the six remaining districts of Sukkur and Larkana divisions. The master plans are also divided into two phases. The first phase is for five years and the second contains planning for two decades, till 2037.

During the five years, the rehabilitation of the existing infrastructure will be carried out. The head of urban planning of EA Consulting (Pvt) Ltd, Masoodul Hasan Jafri, said, "The downtown rehabilitation will be done with minimal dislocation".

He added that people cannot be uprooted from their abodes to expand the roads. He, however, expressed hope that the residents of the downtown will likely be shifted to new housing societies which will offer them better housing and related facilities.

Master plan

The plan allocates land for the future housing, commercial projects, government offices, education, health, trade, industry, recreation, religious places, for water, sewage and solid waste treatment and disposal, infrastructure to facilitate transportation, like road and rail, and graveyards, among other purposes. It also provides an immediate action plan for rehabilitation of existing roads, water supply and drainage infrastructure.

However, the stakeholders who attended the meeting were not informed about how many acres of land in each of the five districts will be required to implement the master plan. The team was also silent about the manner in which the land for the expansion will be purchased from the private landowners as well as from the provincial government.

The team also could not share how many acres will be set aside for each of the component sectors. Though Jafri claimed that they have done land use analysis of all the towns, the details were unavailable.

A participant suggested that the provincial government should complete the land acquisition for implementation of the plan as soon as it is approved and notified. He contended that with the passage of time the value of land will increase and the government will end up spending a far higher sum of money to purchase the land.

Responding to the suggestion, Jafri said that if the provincial government opted to purchase all the land required for the plan in the initial years of implementation, it will not be left with enough funds to finance the on-going and new development projects.

Deficiencies and omissions

An official of Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGC) pointed out that the master plan lacked mention of the supply of gas and electricity utilities. Jafri replied that they wrote to the SSGC in this regard, but they did not get the required information. The company's official, however, claimed that the company has not received any communication either from the consultants or the P&D department.

The SSGC's official, while pointing out that plan was silent over the subject of 'road height', told that until a few decades ago the gas pipelines lay three feet below the road surface in Tando Allahyar district. "Now, due to the addition of one layer of a road after another, during repair and maintenance works, the gas pipelines have been buried 10 to 12 feet deep".

P&D Assistant Director Sono Khan Chandio identified another problem relating to the road level – the damage caused to the structure and value of the residential and commercial properties. He said the people concerned with the ever increasing road level build the ramps for their car porches up to four feet high and by doing so they end up encroaching upon several feet into the roads.

Assistant professor of the department of city and regional planning (CRP), Dr Irfan Ahmed Memon, suggested that the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) regarding low-cost housing should also be included in the master plans.

“You are planning the cities, but you aren’t giving shape to the cities,” noted CRP Assistant Professor Fahad Shaikh. He also pointed out that the master plan appeared deficient about the details of the service roads, environment and commercial street plans.

The additional deputy commissioner of Matiari district opposed the location of the landfill site in the plan which he said were only around two kilometres away from the town.

He suggested that the site should be relocated at least 10km away. An education officer pointed out that no sports grounds have been included in the master plan.

The inter-town public transport also does not appear to be a part of the plan. Its absence attracted greater concern in the session of Jamshoro district. Pointing to the lack of geographical contiguity among Jamshoro, Kotri and Bolhari towns, unlike the towns in the other districts, the participants emphasised on the need to include mass transit in the plan.

Suggestions

An additional deputy commissioner asked the P&D department to convince the provincial government to ban the change of land use from agriculture to residential or residential to commercial. “The influential builders get approval for conversion of land from a union council and later they approach us for rest of the formalities”.

Responding to a query, Jafri said that tourism development was not completely included in the plan. “Who will promote tourism? The Sindh tourism department is not even planning for the sites which without a doubt offer huge revenue potential,” he lamented.

Syed Babur Ali of EA Consulting said that the concept of urban forestry, as being practised by some non-governmental organisations in Karachi, would be introduced to Jamshoro.

The mountainous part of Jamshoro will be developed for the residential and commercial schemes while the land along the Indus River and KB feeder canal will be kept solely for agricultural purposes. He argued that at present there were more new housing schemes than the housing demand in the district.

He said that uncontrolled development had led to the establishment of several housing colonies along the bypass roads which create traffic congestion. “The bypass roads are meant to provide an expressway to the vehicles by avoiding their passage from the urban settled areas. The expansion of the housing society on the bypass roads kills their purpose,” he said. He added that the master plans will ban future construction of housing schemes on the bypass roads.

(By ZALI The Express Tribune, 04, 24/02/2019)

Rethinking urbanisation

A SYMPOSIUM on cities and infrastructure, held at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, saw a variety of researchers, urban policy practitioners, activists, and artists getting together to discuss various aspects of Pakistan’s accelerating urbanisation process. The underlying theme, and a very pertinent one at that, was displacement and inequity produced by development, specifically the sort which relates to the aesthetic regeneration of the city and the building of large, avowedly modern infrastructure.



Since the Empress Market demolitions, the unfolding murkiness of Bahria Town’s expansion in Karachi, and the year-long heritage and conservation conflicts over the construction of Lahore’s Orange metro train line, there has been palpable unease over different aspects of Pakistan’s urbanisation process. Resultantly, there is a consensus, among scholars and activists at least, that the way our cities are designed, regulated, expanded, and administered is problematic. The monetary gains of this urbanisation are funnelled towards a sketchy, and largely undocumented real estate and construction sector; the use-value of this new infrastructure is mostly for the upper classes; and the aesthetic outlook is in step with that of an insular state elite, in the throes of a particular Gulf-tinted vision of modernity.

At each step, there are visible and documentable social justice and inequality concerns, which need to be addressed. Based on recent discussions at the Cities and Infrastructure symposium, as well as larger conversations happening in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, one can identify three areas of concern for researchers, concerned policy practitioners and activists.

The first of these is the institutional configuration of urban administration and regulation. In all three major cities, Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, it is quite apparent that displacement, regeneration, and development have taken place under the aegis of a bureaucratic-technocratic structure, which offers no avenues for citizen participation or accountability.

New models of development where the state invites private investors to acquire land create new challenges.

This is acutely apparent in the case of the Lahore Development Authority, which exists outside of the legal domain of the local government system and reports directly to the provincial tier of government. As a result, all projects that it (or similar bodies like the

CDA undertakes have very few legal provisions for the systematic incorporation of public views. The most they have are bureaucratic exercises like open-days, hearings, or town-hall meetings which serve no purposes except to check off procedural boxes.

This institutional flaw is particularly egregious given that changes imposed on how people physically experience their places of residence and work will fundamentally alter their day-to-day-lives. If planning and regulation bodies were decentralised and responsive to elected local governments, they would, at the very least, experience some formal and informal channels of pressure from public representatives. In such cases, the decision to build or destroy something, which is inherently a political act given that it involves material trade-offs, would be settled in the domain of a political institution (the local government system) rather than a bureaucratic system.

The second area of concern is the interaction of urban development and the market. This has been raised by a number of researchers already, most notably by Aisha Ahmad at Oxford University, who point out that the scale and scope of a city's built environment is directly tied to the flow of money and its relationship with investors, builders, and state functionaries (politicians and bureaucrats). New models of development where the state invites private investors to acquire land, rather than exercising eminent domain using the Land Acquisition Act as it used to in the past, create new challenges.

For example, the coercion deployed by the state through a legal instrument to dispossess holders of land is a tragedy, but one that is easily identifiable. On the other hand, how does one tame the workings of the land market which create similar negative consequences but currently operate within the entirely legal domain of market exchange? If a private developer or a public body operator pays a price at which a landowner is willing to sell to produce a large gated housing community, what sort of regulations should be created to guard against the by-products, such as dispossession, unemployment for farm workers, sites for speculative investment, ecological crises?

Finally, the third problem area that requires creative thinking and attention is the cultural ideals of urban life itself. This is slightly harder to grasp, but it is something that undergirds the problems encountered in the first two domains. There is a need to continue the nascent (but growing) interrogation of what it means to be urban in Pakistan, what sort of aesthetic and practical goals should a city encompass, who should the city serve, and to what ends should it be administered and regulated. This is a challenge because as recent state-led events like the Empress Market anti-encroachment drive, or the state-and-private-capital combination witnessed in the expansion of Bahria Town in Gadap show, existing projects can take the shape of both 'heritage protection' and 'modernisation', depending on the site at which they are working.

As the work of Karachi-based artists Zahra Malkani and Shahana Rajani in Gadap highlights, the definition of modernity and what constitutes heritage used by the state and private developers is exclusionary and often in service of narrow, profiteering interests. On top of that, in places like Lahore and Karachi, there is a bigger problem that these definitions have become hegemonic in the sense that they constitute the active aspirations of most common people. Most people want to live in gated communities, enjoy wide car-friendly boulevards, and experience the consumerist comforts on offer in places like Dubai or Singapore.

Creatively remoulding and rethinking these aspirations to fit the social justice and ecological constraints of a place like Pakistan may prove to be the biggest challenge. And to counteract against it, the nascent critically minded conversation on offer today will eventually have to force its way into the domain of mainstream policy and political discourse.

(By Umair Javed Dawn, 06, 25/02/2019)

Search on for survivors as three-storey building collapses

At least two persons died and several others injured when a three-storey building collapsed in Jafar Tayar Society, Malir, on Monday morning. Authorities claimed to have rescued a young boy from the rubble, but were uncertain about the number of casualties or injured as rescue efforts were ongoing till late into the night



The deceased, whose bodies were retrieved, were identified as Hassan Abbas Zaidi, the owner of the building, and his wife, Zahra. The injured child, who was rescued from the rubble, was identified as their son, Shahzain. The child told rescue workers that three of his siblings were also trapped inside the collapsed building.

The incident

The three-storey building, built on plot number A-51 in Jafar Tayar Society, behind Jamia Masjid Jaffar Tayyar, collapsed at around 7:30am. The sound of the collapse was heard several blocks away. On hearing the crash, neighbours and residents from several blocks rushed to the spot and tried to start rescue efforts. Soon, police and Rangers personnel and rescue teams affiliated with welfare organisations reached the spot. East Zone DIG Amir Farooqi and Malir SSP Irfan Bahadur also reached the site.

By this time, the neighbours had managed to retrieve the body of Hassan Abbas Zaidi. Residents kept complaining, however, that it wasn't possible for them to remove the rubble without the use of heavy machinery. They demanded the government to deploy its machinery to the site to help with the rescue efforts.

Authorities' lax response

It took over two-and-a-half hours for the government's machinery, which included an excavator to reach the site. The narrow streets and the large presence of onlookers made it particularly difficult for the heavy machinery to navigate its way to the collapsed building. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) had dispatched a snorkel, bulldozers, trucks and staff to assist in the rescue efforts.

At least three hours after the collapse, rescue workers managed to retrieve the injured boy, Shahzain, from the rubble. The child was in his school uniform and had severe injuries. The child told rescue workers that he was 13 years old and had just left the house for school when the building came crashing down. "There was a lot of noise and suddenly the building came crashing to the ground," he said, adding that his parents, two brothers and a sister were at home, besides at least six or seven other persons in other apartments.

Pakistan Army joins in

Sometime later, a contingent of the Pakistan Army's Engineering Corps reached the site to assist in the rescue mission. They brought along their own heavy machinery.

It took them several more hours to retrieve the body of the owner's wife, Zahra. Later, the deceased couple's bodies were transported to the morgue, while their injured son had already been shifted to a hospital.

Who lived there?

There was confusion about how many people were actually present in the building when it collapsed. According to neighbours, the deceased owner was an employee of the income tax department, while his wife was a government schoolteacher.

The owner lived with his wife and three sons on the first floor. The second floor had been rented out to a family, whose patron the neighbours identified as Syed Ali. He had, however, moved to another house two days before the incident. Two other families had been living on the third storey.

Local residents told The Express Tribune that the residential building was around six to seven years old. The ground floor of the plot measuring 96 yards had been allocated for an Imambargah.

Initially, it had been constructed as a ground-plus-one building, but later two more floors were added to it. The second floor was given on rent two years ago, while a part of the third floor was rented three years ago and the other, around six months ago. The reports, however, were unverified as the authorities could not say for sure whether the building had three floors or four.

Since the foundation of the building was not strong enough to bear the burden of the additional floors, cracks had appeared in the underground water tank a week before the incident.

As soon as the owner noticed the cracks, notices were issued to the tenants and work to strengthen the foundation was commenced. The work was under way when the accident occurred.

Neighbours also said that at the time of the building's collapse, an empty school van was parked below the building which was buried under the rubble.

SBCA reacts

Hours after the incident, the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) Director-General Iftikhar Kaimkhani reached the site, accompanied by a technical team. During the inspection, said the SBCA in a press release, neighbours informed them that the collapsed property was an old house measuring 100 square feet and comprising ground-plus-two storeys, which had been constructed around 25 to 30 years ago.

"Sometime ago, during the campaign against encroachments, front portion of the said house was demolished," the SBCA statement reads. "Thereafter the owner/occupant without consulting any professional and also without having any approval from SBCA has started cutting/jacketing the structure columns and beams on his own to give strength to the structure of his house from inside the premises with no visibility from outside," it added. Since the said property was a corner plot, restlessness and lack of strength in the existing foundation due to the damage done during the repairs of its structure caused the incident to occur, it claimed.

(By Sajid Rauf / Amir Farooq The Express Tribune, 04, 26/02/2019)

Victims of building collapse laid to rest

Emotional scenes were witnessed at the Ghazi Goth graveyard in Malir, where four members of a family, who had died after a three-storey building collapsed in Jaffar Tayyar Society on Monday, were laid to rest.

The victims' bodies, which had been retrieved from the rubble after hours-long efforts by rescue teams, were identified as Hassan Abbas Zaidi, his wife Zahra and their two sons, Sabih Haider and Jari Haider. A third son of the couple had been rescued in an injured condition from the site on Monday.

On Tuesday, the victims' funeral prayers were offered outside Jama Masjid Jaffar Tayyar Society in the afternoon and were led by Allama Naseem Haider. Hundreds of people, including relatives, friends, neighbours, government officials and political leaders attended the funeral prayers.

Eyewitness account

Speaking to the media after the burial, Javed, who said he was the Zaidis' driver, said that he had been present at the site when the building collapsed.

According to Javed, he used to drop one of Hassan Abbas's sons and his wife to school every morning and had come to work as per routine on Monday at around 7am. When he reached the house, he went upstairs to get the car keys and when he came down, Hassan Abbas followed him.

As he exited the building, he looked up and saw that the overhead water tank was shaking. "I asked Hassan Abbas if it was me who was dizzy or was the building shaking," recalled Javed.

Noticing the instability, Hassan Abbas, who was standing at the gate, immediately shouted for his family to get out. It was at this moment that the building collapsed. "I was momentarily knocked unconscious and when I came to, there was only dust and smoke everywhere," he said. As he regained his senses, he shouted out for help. The neighbours soon came out and together, they managed to pull Hassan Abbas from the rubble. Unfortunately, he had passed away by then.

Rescue efforts ongoing

The rescue operation continued well into Tuesday. According to rescue officials, there were no traces of any person present under the rubble anymore.

If anyone, other than Hassan Abbas's family was present in the building when it collapsed, someone would have come asking for them, but that wasn't the case.

According to the rescue teams, it would take several more hours for the debris to be cleared. They added a four-member team of the Sindh Building Control Authority will investigate the incident after the rubble is cleared.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 27/02/2019)

Building collapse death toll rises to four

The body of a teenage boy was on Tuesday retrieved from the debris of the three-storey building in Malir that collapsed on Monday, increasing the death toll to four.

An official said following retrieval of the body of 18-year-old Jarri Abbas, the rescue operation was over since no one else was suspected to be under the rubble.

An official at the Malir City police station said that the city and town administrations were now busy removing the rubble from the site.

Meanwhile, the funeral prayers of all the four victims of the family — a couple and their two sons — were offered on the main road in Jafar-i-Tayyar Society. They were buried in Malir's Ghazi Goth graveyard.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 27/02/2019)

Harvard professor recalls legacy of Islamabad master planner Doxiadis

The legacy of architect and urban planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis, who planned Islamabad in the late 1950s, was dissected by Harvard professor Spiro Pollalis at the Mohatta Palace on Tuesday.



All of the architectural projects of Doxiadis were practical applications of the theory of ekistics, which is rooted in urban planning philosophy and concerns the science of human settlements, including regional, city, community planning and dwelling design.

In the presentation given by Prof Pollalis, it was shared that Doxiadis believed that "we are building the wrong cities for the future, wasting and spoiling natural resources and allowing man to lose his importance inside the cities due to traffic and pollution. The cities of the future will be extra-human in dimension, therefore our task is to create them as a web of many communities with human dimensions".

Doxiadis had said: "Elements of contemporary cities, including transportation, zoning and communication, were no longer in balance. Cities were losing the human scale and were no longer satisfactory for their inhabitants. As a result, people suffered in cities that were too large, crowded and noisy, and that exacted too much damage on the surrounding natural environment."

Prof Pollalis says Doxiadis proposed climate-friendly techniques for houses to withstand Karachi's intense heat

And so he had used the same premise in his planning of Islamabad and Karachi, including many other cities around the work, said Prof Pollalis.

"Islamabad was a project by Doxiadis that worked pretty well; also because it was the capital so a lot of money and effort were put into it," said Prof Pollalis.

"This success is evident from the present quality of life in Islamabad and the satisfaction expressed by the people who live and work there and by the wish of others to reside in the new city, in different sectors developed as planned by Doxiadis. Islamabad is a 'unique' example of a large new city 'planned for the future and built for the present', fully respecting the long-term planning."

Korangi master plan

Doxiadis also worked in Karachi in Korangi and master plans drawn up by him were also shared by Prof Pollalis.

"The Korangi master plan is part of the Great Karachi Resettlement Plan conducted by Doxiadis in 1958. The scope of the master plan was to accommodate thousands of refugees from India and internal migrants living in slums across Karachi under terrible and unhealthy conditions which were obstructing the smooth operation of the city. Basically deal with the problems of the shelterless," he said.

According to statistics shared, there were 120,000 shelterless families, 30,000 families living in permanent houses under high and unacceptable densities, and 150,000 houses required.

Prof Pollalis said: "The vision of Doxiadis in Korangi was to have a variety of incomes, a safety net for many different economic classes, and have residential areas distributed not in a random way but with a purpose; basically to create a self-sufficient community in Korangi for the rich and the poor and each community should be able to function independently providing opportunities of employment to the inhabitants within their boundaries."

For Korangi, Doxiadis proposed standardised types of houses. For low-income families an affordable house with one room and the necessary auxiliary spaces was proposed. "[The] Doxiadis Associates proposed climate-friendly techniques [for] houses to withstand Karachi's intense heat. They used features from old South Asian homes, many of which were surrounded by verandas, or covered porches, and were installed with screens that kept the brutal sun and monsoon rains away from the walls," explained Prof Pollalis.

Why did the master plans in Korangi fail then? "Because of lack of implementation," he asked and answered.

"Doxiadis from his early visits on site noticed that things were not going well; there was a lack of infrastructure, community centres were not developed, and illegal shops and structures begun occupying public space. He was disappointed by the simple planning, which has only led to vast space, which was supposed to become the heart of the city, to remain in full waste."

Prof Pollalis shared images of the very detailed travel diaries of Doxiadis with black-and-white photographs that not just documented his work, but also expressed his disappointment with the project's implementation. The resettlement programme in Korangi soon failed financially and socially and by 1964 was abandoned and shut down.

(By Haneen Rafi Dawn, 15, 27/02/2019)

Illegal housing schemes

ILLEGAL housing societies are a virus that infects all parts of Pakistan. Crumbling mechanisms of governance have emboldened rapacious elements and fuelled an ugly, and frequently violent, land-grabbing industry. Last October, a report furnished before a Supreme Court bench revealed that 5,492 housing societies in the country are unregistered, illegal or exist only on paper. On Friday, an audit report presented in the National Assembly noted that the Capital Development Authority in Islamabad had suffered a loss of Rs5,217.39bn on account of 109 illegal housing schemes in the ICT. The document was scathing in its criticism of the CDA saying it had allowed the area to become a haven for the land mafia and that it may as well change its master plan in an explicit acknowledgement of its inability to enforce land regulations. Even the upscale Banigala neighbourhood, in which prime minister's 300-kanal estate is located, has been developed in violation of the city's master plan.

Illegal housing societies and encroachments have been the subject of several recent court proceedings. The mighty Bahria Town has not been spared either. That can only be to the good of the citizens. Many of them, swayed by marketing gimmicks that promise a 'Dubai-style' standard of living, invest their hard-earned savings in such housing schemes only to find that they have been duped by unscrupulous builders in terms of construction quality and amenities. At times the location itself, such as on a floodplain or on reclaimed areas of natural channels, puts residents at peril. A burgeoning population has led to a surge in demand for housing; construction is a hugely lucrative business and profits can be multiplied hundred-fold if land is obtained without requisite payment of fees and taxes, or without obtaining NOCs, in collusion with corrupt bureaucrats. The state exchequer remains dry even as the pockets of builders and their cohorts overflow with ill-gotten gains. There must be no leniency shown by the courts to those involved in this plunder.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 27/02/2019)

Building collapses

A RESIDENTIAL building collapsed in Jaffar Tayyar Society in Malir, Karachi, a few days ago, killing four people. It seems the building was self-built by the owner without any proper structural or architectural design, and not examined by any building regulatory authority.



However, there are plenty of such shoddily built structures in the country, particularly in Karachi, that are death traps for their occupants. The creation and management of a safe and secure built environment is one of the government's primary responsibilities.

Despite legal prescriptions to ensure precisely such an environment, several factors act as impediments. Among them are inefficiency and inadequacy of building control agencies; adulterated construction materials; lack of technical know-how; errors and discrepancies in the supply chain of materials/building services; and indifference of user groups in reporting the defects.

Recent demolitions in the name of removing extensions and illegal constructions have been executed unscientifically. Due to reckless use of demolition machinery, remaining buildings have become weak. Such structurally unstable buildings are nothing short of a ticking bomb. And the numbers of such structures may run into hundreds, if not more.

Structurally unstable buildings are a ticking bomb.

Close observation of some building collapses reveal recurrent patterns of violation of fundamental zoning principles and incomplete construction. Informal settlements have a history of gradual expansion and growth. Land development, usage and control are affected by the local power structure.

For example, in settlements close to affluent neighbourhoods, the conversion of single-storey construction is being swiftly replaced by eight- or even nine-storey buildings. Constructed without technical advice on plots ranging between 80 to 200 square yards, these structures are inherently flawed. Poor quality foundations, inferior contracting practices, construction in many stages, shoddy plumbing and electrification fixtures and installations make such buildings unfit for human habitation.

Most of them are built with a tripartite partnership of landowner, contractor and investor. The three determine the internal distribution of rentable space after construction is completed. To maximise profits, the contractor resorts to cutting costs in inputs such as design or construction material while the investor lends less capital to earn maximum on his share. The landowner turns a blind eye in anticipation of additional accommodation to rent out for extra income.

Since more and more folks from working classes wish to reside close to the city centre or populous neighbourhoods, the rental demands of such buildings remain substantial. These practices are common in many Karachi neighbourhoods. It is only after a disaster that some regulatory exercises are carried out — which soon end.

Planned neighbourhoods also face such problems. The mayor and other local functionaries have been critical about divided responsibilities of development control in the city. More than 13 agencies that own and manage land in Karachi claim to hold that prerogative without any coordinating mechanism.

The Sindh Building Control Authority is a major agency for the bulk of neighbourhoods under local and provincial jurisdictions. Federally controlled and constituted bodies such as cantonment boards are independent of the local authorities. Similarly, other autonomous landowning agencies such as port authorities are not controlled by the conventional building control practices.

The intentions of agencies vary. One authority discourages tall buildings for some time; the other issues permits for their unabated development. In the same neighbourhoods, different building profiles are found which create anomalies in real estate development, management and transactions.

A safe built environment can only be ensured if a trained and competent cadre of built environment regulators is inducted in these public agencies. Sound understanding of building design, execution processes, construction/ structural design codes, by-laws/ regulations and construction are common essentials. From building inspectors and building controllers to the chief executive, a specific type of background know-how and qualifications is essential. Architects, civil engineers, town planners and diploma holders in the relevant field are normally suited for the job after some kind of basic training.

Documenting and reporting mechanisms are also non-existent in terms of land and development control. Despite improved satellite photography/imagery and GIS, there is no annual report/ study on land use change, encroachments, densification or infrastructural situations. If one asks for a comprehensive map of the recently executed building demolitions, the concerned agencies may find it difficult to produce it. Unless departmental capacities are developed, ensuring a safe living habitat for all will remain an elusive goal. (By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 09, 01/03/2019)

Overcoming housing shortfall

The Capital Development Authority has started work on a project which will see the construction of high-rise buildings in Islamabad and will ultimately replace slums. The federal cabinet has also granted the go-ahead to the construction of high-rise buildings in the capital city in areas identified by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). This follows Prime Minister Imran Khan's instructions to Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Amir Ali Ahmed to prepare a plan for the betterment and transformation of katchi abadis. The CDA plans to build high-rise buildings in order to replace the slums and accommodate slum dwellers in these buildings. This, instead of depriving the poor of the roof they have over their heads, will offer a housing solution for the underprivileged.

The plan will benefit both the general residents of the federal capital and the underprivileged who live there. The CDA and the CAA have finally sat down and marked out the areas where high-rise buildings can be built in the city. This will have an impact on future planning for a city which has seen its population more than double over the past 20 years. Vertical expansion is a commendable idea to meet the growing housing needs in the capital city. It has 10 officially-recognised slum areas and four times as many unofficial ones. The government should ensure the provision of basic amenities to the residents of the high-rise

buildings. The shifting of slum dwellers to high-rise buildings will be meaningless in the absence of basic facilities. However, from slums to clean apartments it will be a healthy change in the lives of the under-privileged.

We hope that the plan will be executed without bureaucratic delays. And if successful, it should be replicated in other cities and towns across the country. It is a practical way to overcome the housing shortfall in the country.
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 16, 02/03/2019)

Court orders NAB to file reference against Super Highway housing project fraud

The Sindh High Court (SHC) directed the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Tuesday to file a reference within two months in the case pertaining to the fraud committed in the Gulshan-e-Rufi project at Super Highway.

A two-member bench, comprising Chief Justice (CJ) Ahmed Ali Sheikh and Justice Omar Sial, was hearing the bail plea of the accused builder, Ghulam Murtaza. The CJ reprimanded the builder and remarked that the builders defraud the public and flee with their money. The lawyer for the accused maintained that his client had committed no fraud.

The CJ commented that there seemed to be no issue in siphoning money from the public under the name of residential schemes and then using this money to acquire properties in the US and South Africa because they think there is no one to hold them accountable. The CJ asked the investigation officer as to why the bank account of the accused was not frozen and remarked that if the builder flees then what will become of the money invested by the people.

The investigation officer replied that the bank accounts of the accused persons have been frozen while evidence is being gathered from the affected people. The CJ directed the NAB investigation officer to file a reference against the accused within two months and said that the case will be heard every week.

Illegal allotment of plots

The same bench asked for evidence against former Karachi Development Authority (KDA) Director-General (DG) Nasir Abbas in the case pertaining to illegal allotment of plots. NAB prosecutor maintained that Abbas sold the plots under fake documents. Important evidence has been collected against the accused, claimed the prosecutor.

The court expressed annoyance over the absence of accused's lawyer and summoned him to court on April 11. Court also demanded the evidence based report against Abbas from NAB and summoned the investigation and case officer on next hearing.

Kamran Michael plea

The same bench issued notices to NAB on Tuesday for March 19 on the plea against the arrest of former federal minister Kamran Michael. The plaintiff's lawyer observed that Michael's name was not included in the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) land allotment and inquiry reference. Michael has been targeted politically and the accountability court also illegally sent him on judicial remand, maintained the lawyer adding that Michael's arrest and judicial remand must be termed illegal. Court issued notices to NAB and demanded detailed replies.

Bail granted

The same bench issued notices to NAB authorities accepting the bail of Sehwan Development Authority (SDA) officer Rehmatalullah Lashari on Tuesday. The plaintiff's lawyer observed that after Agha Siraj Durrani's arrest, his client had been issued a call-up notice. NAB should be barred from arrest, he said adding that public officers, in order to save themselves from arrest, have approached SHC after the arrest of Durrani.

The court accepted Lashari's bail plea against a surety of Rs3 million and issued notices to NAB for April 3.

Sindh anti-corruption

The same bench, returning the report pertaining to the inquiries pending in the Sindh anti-corruption department back to the department chairman, ordered the report to be submitted with a statement under oath.

The anti-corruption department chairman submitted a report related to inquiries being conducted by his department. According to the report, a total of 14 inquiries were pending all over Sindh. The report stated that the anti-corruption department received 1,569 complaints from the nine districts of Sindh, of which 157 complaints were converted into FIRs. As many as 1,176 complaints were sent for departmental action while 141 complaints were closed. The report mentioned that currently, four inquiries were pending in Karachi's district East and only one inquiry pending in Hyderabad while nine in Larkana.

The CJ remarked that thousands of inquiries were pending since years. The court ordered the anti-corruption department chairman to submit report with statement under oath and adjourned the hearing.

Land purchase embezzlement

The same bench directed the plaintiff on Tuesday to submit the land sale documents before court on March 9 in the case of embezzlement in the purchase of a 1,600 acre land. The bench while hearing the pre-arrest bail of accused, Waleed Saad Khan, inquired that how did the plaintiff acquire this land and where was it situated. The plaintiff said that it was situated on Super Highway and informed the court that this was the land that he got in exchange of North Nazimabad Town land. The court inquired about the land in North Nazimabad Town, to which the plaintiff said that his grandfather had bought the land I Khasti

Goth in 1962. Court directed the plaintiff to submit the first sell/purchase documents of the land in court and adjourned the hearing.

Appeal against death sentence

The SHC rejected the appeal on Tuesday of a culprit on death row for murder charges and commuted his death sentence into life imprisonment. A two-member bench, comprising Justice Naimatullah Phulpoto and Justice KK Agha, was hearing the plea in which the defence lawyer argued that the testimony of the eye witness and recovery of murder weapon was suspicious, and so the benefit of doubt was to be given to the culprit. The public lawyer maintained that the subordinate court had sentenced culprit Liaquat to death for the murder of Arif. The culprit had murdered Arif over an old enmity in the city court in 2009. The culprit had been caught red-handed with the murder weapon and does not deserve clemency. The court rejected the appeal and commuted the sentence.

Sugarcane prices

The SHC annulled the public notice issued regarding the sugarcane prices and fixing it at Rs182 per mond. The court, directing the government to revise the prices, ordered to issue a new notification within 15 days.

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Mazhar Ali and Justice Agha Faisal, was hearing the plea in which notification was annulled and court remarked that the Sindh government must issue notification for crushing season 2018-19 within 15 days. Sindh Chief Minister must call the cabinet meeting and fulfil all the procedures, said Justice Mazhar, adding that if court orders went unimplemented, contempt of court notice will be sent to the chief minister.

The plea was filed by the sugar mill owners against the fixing of sugarcane price at Rs182 per mond. It was observed in the plea filed that Sindh government's notification issued on December 7 be annulled.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 06/03/2019)

Bahria Town gets last chance to up Malir land offer

The Supreme Court on Wednesday provided the last chance to Messrs Bahria Town (Pvt) Ltd to settle the case by further scaling up the price of the Malir lands where it had developed a housing society and revising the payment schedule.

The opportunity was granted by a three-judge bench, headed by Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed, after Barrister Syed Ali Zafar representing Bahria Town had enhanced its offer from Rs405 billion to Rs435bn, which would eventually go to the Sindh government. The bench observed that the figure of Rs435 billion did not seem appropriate and said the developer might like to consider offering a better figure.

The bench had taken up implementation of the May 4, 2018 judgement of the apex court which held that the grant of land to the Malir Development Authority by the Sindh government, its exchange with the land of Bahria Town and anything done under the provisions of Colonization of Government Land Act 1912 (COGLA) by the Sindh government was illegal and of no legal existence. The land was granted for launching incremental housing scheme, but the MDA exchanged it with Bahria Town to launch a scheme of its own, the court observed.

Earlier, the developer had offered Rs405 billion after enhancing it from Rs358 billion and Rs250 billion to purchase 16,896 acres of lands in Malir and that after deducting Rs14 billion that the developer had already deposited with the court, the rest of the amount would be payable in 12 years in instalments of Rs2 billion per month for the first six years and Rs3 billion per year for the remaining six years.

SC implementation bench to hear NAB prosecutor general on 13th

The court, however, rejected the payment schedule with a direction to improve the same.

At the outset, Justice Saeed reminded the counsel that the original site plan that the Bahria Town had furnished before the court was similar to the one that the Prism Marketing, an authorized dealer of the developer, had presented.

At the last hearing, the court had expressed surprise that the sale of plots in certain precincts or areas did not fall in the area owned by Bahria.

On Wednesday, the counsel submitted an application assuring the Supreme Court that it had developed the Malir project on the land in its actual possession of 16,896 acres and that Bahria Town would provide plots and would fully compensate those who had purchased plots outside the existing boundaries.

The court said the bench would hear the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) prosecutor general on March 13 and cautioned the respondent that if the NAB prosecutor general convinced the court and if the order did not come in favour of the developer, the law would take its course. But the court also assured the defendant that it had full faith in the counsel for Bahria Town when he hinted at the possibility that his client would further improve the price and reduce the period of payment.

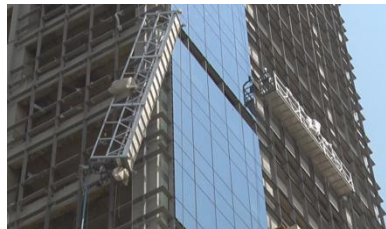
During the proceedings, Khawaja Tariq Raheem representing residents of the housing scheme remarked that financial problems the country was facing would be solved if three or more individuals like Malik Riaz came forward.

The court asked Assistant Advocate General for Sindh Sibtain Mahmood whether the Sindh government had any objection if the matter was concluded in terms of any proposal. He said the provincial government would have no objection.

The case was then adjourned for March 13 with a directive to all the relevant parties to be present on the next date of hearing.
(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 01, 07/03/2019)

Six workers fall to death after construction lift buckles in Clifton

Six workers died after a fall from the 13th floor of a 23-storey under-construction building in Clifton as the construction lift buckled on Saturday morning, Boat Basin police and hospital officials said.



Six workers were trying to install glasses on the 13th floor of the building with the help of a lift fitted with a trolley when its rope broke, said Boat Basin SHO Mohammed Ashfaq. As a result, the lift twisted and all the labourers in the trolley fell to the ground. They sustained critical injuries.

“Three of them died on the spot, two others while being taken to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) and the sixth one succumbed to injuries during treatment,” said the area SHO.

Dr Seemin Jamali, executive director of the JPMC, confirmed that five labourers — Abdul Rehman, 30, Mohammed Asad, 21, Faisal Islam, 32, Riaz Khan, 29 and Nasir Shamshad, 30 — were brought dead to the facility. The sixth labourer, Musab, died during treatment, she added.

SHO Ashfaq said that the builder, Aga Amin Patel, was constructing a 23-storey building in Block 7 of Clifton.

CM orders probe, minister promises compensation, SP wants building owner booked over tragedy

Clifton SP Suhai Aziz said she had directed the police to register a case against the owner on behalf the state in case the victims' relatives did not approach the police for it.

The Clifton SP, who visited the site, told Dawn that the district administration and the Sindh Building Control Authority were conducting an inquiry to ascertain the exact cause of the incident.

CM orders inquiry into incident

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah took notice of the tragedy and sought an inquiry report from the commissioner of Karachi. Mr Shah asked the authorities who was monitoring the quality of the construction of the building.

“The Sindh government would conduct a thorough probe into the incident,” said Adviser on Information Murtaza Wahab.

Minister for Labour Ghulam Murtaza Baloch, who visited the site, told Dawn that the construction work had been stopped and the building sealed by the district administration and SBCA, which had put up banners to that effect there.

The minister said that they were trying to get the construction workers registered at the labour department to provide them compensation in such a tragedy and bring the builders to justice through a labour court. Mr Baloch said that three deceased workers belonged to the rural areas of Sindh while the other three were residents of the city. He promised that compensation would be paid to the heirs of the victims.

Meanwhile, South SSP Pir Mohammed Shah said that there was “criminal negligence” on part of the builder as no helmets or ropes were provided to the workers in case of a fall to save their lives.

On Feb 25, a couple and their two young sons died when a ground-plus three-storey building collapsed in Malir's Jaffar-i-Tayyar Society.

Saturday's tragedy in Clifton once again highlighted the lack of proper precautions and safety measures at multistorey buildings. Workers are often seen performing their duty without any safety gear.
(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 15, 10/03/2019)

Construction lift provider held, building owner, others booked over Clifton tragedy

Boat Basin police on Sunday registered a case against the owner of the under construction multistorey building in Clifton and contractor firm owners on charges of manslaughter as the six workers, including two brothers, fell to death on Saturday morning, said area SHO Mohammed Ashfaq. One of the suspects, who provided the construction lift without any safety gears, was arrested, the SHO added.

The six workers died after a fall from the 13th floor of the 23-storey under construction building in Clifton, Block 7, after the construction lift buckled.

The workers were trying to install glass panels on the 13th floor of the building with the help of a lift fitted with a trolley when its rope broke. The lift twisted and all the six workers in the trolley fell to the ground and died.

The area SHO told Dawn that an FIR (157/2019) had been registered on behalf of the state through sub-inspector Mohammed Riaz. *Two of the six dead workers were brothers*

The case has been registered against the building owner, Mohammed Amin Patel, and his other partners Moosa Iqbal of the contractor engineering firm (Alaf Engineering) and Irfan Rehman of the contractor firm of glasses/lift provider (Ammonium Glass) under sections 322 (punishment for qatl-bis-sabab: whoever commit qatl bis-sabab shall be liable to diyat) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

Irfan Rehman has been detained, said the officer.

According to contents of the FIR, precious human lives were lost owing to “substandard material and lack of precautions and safety measures and refusal of treatment and negligence” of the three suspects.

According to the complainant police officer, they were performing their patrolling duty in the area when they heard cries of workers from the 13th floor of the under construction building as the lift twisted and they fell to the ground. The complainant said that he and other policemen rushed to the spot and saw that three workers had already died while three others were lying there injured.

The police called ambulances and immediately shifted the dead and injured workers to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, where the doctors declared five of them as dead on arrival while the sixth one died later during treatment.

Relatives of two victims, Riaz Khan and Abdul Rehman, took away their bodies without allowing the doctors to fulfil legal formalities. The SHO said that Riaz and Rehman were brothers. He claimed that the case was registered on behalf of the state as the family of the deceased workers did not approach the police to register an FIR.
(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 11/03/2019)

‘Sky is the limit’ for urban growth, says Imran

Vowing to encourage vertical expansion of cities, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday announced that “sky is the limit” for future high-rise buildings in the federal capital and the two provinces where his party rules.



However, about the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme, Mr Khan said that non-disposal of a case related to foreclosure laws pending in the Lahore High Court was a major hurdle in building five million low-cost housing units.

The prime minister expressed these views while addressing the launching ceremony of State Bank of Pakistan’s finance policy for low-cost housing.

Mr Khan said: “Except the areas which are close to the airports, developers are permitted to take their buildings as much high as they can.” He said he wanted to make Islamabad a “model city” and there would be no bar on height of buildings except for those close to airports or in flight restriction zone.

Interestingly, a few days ago the prime minister had disagreed with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that construction of highrise buildings should not be allowed near airports. He reportedly said there was no such restriction in developed countries, as skyscrapers could be seen in the vicinity of airports in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

Low-cost housing project facing hurdles, says prime minister

However, at the launch of SBP’s finance policy on housing, Mr Khan said: “Except for areas with aviation restrictions, citizens [builders and developers] will be allowed to build high-rises in commercial areas of Islamabad to whatever height they prefer.”

“The government will not let cities to expand horizontally. Cities will go upwards. Expansion of cities is endangering green areas and risks national food security and environment,” he reasoned.

In order to protect green areas, the prime minister said the government took the decision to encourage building of cities vertically. In this regard, he said there would be no restriction on the height of buildings in Islamabad, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Since coming to power, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf has been trying to lift the lowest segment of society by providing them basic facilities, including that of housing, the PM said, adding that everyone wanted to have their own home. He appreciated the SBP for giving incentives to commercial banks to lend money to citizens for low-cost housing in the country, particularly in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata).

Special package in the policy meant for tribal areas would be crucial, as people in the war-torn areas were looking for funds to rebuild their houses and infrastructure, he added.

PM Khan also lauded the SBP for not ignoring the transgender community and widows while framing the policy for house financing. He said: "The inclusion of the transgender community and widows in the policy is quite positive."

Five million housing units

Mr Khan said the government had an ambitious plan to build five million low-cost housing units in five years. But this would not be possible, he said, adding that a case regarding foreclosure laws was pending in the LHC. He expressed the hope that the court would decide the matter early.

Foreclosure law provides the means for a mortgage lender to take possession and sell a home when the borrower has defaulted on the loan. ... If the proceeds are not enough to pay off the loan, the borrower may be held personally liable for the difference, in addition to being forced out of the house.

Also praising the SBP policy for provision of credit to small farmers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), Mr Khan said they were the backbone of the economy and they must be provided soft loans.

Vowing to bring about a 'change' in the country, the prime minister said the government's flagship affordable housing programme would run the wheel of the economy as it would not only help 40 allied industries but also generate employment. "We have planned to provide 10 million jobs to youth and I believe that the housing programme will provide half a million jobs during the first year," he added.

Commercialisation of urban slums

He said the government also planned to regularise Kutchi Abadis by replacing them with flats. "Unfortunately, no one had ever thought about those living in slum areas without basic facilities. But we are inviting developers to use their [slum area] land for commercial purposes and build apartments on them for the dwellers," he said.

Finance Minister Asad Umar told the gathering that planning for low-cost housing schemes in 12 cities of Punjab had already been finalised, while for three other cities it would be done soon.

(By Syed Irfan Raza Dawn, 01, 12/03/2019)

Vertical cities

THE sky is the limit, said Prime Minister Imran Khan at the launch of the State Bank's finance policy for low-cost housing in Islamabad on Monday. He was speaking in reference to his government's plans to encourage vertical as opposed to horizontal urban growth in order to conserve green spaces and prevent the pressure that overcrowding brings to bear on the environment. These stated objectives would be consistent with the importance that the PTI accords to environmental protection, illustrated in its flagship 'billion-tree tsunami' project to reclaim forest area in KP. The prime minister has also spoken about how multistorey buildings can be more affordable for the low-income segment of society. He alluded to this on Monday when he mentioned that his government wanted to incentivise private developers to construct apartment blocks in shantytowns.

The future of urban expansion in a land-scarce world certainly lies in a vertical direction. However, while looking at the sky, it is always prudent to keep an eye on the ground. The construction of high-rises, if undertaken without proper planning and strict implementation of building regulations, can have deleterious environmental and social effects. One of the main problems that arises in the context of Pakistan is the lack of truly independent planning agencies with the professional expertise to supervise the execution of their plans and ensure maximum public benefit from land use. Even the ostensibly autonomous Capital Development Authority in Islamabad, a city the prime minister has vowed to showcase as a model high-rise urban centre, functions under the federal government. Given the area's seismic vulnerability — demonstrated tragically in the Margalla Towers collapse in the 2005 earthquake — structural engineering requirements must be strictly enforced in the construction of multistorey buildings. And that is only one consideration in a comprehensive urban design exercise which needs to be carried out; a construction frenzy may have dangerous consequences.

Conditions in Karachi illustrate what unchecked proliferation of high-rises can do to the citizens' quality of life. The Sindh government's centralised control over land and the involvement of several of its top political bosses in lucrative construction projects has placed tremendous pressure on the city's already fragile civic infrastructure. To take but one example of this appalling violation of urban planning principles, 32 major roads in Pakistan's biggest metropolis were commercialised within 2016 alone and NOCs granted for multiple high-rises to be constructed on them. This was done without any consideration as to the limitations of the existing civic infrastructure including water and sewage lines. The conversion of low-rise, low-density areas into high-rise, high-density areas without corresponding addition of public areas shrinks the footprint of green spaces, increases environmental pollution and introduces negative social consequences. Building high-rises, much like building dams, should not become yet another buzz phrase. Careful planning is a prerequisite.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 13/03/2019)

SC reserves ruling on Bahria Town's offer of Rs450bn on Malir scheme

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its ruling on whether or not to accept a fresh offer by the Bahria Town (Pvt) Limited to settle a case pertaining to its Malir or Karachi Super Highway project in lieu of payment of Rs450 billion.

"Either you have something to celebrate or nothing to rejoice about," observed Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed while postponing further proceedings for March 21, adding that "we believe the matter has run its course".

On Tuesday, senior counsel Barrister Syed Ali Zafar, on behalf of Bahria Town, had put forth a proposal suggesting a total payment of Rs485bn as full and final settlement for all its three cases.

Of this amount, Rs440bn was to be earmarked for the 16,896-acre Malir or Karachi Super Highway project, Rs22bn for 5,472 kanals at Takht Pari Rakh (Rawalpindi) and Rs23bn for the 4,542 kanals of Sulkhtar and Manga land (Murree). The apex court would decide about two of the cases after dealing with the developer's Malir project.

Counsel says total payment will be made in eight years

The court put off further proceedings after Advocate General for Sindh Salman Talibuddin, on behalf of the Sindh government, and Farooq H. Naek, representing the Malir Development Authority (MDA), said they had no objection to the offer made by the developer.

A three-judge bench of the court had taken up the implementation of its May 4, 2018 judgement in which it was held that grant of land to MDA by the Sindh government, its exchange with the land of Bahria Town and anything done under the provisions of the Colonisation of Government Land Act 1912 by the provincial government was illegal and "of no legal existence".

The land was granted for launching an incremental housing project, but instead of launching such a scheme the MDA exchanged it with Bahria Town that launched a scheme of its own, the judgement had held.

The apex court clarified that it would recognise only the site plan of Bahria Town, Malir, identifying 16,896 acres in the district that had been signed both by the developer and the Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission.

It also told the counsel that while putting forward an offer, he should bear in mind that the court was "not sitting on a negotiating table".

The counsel explained that the total payment would be made in eight years and that the developer would make a down payment of Rs20bn that would include Rs10.75bn which had already been deposited with the apex court.

A sum of Rs2.25bn would be paid on a monthly basis for the first five years and the remaining amount would be paid during the subsequent three years.

The court said it would deal with the issue of securities in case of default of payments later.

When the counsel requested the bench to order transfer of the land's title to Bahria Town, Justice Faisal Arab said the developer would have the power of attorney to sell and deal with the lands but the title could be transferred only when the entire payment had been made.

The counsel also said the amount the developer was paying should include all the taxes and other charges, but the court explained that the court could not rewrite the law.

When asked to comment, the advocate general for Sindh said "whatever is due under the law is due".

The developer requested the court to order the National Accountability Bureau to close its investigations and also to refrain from proceeding further in such investigations for all times to come against the officials, officers and directors of Bahria Town.

The court, however, said this would depend on acceptance of the developer's offer and if the proposal was rejected the law would take its course and the court would move on.

Justice Saeed reminded the counsel that Bahria Town had initially offered only Rs85bn for the Malir scheme. At this, the counsel requested the bench not to mention the amount.

During the hearing, a request was also made to allow the developer to advertise sale of land, but the court ignored the plea. In an earlier hearing, the court had barred the developer from issuing advertisements.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 03, 14/03/2019)

Accessible housing

ONCE again, Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed his resolve to facilitate housing for low-income groups. Mr Khan recently stressed the significance of easy credit for enabling the poor to benefit from various housing options. The promulgation of effective foreclosure laws, controlling the urban sprawl, encouraging high-rise development and 'upgrading squatter settlements with apartments' were some ideas he put forward.



The intention is praiseworthy. It aims to address a major issue that past governments largely ignored. The number of urban dwellers is increasing fast. The majority of the new numbers belong to the lowest economic strata.

Research and evidence show many examples establishing a link between homelessness,

crime and terrorism. Low-income groups in urban and rural settings in Pakistan face a major challenge. The numbers and types of vulnerable groups are escalating. The access to housing is denied on account of religious beliefs, ethnic origins, social orientation and even cultural preferences.

The poor pay for every service, but to the informal sector.

According to The State of Pakistani Cities Report 2018, 54 per cent of the total urban population live in the 10 largest cities namely Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Peshawar, Multan, Hyderabad, Islamabad and Quetta. It may be useful if the naya Pakistan Housing Authority, in consultation with the provincial governments, prioritises tasks essential to delivering housing to the urban poor. Stock-taking of suitable publicly owned land and its realistic pricing, planning for urban basic services, effectively targeting poor households in urban areas and instituting a workable mechanism for implementation at the district level are core considerations.

Katchi abadis require a careful review. Often the status and entity of katchi abadis is not understood. Katchi abadis are a response to the failure of the state to arrange housing for the low-income segments. The late social activist Perween Rahman called such locations 'people's settlements' as they extended the right to exist to all. The absence of choice to live and work in cities has left the poor with no option but to build on any available piece of land.

Interestingly, when Pakistan was created and millions of new citizens from various parts of the subcontinent opted for urban housing, the resulting settlements were not termed katchi abadis despite their rundown appearance. The government of the time planned and delivered several schemes for rehabilitation. However, it could not keep pace with the huge influx of refugees searching for basic living options.

Meanwhile, over the years, economic compulsion has forced millions to move towards cities in search of jobs. State institutions, especially under military rule, never responded to the acute problems of housing faced by the new urban citizens, who had no choice but to help themselves, albeit in a disorganised manner. Haphazard squatter settlements sprang up in different locations.

Government agencies attempted to bulldoze these but soon realised that it was an impossible task. Thereafter, the government took little notice, allowing the people to consolidate their living arrangements.

The process became technically sophisticated with the passage of time. Learning from earlier examples, katchi abadis adopted a grid iron rectilinear layout. Once the more favourable locations were saturated, desperate settlers swarmed the vulnerable ones. The phenomenon has continued.

It is often claimed that poor people need subsidies in housing which the state can no longer provide. This is not accurate. The poor pay for every service depending on where they live, but to the informal sector. Housing is acquired through payments to illegal entrepreneurs, building material providers and contractors. Security is accessed by giving money to musclemen of various profiles.

Water is acquired on higher costs from vendors. In many cases, the poor end up paying more than the middle- or upper-income groups. The state, though aware, continues to do nothing.

Housing can only be delivered through efficient land markets under robust regulatory regimes. The proper governance of land and its transparent and judicious disposal are prerequisites to ensuring access of housing to the poor. Land cannot be regenerated. Its inappropriate usage must be checked. An effective means to deal with this issue is to institute an information base which provides facts that cannot be disputed. This would help streamline transactions, land use planning as well as preparations for overall development in urban contexts. It will also lessen corruption.

Modern-day markets require up-to-date information to create a level playing field for all stakeholders under a regulatory framework. Such an information base could be made available, initially, in a few cities such as Islamabad and Lahore, with right of free access given to all. It would help raise much-needed awareness.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 18/03/2019)

Call for combining innovation with tradition in urban planning

Innovation is necessary. But, the challenge is to combine innovation with tradition in a way that not only needs of the people are catered to efficiently, but the local identity is also preserved. Also, it is important to document social changes brought about by technological changes.

These points were raised by researchers during presentation of their papers on Saturday at the conclusion of the third international conference on urban and regional planning organised by the department of architecture and planning at NED University of Engineering and Technology.

The theme of the two-day conference was Innovation in planning and practice.

Giving a presentation on the paper titled 'Challenges and emerging opportunities in land administration, a case study of Peshawar', Mohammad Nazeef Pasha of the planning and development department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government said that while land was the most important component of urban planning, it was a widely misused asset.

The current system of land administration inherited from the British, he pointed out, was obsolete in which the 'patwari' maintained the land records in paper form and reported them to higher authorities.

This record keeping, he said, had been questioned many times and attempts had been made to simplify it and make it transparent. He suggested digitalising land records which, he said, would result in more user-friendly and credible land information system.

Dr Nyoman Gede Maha Putra, a seasoned architect from Indonesia, and Dr Ameen Monasser, currently an assistant professor at the department of architecture and environmental design at Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, shared the opinion that tradition was an asset associated with economy and human memories.

They underscored the need for combining innovation with tradition from planning perspectives. However, they acknowledged that it's a continued struggle how to link with the global order and not to suffocate the local identity.

Tahira Hasan, director at the Imkaan Welfare Organisation, informed the audience about the various projects the organisation had initiated, especially Khel — a Recreation and Learning Centre for children — which kicked off a year ago in Machar Colony.

She explained how a different methodology of making children learn through play in a safe and nurturing environment produced positive results.

Dr Mansoor Ali, an NED alumni and visiting professor in the UK and Italy, presented key features of his paper titled 'Supporting innovation programmes in Africa: learning from experience'.

The paper was based on his experience of supporting innovation programmes in basic services across African countries.

Dr Muhammad Ahmed Al-Rashid of University of Malaya, Malaysia, Muhammad Shafaat Nawaz, an assistant director, town planning, at Lahore Development Authority and Dr S. Shabih-ul-Hasan, a spatial planning expert, also spoke.
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 18/03/2019)

PQA asked to share master plan, cumulative impact study

The Port Qasim Authority (PQA) needs to publicly share the federally-approved and gazetted copy of its master plan as well as the (recent) study which assessed the cumulative effects of the industrial projects coming up in its jurisdiction. This is critical to ensure human and environmental safety in current circumstances and future.

In the absence of a master plan document, any development that takes place in the Port Qasim area lacks legal validity as per sections 10 and 11 of the Port Qasim Act 1973.

These concerns were raised at a public hearing organised on Thursday at a local hotel by the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa). The hearing pertained to an integrated LNG project proposed by Tabeer Energy Private Ltd, a wholly owned affiliate of the Mitsubishi Corporation.

Hearing seeks details of LNG project

The \$300 million project planned within the recently demarcated LNG zone at Chhan Waddo-Chara Creek envisioned removal of mangroves spread over an estimated nine hectares (22.239 acres).

"They are very much part of the forest covering an area of 64,000 hectares which was declared protected in 1950s in Port Qasim. While the protected status of these mangroves hasn't changed, we have issued a no-objection certificate to the project proponent on some conditions and will ensure their compliance in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature," explained conservator forest Riaz Waggan at the hearing.

These conditions, he pointed out, included plantation of mangroves over 1,000 hectares in an area to be identified by the forest department and investing about Rs40m in mangrove sustainability and management.

"They are required to look after these mangroves for at least a decade. In addition, they are required to spend Rs40m on community welfare projects," he said, informing the audience that the conditions were put forward after the forest department assessed the value and economic benefits of the mangroves which would be affected by the project.

It's the first time that the forest department had been taken on board by any project proponent, he told the audience, suggesting that the forest department had never granted any NOC for mangrove destruction/removal and any developer who had done this in the past violated the law.

Mr Waggan, however, called for transparency and emphasised that the PQA must share its master plan with government departments including the forest department so environmentally safe decisions could be made.

"We want to know what kind of projects are already there and details of those being planned so that we could make the right decisions.

"If we allow one company to remove mangroves over 10 hectares on the condition that it would carry out a major mangrove plantation and sustainability drive and help support poor communities, it's not a bad development option."

Where is cumulative impact study?

An important concern raised multiple times at public hearings was related to the need for a cumulative impact study given the fact that the area of Port Qasim is being heavily industrialised. Lately, at one such meeting, it was disclosed that such a study did exist but was never shared by PQA at any public forum.

Replying to a question related to this matter, director general of Sepa Naeem Mughal said: "This matter has been raised at hearings and now the department will take this up in writing. Also, the PQA doesn't share its master plan. We want to know how many LNG terminals are being planned in the specific zone and where the (federally-administered) PQA is acquiring land from. Often, the land they leased out to companies is said to be reclaimed."

Mr Mughal, however, couldn't give a satisfactory reply when asked to explain as to why the department had raised the Sindh Environmental Quality Standards of PM2.5 (an extremely harmful air pollutant) to 75µg/m³ (24-hour mean) whereas the international guidelines stipulated that PM2.5 should not exceed 10µg/m³ (annual mean), or 25µg/m³ (24-hour mean).

He reasoned that the decision to change this specific standard was taken with the help of air quality experts at the time when Jamshoro power plant was being planned in 1990s.

"We found that the PM2.5 levels were already high and same is the case in other parts of interior of Sindh. No development activity could take place if we continued with the old standard on this particulate matter," he said, adding that the old European standards couldn't be applied in the local environment without review.

He didn't reply to the question when asked whether the department carried any health impact study after deviating from international standards.

Questions were also raised about the validity of air ambient quality test findings shared during the hearing, possible environmental damage during laying the gas pipeline and increase in port traffic, an apparent lack of input from fishermen communities on projects being planned in Port Qasim, waste discharge into the sea and disposal of dredging material.

Earlier, the programme began with detailed presentations on the project given by Saquib Ejaz Hussain representing the Environmental Management Consultants, which carried out the environmental and social impact study of the project. Francis Frei, Kosshu Fujita, Stefano Cappelozza and Lenardo Ciulla all provided technical support to the project.

According to them, multiple studies/tests were carried out to choose the site to minimise damage to the environment and make the project safe. The first phase will see the project capacity handling and processing 750MMFCD of gas supplies as a base load and 1,000MMFCD as peak gas out; the second phase will be subject to market demand, regulatory permissions and commercial alignment.

The project proponent estimated to offload approximately 100 cargo parcels per year from LNG cargo vessels onto a floating storage and re-gasification unit.

All relevant local and international guidelines would be followed during the construction phase and after terminal's operation.

The dredged material would be disposed of from mangrove area into a coffer dam or other alternatives to avoid displacement in the creeks, it was stated.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 15, 22/03/2019)

Compliance report on SC land use order sought by chief secretary

The Sindh chief secretary on Friday asked the authorities concerned to submit to him a compliance report within a week regarding implementation of the Supreme Court order for removal of encroachments and misuse of land other than the specific purpose for which the land was allotted, including cantonment land and removal of encroachments from the land of the Karachi Circular Railway.

Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah issued these directives while presiding over a meeting held here on Friday at the committee room of the Sindh Secretariat to review the progress on the compliance with the orders of the apex court.

In the meeting, the matters which were taken up for review included elimination of encroachments, Khayyam canal-related issues, removal of marriage lawns from amenity plots, use of cantonment land for purposes other than cantonment purposes and restoration of the land for which it was meant for.

The chief secretary also took notice of the recent fire incidents in residential buildings in the city and asked the director general of the SBCA to furnish him a report within 48 hours specifying whether the affected buildings were constructed in accordance with their approved plans and if the rules were violated, fix the responsibility in this regard and take action against the persons and SBCA officers responsible for the flaw in the building construction.

He also directed the SBCA chief to furnish the Karachi Master Plan within two days.

The divisional superintendent of the Pakistan Railways informed the meeting participants that process to clear the Karachi Circular Railway land from encroachments was continuing.

He was directed by the chief secretary to get assistance from law enforcement personnel for clearing the KCR land from encroachments and submit the compliance report as per order of the apex court within a week.

The chief secretary also asked Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani to submit a detailed report regarding recent incidents of fire.

Those who attended the meeting include Sindh Advocate General Salman Talibuddin, local government secretary Khalid Haider Shah, divisional superintendent of Pakistan Railways Abdul Haseeb, chairman of Anti-Corruption Establishment Mukhtar Soomro, industries secretary Haleem Shaikh, water board managing director Asadullah Khan, DG of SBCA Iftikhar Qaimkhani and other officers concerned.

The chief secretary on Friday also presided over another meeting in his office which was linked with videoconferencing with all divisional commissioners.

The chief secretary advised the administrative secretaries and commissioners of all divisions to ensure special attention to complaints which they received from officials and the public.

Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah also asked the commissioners to improve the public service delivery system in coordination and consultation with the relevant administrative departments.

He particularly mentioned that performance of officers would be recorded in the annual confidential reports.

The chief secretary's consultant on legal affairs, Dr Saeed Qureshi, was asked to get compliance report on the orders of the Supreme Court from the authorities concerned regarding restoration of land, which was being used for purposes other than cantonment uses. In light of the order of the apex court the cantonment land could only be used for cantonment purposes and not for any other use.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 23/03/2019)

Construction of 5m houses for poor to kick off in April: PM

Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Thursday that the government's scheme to build five million houses for the poor will be launched next month.

"The State Bank of Pakistan and the World Bank are providing valuable assistance in the efforts to achieve the government's target of building five million housing units," the prime minister told the audience at the International Housing Conference in Islamabad.

"There is a demand for 10 million houses in the country. We have set our target at five million but even that is an ambitious one considering the lack of infrastructure," he elaborated.

He added that the government was looking towards the private sector to engage actively in the low-cost housing initiative.

"We want the private sector to participate and want young entrepreneurs to contribute. Chinese and Malaysian companies have expressed their interest in housing projects here, while the response from overseas Pakistanis has also been positive," he informed the audience. He added that the initiative would positively impact the economy in several ways as over 40 other industries were directly related to housing.

The prime minister said the government was formulating foreclosure laws in collaboration with the central bank as the country lacked mortgage facility for low-income groups.

"After the housing project is launched, it would also face an incremental increase every year. The private sector will help in achieving this gigantic task and the government will merely act as a facilitator," he added.

Under the housing scheme, the poor will be provided with house financing, In case anyone is unable to avail house financing, the government will have them sponsored.

Concealing of land

The prime minister also announced that concealing of land and property would be declared a criminal offence.

"The decision was made at the last meeting of the federal cabinet," he explained. "Over recent months, we have retrieved occupied land worth Rs500 billion just in Islamabad. People have become billionaires by occupying lands and hiding properties. Till today, property and holdings are being hidden from the government," he added.

Squatter settlements

The prime minister also shared the government's plans for the uplift of squatter settlements. "There has never been any planning for these settlements. There are no facilities for the poor and, usually, boundary walls are raised around them to keep them out of the elite's view," he observed.

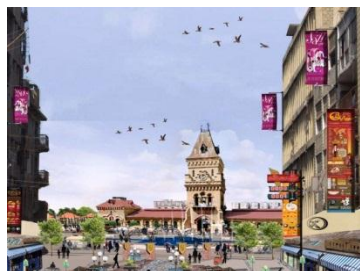
"We are introducing a plan to regularise these settlements and are looking to adopt the models in India and Turkey," he added.

Khan also spoke about the shift towards vertical construction. "We have to allow housing to grow vertically. Our arable land is being used up and threatens our food security. We will encourage more vertical construction. Singapore is the best example and our task force is learning from them," he said.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 29/03/2019)

Karachi's revitalisation drive aims to remake Pakistan's largest city

At a historic market commissioned by Queen Victoria during colonial rule in Karachi, third-generation spice seller Mohammad Shakeel Abbasi complains that a move to clear illegal encroachments has left poor shopkeepers jobless. "My own business has been cut in half," said Abbasi of the modernisation drive ordered by the Supreme Court in January to clean-up large swathes of the city's historic centre, which he says has driven away so many vendors that fewer people now visit the area. "We need these changes for the country to move forward but it needs to be done properly," he said, surrounded by barrels of mango pickle, chilli powder and turmeric at the stall his grandfather built more than 80 years ago.



The modernisation of Karachi's old downtown is one of the string of projects aimed at revitalising Pakistan's largest city and economic powerhouse, which has long been plagued by traffic congestion, water and electricity shortages, and rampant crime. But experts say the politicking by local parties and wranglings between different levels of government that have stalled Karachi's growth for decades, continue to hold back development.

Public transit programmes, including a shiny new bus service and the revival of a long-closed inner city rail service, are among the projects stuck in the gridlock. Both transport schemes have been held up awaiting authorisation from Islamabad to invite bids to supply new buses and begin laying railways tracks, according to Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah.

Muhammad Sualeh Faruqi, CEO of the federal development corporation in charge of the bus project that is expected to move 250,000 commuters daily, said an agreement between the provincial and federal governments should be finalised soon. But no movement has been made on the bus or rail projects since *Reuters* spoke to Faruqi in January.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced the allocation of Rs162 billion for Karachi's development, to be primarily spent on transport and sewage projects. "We need to make a master plan for Karachi and define the limits of the city and whether it will expand beyond its current area," said Khan.

Congestion crisis

In the 1960s, Karachi boasted the tallest building in South Asia, an operational inner-city rail service, vibrant nightlife, and booming tourism. But more than 50 years later, the city's infrastructure has failed to keep pace with a population that has skyrocketed more than 300%, leaving many public services such as health, transport, and water either provided by an informal private sector or controlled by organised crime. The city nevertheless remains key to Pakistan's shaky economy, now on the verge of its 13th International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout since the late 1980s, accounting for 20% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), according to World Bank figures.

"Improving Karachi's efficiency and Karachi's economy, improves Pakistan's efficiency and Pakistan's economy," said former finance minister and Karachi resident Mifath Ismail. "It is the only port city in Pakistan and it's the hub of all international trade."

A study by the NED University of Engineering and Technology found that traffic congestion costs Karachi \$2 billion annually. Data from the local municipal corporation showed more than three million motorcycles currently in use with 25,000 added each month.

Crime and Neglect

To be sure, efforts to revitalise Karachi have achieved some success, most notably in curbing violent crime for which the city had become notorious. In 2013, the national government of then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif gave free hand to the paramilitary Rangers for a sweeping crackdown on criminal gangs. That, say police officials, saw the annual number of murders fall from more than 2,500 to fewer than 500 in the space of a year. "If this had been achieved in the West, studies would have been carried out to replicate these results," said senior police official Abdul Khaliq Shaikh.

The falling crime rate has meant some upscale neighbourhoods have seen a spike in new restaurants, from hipster burger joints to taco food trucks, alongside high-end retail outlets. But decades of growing congestion and neglect have turned places such as the Saddar area, where Empress Market is located, from a spot where all Karachiites once rubbed shoulders into a rundown shopping and business district avoided by the well-off. The once fashionable part of town, now lined with crumbling colonial-era buildings, is a transport hub for nearly 20 million residents. Every day, an overcrowded network of private buses and vans cart thousands to and from work in the bustling downtown.

Shah, the provincial transport minister, blames delays in the rail and bus projects on the federal government, which he accuses of “playing political games”. The federal information ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

‘Clean Karachi’ drive in full swing, earns praise

Karachi’s administration has been dominated for decades by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which has traditionally drawn support from the descendants of Urdu-speakers who migrated from India following partition in 1947, but had little following beyond the city. The MQM was involved in bloody factional battles in the 1990s and 2000s and was accused by opponents of running the city like a mafia fiefdom, allegations it denied. It has come under increasing pressure since the crackdown on crime, which saw the party split into several factions. As a result, the city’s politics are now more competitive, but also more fragmented.

“There is no one taking ownership of Karachi,” the city’s Mayor Wasim Akhtar of the MQM told *Reuters*, adding the city saw little return for the millions in revenue that went to provincial and federal governments. “From the Federal or Sindh government there is no seriousness.”

None of this is any comfort for Karachi’s long-suffering commuters who are forced to trudge through hours of traffic on their daily commutes, as the city’s main traffic artery comes to a complete standstill during rush hours.

“With the non-serious attitude of all the parties involved, I don’t see the project taking off for the next two, three years,” a senior bureaucrat, who asked not to be identified, told *Reuters*.
(By Reuters The Express Tribune, 05, 01/04/2019)

Archaeological site unearthed after ‘heritage’ building is razed in Hyderabad

An 18th or 19th century structure, bordering late 18th century harem of Talpur Dynasty, is believed to be buried underneath a demolished building, known as heritage architecture, inside Pucca Qila, Hyderabad. The demolition earlier also drew condemnation by several experts of archaeology and former officials of the department.

The remains consist of around four-feet-wide walls made of small bricks. The portions of these several walls are scattered around the site. The walls surfaced during digging work at the site by Sindh Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Department that had planned to construct a new building for a museum.

However, after the discovery of the structure, the digging has been halted. “We have asked the department’s experts to determine whether the walls were built during the Kalhoro or Talpur dynasties,” the department’s secretary, Akbar Laghari, told *The Express Tribune*.



The corroded walls of the harem are also of the same size and they are built with identical bricks as well. “We will consult experts from the department about how to make good use of this place,” said Laghari when asked whether the department will abort the plan of constructing a new building for the planned museum.

He ruled out the possibility that old walls would be razed for the construction of the new building. “I think it [the underlying walls] is so strong that a new structure can be built over it.” However, the secretary said the walls can also be preserved like parts of the fallen Berlin Wall in Germany. Laghari said the walls’ study will not take long and his department’s experts will be able to determine the nature of

architecture in few days.



Controversial demolition

The Pucca Qila in Hyderabad, a fort built by a ruler of the Kalhoro Dynasty, Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro in mid-18th century, is among the hapless archaeological sites in Sindh which have been allowed to decay. For several decades, apathy of the antiquities department and encroachment by tens of thousands of people has together contributed to the fort’s degeneration.

The recent demolition of the building, which has been documented as the ‘old offices of Mirs’ in the book ‘Inventory of Cultural Property in the Province of Sindh’, edited by Yasmeen Lari and Michael Jensen, has aggravated the decadence. Many other experts also assert, unlike the department’s secretary who says it was built in 1960s, that the building was part of the heritage.

“A complex of five spacious chambers is situated east of [the] harem. The halls were meant for offices of the Mirs and their treasury,” states the book. Later during the British period, the building was used as the land record office and it was converted into a museum in the 1960s. The museum was looted and set on fire in 1987 during a riot involving some religious persons.

Both the harem and the building remained in possession of the Rangers and later police during the ethnic riots of late 1980s and 1990s. A police station was also later built in its premises. The book notes that the mosaic flooring was laid and the walls were whitewashed besides other renovation works by the people who occupied it.

The department's secretary, meanwhile, claimed that the building was constructed in the 1960s for the museum. "Let me clarify again it wasn't a heritage building," he emphasised pointing out that the demolition was approved and initiated in 2016. According to him, the structure remained idle since it was set ablaze around three decades ago.

"The officials who approved the demolition should be booked for this crime," said a former archaeology director Shahzore Tayabani while talking to The Express Tribune. According to Sindh Cultural Heritage Act, a person who destroys, damages, alters or defaces a heritage structure is punishable with up to three years imprisonment and Rs100,000 fine.

Tayabani, who has worked on Pucca Qila's preservation projects before his retirement in 2012, contended that the department's officials are lying about the demolished structure's status. "We always used to complain when archaeology department was under the federal government. But since the devolution, the Sindh government has been performing worse when it comes to preservation."

Another former director Qasim Ali Qasim deplored that the razed structure is located next to the department's regional office in Hyderabad and yet no one bothered to oppose the official move of razing it to the ground. "There were cellars in that building where Talpur rulers used to store their treasure owing to which it was also called the treasury building."

Qasim also demanded that the officers who approved the demolition should be identified and booked in the FIR. Naheed Zehra and Fateh Shaikh, both the serving directors of the department, said it was decided that a similar structure will be built in place of the razed one.

(By Z.Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 02/04/2019)

Denso Hall Facade Cleaning Festival from April 14

The historic Denso Hall Facade Cleaning Festival, jointly organised by Heritage Foundation Pakistan and Karachi Rotary Club, will begin on April 14.

The decision was made during a meeting chaired by Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani on Monday in which he promised the full cooperation of the local administration in the efforts to restore the city's heritage.

In a briefing about the campaign, Founder of the Heritage Foundation and renowned architect, Yasmeen Lari, said that the first step towards bringing back the glory of Karachi would be cleaning the facades of Karachi's historic buildings. Beginning with the historic Denso Hall, that was constructed in 1886, the facades of all buildings located on Marriott Road will be taken up one by one every Sunday by volunteers. The voluntary movement to make Marriott Road a pedestrian area and safeguard Karachi's heritage will create livelihood opportunities, she hoped. Rotary Club Karachi is a partner in this noble venture, and the government has given it its blessings, she added.

Lari made detailed presentation on the method for gentle scientific cleaning of Karachi's beautiful buff coloured stone to heritage volunteers. The campaign provides an opportunity to all Karachiites to participate in restoring the city's heritage. During the festival, a community and youth outreach arm of Heritage Foundation, KaravanPakistan, will organise various activities from music to street theatre to sketching.

The commissioner said that the Sindh government was putting their best efforts for the development and beautification of the city. Those from civil society who want to contribute would be considered a great support and would be encouraged and provide all possible support, he added. He expressed hope that the programme would create awareness about the various environmental aspects and added that it would help define the way government agencies and civil society can cooperate in the future to make Karachi not only the cheapest city but among the most liveable cities.

Shallwani directed the officials of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, district municipal corporations, Traffic Police and other related agencies to provide all possible support for the cleaning and beautification work conceptualised by the Heritage Foundation. The rehabilitation work of the historic buildings and the historic streets would also be carried out with the support of expert stakeholders from the Heritage Foundation Pakistan, he added.

He said that the administration will provide security and traffic arrangements to volunteers participating in the scientific cleaning of facades of historic buildings.

(By Press Release The Express Tribune, 05, 03/04/2019)

'Scientific cleaning' of facades of Karachi's historic buildings soon

The city administration in collaboration with the Heritage Foundation Pakistan and Rotary Club Karachi has decided to embark on the "scientific cleaning" of the facades of historic buildings.

Official sources said that the task would begin with the Denso Hall facade cleaning festival from April 14.

They said that the decision to this effect was taken recently at a meeting held under the chairmanship of Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani.

Yasmeen Lari, the founder of the Heritage Foundation and renowned architect, briefed the participants of the meeting about the campaign saying that it would be an effort to bring back the glory of the city.

She said that beginning with Denso Hall (1886), facades of all buildings located on Marriott Road would be taken up one at a time every Sunday as a voluntary movement for safeguarding Karachi's heritage and creating livelihood opportunities through pedestrianising Marriott Road.

She said that the Rotary Club was a partner in this venture and the government had given it its blessings.

She made a detailed presentation on the method of gentle scientific cleaning of Karachi's beautiful buff-coloured stone to heritage volunteers.

She said that the occasion provided an opportunity to all Karachiites to participate in taking care of our heritage.

The commissioner said that the provincial government was making all-out efforts for the development and beautification of the city and civil society's support would be encouraged.

He hoped that the programme would be helpful in raising public awareness regarding various environmental aspects.

Commissioner Shallwani directed the officials of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, district municipal corporations, traffic police and other agencies concerned to extend all possible support regarding the cleanliness and beautification work conceptualised by the Heritage Foundation's programme.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 04/04/2019)

'Land grabbers are behind the creation of Katchi Abadis'

Land grabbers and some political parties are behind the creation of Katchi Abadis where people are deprived of basic facilities. This mushroom growth of informal settlements has destroyed peace in the city.

These views were expressed by renowned author and historian Gul Hassan Kalmati during a two-day workshop for peace committees organised by Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) on Sunday.

During his address he placed special emphasis on the need to devise policies to ensure regular housing settlements for labourers across the city and control the mushroom growth of Katchi Abadis in Karachi.

Recalling life in Karachi before partition, he said that late Jamshed Mehta developed Karachi and ensured the provision of all basic facilities to its residents. Kalmati suggested that the government plan low-cost housing schemes for the working class and provide residential plots to poor people at reduced prices. These housing schemes should be provided water, sewerage and other amenities on a priority basis, he added.

In the past, he said, no government had prepared any plan to solve the residential problems of the people of Karachi. Under the Supreme Court's orders, the old markets and residential colonies are being razed, which has affected the livelihood of many locals. He said that in a recent campaign, the government has demolished thousands of shops in old city areas and no alternative spaces have been provided to the displaced shopkeepers. Thousands of people have been rendered jobless due to the unplanned anti-encroachment campaign.

Kalmati said that Lyari was once a peaceful area where people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds lived peacefully. But some political parties, to attain their vested interests, provided arms and narcotics to gangs, resulting in the destruction of the harmony in the area. He said that many operations were conducted in the city for the restoration of peace, but the attempts failed as they too were politically motivated. That is why peace has still not restored in the city.

He said that the system of policing needs reforms. There is a need for positive encounter between the police and citizens to build trust, he said. However, he expressed the regret that good police officers are transferred if they try to make things right. Political parties try to get their own pawns posted as police officers for their vested interests, he added.

For the restoration of peace in Karachi, said Kalmati, youth can play an important role through social mobilisation and by raising awareness.

A youth leader, Naghma Iqtidar, asked the participants to organise gatherings for peace building activities in their areas. There is a need to take collective actions to get rid of all the issues, she said. She added that in terms of cleanliness everyone needs to take responsibility and take care of their own areas.

PILER Joint Director Zulfiqar Shah said that an atmosphere of intolerance had been fanned which had created differences among people. PILER had been working to mobilise peace committees in 12 different areas of the city where these committees will work to promote peace and counter violent extremism in their respective neighbourhoods, he said.

(By PPI The Express Tribune, 05, 08/04/2019)

Grave concerns of a gravedigger

Graveyards are ominous places, dreaded by nearly all. And yet they occupy space in our imaginations even if death has not been encountered yet. Gravediggers, however, are not granted that courtesy. It is only the bereaved and the aggrieved who meet them, and in that moment of mourning, our thoughts are typically with the loved ones we have lost. Gravediggers, it appears, are also ignored by the state.



Even the descendants of the gravedigger who prepared the final resting places of beloved personalities such as Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Quaid-e-Millat Liaquat Ali Khan are forced to live a life of poverty, unnoticed and unappreciated. At a mosque near Mewa Shah Graveyard, in SITE area, sits gravedigger Fatah Muhammad. This is his story.

Fatah Muhammad, an ailing man of 60, has spent his entire life working in Mewa Shah Graveyard. As a child, he used to assist his father, Noor Muhammad, who prepared the graves of some of Pakistan's founding figures as well as other prominent personalities. Today, Fatah is the father of six daughters and a young son. He has spent his life serving the deceased and knocking on doors of government offices for recognition of his father's services. As he nears the end of his Kafkaesque life, Fatah finds himself deprived and excluded from Mewa Shah Graveyard, robbed of his livelihood and ignored by both society and state.

Ancestral profession

Mewa Shah Graveyard, named after a 19th century Sufi, Mewa Shah, who was jailed and eventually exiled by the British for his struggle against colonial rule, is one of the largest and oldest graveyards in Karachi. The deceased of multiple religions, Jews, Christians, Muslims and Hindus rest in Mewa Shah Graveyard which includes space for cremation as well. Over the years, a portion of the graveyard was lost as tombstones were razed and factories, houses and buildings were constructed in their place. However, the graveyard still exists and its significance in Karachi prevails.

Fatah's father, grandfather, and great grandfather have served as gravediggers at the graveyard. When his father died, Fatah's mother took on the responsibility of being the caretaker of the graveyard.

In 2010, Fatah was informed he would be given a job in the district government on the directives of former Sindh chief minister Qaim Ali Shah. However, when he approached the relevant departments to receive his appointment letter he was asked to pay a bribe of Rs50,000. He managed to pay the amount by taking loans and selling off items from his house, and was appointed as the supervisor of Mewa Shah Graveyard.

At the time, Fatah thought that there would finally be the promise of a stable income in his life. His hope for financial security was, however, short-lived. Fatah was not paid his salary for several years after he joined the post. He contacted the Chief Minister's House relentlessly and managed to get departmental directives issued for the payment of his salary as well but found that those directives were never implemented.

As supervisor of the graveyard, he would issue an official receipt of the burial in exchange for which he would be paid Rs100 to Rs200 by the families of the deceased.

Monetising death

During Fatah's tenure as the supervisor, Mewa Shah Graveyard was affected by gang wars going on in nearby vicinities. Criminals and drug addicts began frequenting the graveyard until it was eventually overtaken by the mafia.

Under the mafia, the fees for providing space for graves in Mewa Shah increased to Rs20,000 to Rs25,000. The mafia appointed its own gravediggers there and excluded Fatah from the graveyard.

In a mosque near the graveyard, Fatah tells *The Express Tribune* that he is no longer allowed to enter the premises.

He speaks of how his father would always insist on Wuzu before digging a grave, and of how he was taught Quranic verses to recite when the body was lowered inside the grave.

Gravediggers nowadays are far removed from religion, laments Fatah. According to him, gravediggers in the past would only charge a small wage for digging the grave, but now the land for the grave is given after bargains and negotiations. Too often, says Fatah, a dead body would be buried in same grave as another which was buried just six months prior as things stand now.

The Quaid's gravedigger

Fatah's father, Noor Muhammad, was heading home after finishing his day's work at Mewa Shah when he met some government officials along the way who inquired about his profession. Upon hearing that he was a gravedigger, the officials beckoned for Noor to accompany them in their horse cart and took him to where the tomb of Quaid-e-Azam exists now.

The officials asked him to prepare a grave on top of a rocky hill. Noor asked for special tools and some assistance as the ground was rocky. He, along with the officials, went back to Mewa Shah Graveyard where they picked up the necessary tools, four labourers and headed back to dig the grave.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's grave was prepared after 16 hours of continuous labour, claims Fatah.

According to Fatah, his father was a gravedigger from 1930 to 1974 and also prepared the graves for Liaquat Ali Khan, Fatima Jinnah, Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, I I Chundrigar, Muhammad Hussain Suharwardy, Chaudhry Abdul Mateen, Sir Abdul Haroon, Qazi Khuda Bakhsh, Baba-e-Urdu Maulvi Abdul Haq, Yousuf Shah Ghazi, Abdul Rehman Kanch Qawwal and Muhammad Hashim Gazdar.

His father also had the honour of meeting the Quaid, tells Fatah. Noor prepared the grave of Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar on the directives of Jinnah at Mewa Shah Graveyard but the burial was done at Baitul Muqaddas in Jerusalem. Fatah narrates that the Quaid visited Noor Muhammad personally along with Abdullah Haroon and apologised. Jinnah also gave Noor Rs10 as donation and expressed the wish that his grave be prepared by Noor.

Before the state

Noor was never paid for the graves he prepared for these noted figures, says Fatah. Instead, he was given the white cloth in which the deceased were wrapped before being lowered into the graves. In time of need, Noor sold the sheets for Rs1 per sheet.

Noor was presented a certificate for preparing the Quaid's grave but that certificate is lost now. Fatah still has the certificate Noor received for preparing the grave of Liaquat Ali Khan but it is now in a frayed condition and as Fatah narrates his story, he laments that the certificate was of no use when the family suffered from poverty and starvation. It proved to be just a piece of paper, says Fatah.

Fatah tells that he has spent his life outside government offices trying to get some sort of official recognition for his father's services but to no avail. He claims that his father and his family deserve the government support just like others who are recognised for their national services. Even celebrities of the entertainment industry have received the Tamgha-i-Imtiaz, he says.

Unappreciated services

Fatah's plea is perhaps also supported by the fact that his family has spent their lives in poverty and have experienced starvation often. He tells of his six daughters, one of whom has passed BCom, and how he has requested former chief minister Qaim Ali Shah and current Chief Minister Mumtaz Ali Shah for employment for his daughters.

One of his daughters suffers from a mental illness and the family struggles to pay for her treatment. Fatah and his wife also suffer from poor health and turn to government hospitals for their treatment. His young son is learning mechanical skills as Fatah cannot afford to pay for his education anymore.

Fatah is now reduced to asking for financial assistance from people visiting the graveyard as he has no other means of income to support his family now.

Almost every individual is hit by the reality of their mortality at some point in their lives. We think of life after death, we think of the life we live before we breathe our last, religion tells us of what we may expect to experience in our graves once we are dead, but we hardly ever think of those who prepare our final resting places.

(By Kashif Hussain The Express Tribune, 04, 08/04/2019)

SBCA seals more than 50 showrooms on New MA Jinnah Road

The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) sealed on Monday night more than 50 car showrooms at New MA Jinnah Road on the instructions of Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah.

The owners and employees of the showrooms reached the site as soon as they heard about the action. When they asked the SBCA staff present there, they were informed that on the basis of complaints by the area residents, the CM had issued orders to Karachi commissioner to seal the showrooms.

The locals had complained that the showroom owners park their cars on roads causing routine traffic jams that inconvenience the people passing by.

While speaking to The Express Tribune, SBCA Additional Director-General Zafar Ahsan said that action was taken against the commercial activities going on in the residential buildings at MA Jinnah Road. Dozens of car showrooms have been sealed up till now. He said that the citizens face extreme difficulties due to the cars parked on the roads and the law is also being violated.

The CM has also expressed annoyance over the traffic jams occurring due to these commercial activities, he added. Operations at different roads have been started in collaboration with the deputy commissioner, said Ahsan.

He said that a session headed by deputy commissioner was held on judicial orders. The session discussed the commercial activities under way in residential buildings present at New MA Jinnah Road and Khalid bin Waleed Road. He said that in the first phase, the car showrooms have been sealed, while more steps will be taken later.

CM's surprise visit

On Monday, the CM had paid a surprise visit to different commercial areas across the city and expressed displeasure over the parking of vehicles on roads by car showroom owners.

He got off his vehicle at Sharae Quaideen and called the Traffic deputy inspector-general (DIG) and Karachi commissioner and showed them that the showroom owners had encroached the main road and service lanes to park their vehicles.

“These roads are important for the traffic flow, how dare they park their vehicles on them?” questioned Shah. He directed the traffic DIG to immediately start an operation and report to him.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 10/04/2019)

Cabinet approves new authority to build housing units

In order to make its flagship housing programme a successful endeavour, the government on Tuesday decided to form a new housing department called Naya Pakistan Housing Authority and initially build 130,000 housing units for the deserving people in the federal capital and Balochistan.

The government also decided to announce a tax amnesty scheme next week and planned a massive crackdown on electricity and gas thieves to overcome losses worth billions of rupees.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the federal cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan at PM Office.

The cabinet approved the signing of memoranda of understanding with the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom under which Pakistan would get information about properties and assets of its nationals in the two countries.

Government plans crackdown on electricity, gas thieves

“Under the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme, the formation of Naya Pakistan Housing Authority has been approved in the cabinet meeting to provide 130,000 housing units to the poor in the federal capital and Balochistan in one year,” Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said at a post-cabinet meeting press conference.

He the government had decided to launch the tax amnesty scheme after recent talks with the International Monetary Fund. “Finance Minister Asad Umar is currently in Washington to hold talks with the IMF and the tax amnesty scheme will be formally launched after his return,” he added.

When asked whether the scheme would be introduced through an ordinance or a money bill, the minister said Prime Minister Khan had formed a committee and the law minister would take decision about it.

Mr Chaudhry said the government decided to tighten the noose around gas and electricity thieves and the action would start from bigwigs, including opposition leaders Hina Rabbani Khar of the Pakistan Peoples Party and Rohail Asghar of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. He said Prime Minister Khan had ordered stern action against those involved in power and gas theft.

He said that 43 per cent of unaccounted for gas (UFG) was being stolen in the country and a number of “big” gas thieves had been held. “The cabinet was informed that stealing of 7.3pc UFG had been stopped that would save Rs3 billion,” he said, adding that 93pc UFG was being stolen in Karak and 48pc in overall Balochistan. “The problem of gas theft has also been reported in Lahore and Islamabad.”

The minister said that due to the action taken against the thieves a reduction of over Rs40bn in losses had been reported in the power sector. “Not only power thieves, more than 500 officials of electricity departments are also facing cases,” he added.

He said the cabinet had also approved the establishment of a media university on a public-private partnership basis and the government would only provide land for the purpose.
(By Syed Irfan Raza Dawn, 14, 10/04/2019)

Campaign to revive ‘Karachi’s glory’ kicks off at Denso Hall

The campaign to restore Denso Hall kicked off on Sunday with a large number of school, college and university students who participated and volunteered for the cause. Aiming to return the city its lost beauty and glory, authorities in pursuance of the Supreme Court (SC) orders have started a campaign to restore historic building structures in Karachi. The provincial government, in this regard, is assisted by Heritage Foundation of Pakistan – an institution that works for the preservation and promotion of vintage buildings.

The Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, through public-private partnership (PPP), launched a campaign to recruit volunteers from all over the city for the restoration work. The campaign started on Sunday with restoration work on the historic 133-year-old building of Denso Hall Library, located at MA Jinnah Road. The building was surrounded by encroachments, which were planned to be removed while in order to restore the glory of the city, the foundation and its volunteers also planned on restoring and decorating the interior of the building. Once the structure would get back its shape and space, the building would be used for public events and activities.

Moreover, Marriot Road, located at the back of Denso Hall, will also be blocked for traffic when any cultural or literature-related event will be organised. Stalls for books or handicrafts may be set up in such events and arrangements for public seating will also be made.

Active volunteering

The students volunteering for the restoration were seen cleaning the dust on the walls of Denso Hall that had been resting there for a few decades.

Former Karachi deputy mayor, Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani, German Consul-General in Karachi Eugen Wollfarth and Senator Nasreen Jalil also participated in the event.

Speaking at the event, Shallwani said that for the purpose of restoration, Sindh government will be actively participating through public-private partnerships and public support. "Marriot Road has been closed for traffic while the illegal structures around it are removed to make space for pedestrians so that this beautiful and historic building can be used for public events and social activities," he said, adding that the measure was being undertaken as a first step to restore historic buildings and bring back the lights to the city of lights.

Trees and boundary walls were also being placed around the sides of Empress Market, he said, adding that tourists coming from all over the country would definitely want to visit this historic building. The boundary wall will be completed within four months. "Sindh government and the district administration is providing all possible support," Shallwani assured.

Social responsibility

Architect and campaign manager Yasmeen Lari said that safeguarding historic buildings was a collective social responsibility. "The identity of the city will be lost if we are not able to keep the buildings intact," she said, lauding the SC for its orders for the revival of the original shape of the city after which public places, parks, roads and footpaths were being cleared of encroachments.

Lari said that the orders of the apex court raised the spirits of the citizens and motivated them to restore the lost glory of the city, including historic buildings. "We will take this campaign forward through the help of volunteers and the civil society and revive one building after another."

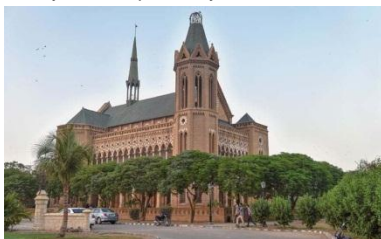
Lari thanked the Sindh chief minister, chief secretary, Karachi commissioner and all relevant departments for their efforts to clean up the encroachments around Denso Hall.

On the other hand, German consul-general, while inspecting the interior of the building and its roof, lauded the spirit of the citizens and said that the revival of the cultural heritage will instil pride in the hearts of citizens. Karachi was a significant city in terms of its social and economic value, he said, the city was a remarkable force to help the country stand on its feet in its early days while Denso Hall is still considered one of the key buildings for being a centre of learning. "The citizens and the private sector should actively participate in bringing back the cultural heritage of the city so that the next generation could be aware of the city's glorious past," he said.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 15/04/2019)

Guardian board seeks to restore Frere Hall's glory

Last year in April, Mayor of Karachi Wasim Akhtar announced that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) was ready to hand over the management and maintenance of the historic Frere Hall and its gardens to an 18-member Guardian Board for a five-year (extendable) period.



An MoU was to be signed between the City Council and the board's chairman Shahid Feroz. And on Nov 30, 2018, the City Council officially handed over the building to the board. The board, comprising eminent citizens (such as Amin Hashwani, Durriya Kazi, Ghazi Salahuddin and Shahid Abdulla) has ever since been working hard on the project and has in fact embarked upon an ambitious plan to restore some of the iconic features of the building, and to add a few new ones to enhance its cultural value.

'The star of Asia'

Talking to Dawn, chairman of the board Mr Feroz said, "Karachi has been neglected when it comes to architecture. A lot of architecture has been defaced. Luckily, Frere Hall is the only place, despite being iconic, that has not been tampered with. Ninety per cent of Karachiites are convinced that it used to be a church which has been converted. No one understands its history, whereas the history of the hall is critical to comprehend. This was not only the first town hall of the city but the British had built it with a lot of passion because they had conceived Karachi to be the star of Asia."

'Karachi has been neglected when it comes to architecture'

The board wants to make sure that Frere Hall is fully protected. In that regard, restoration, revival and an additional plan to make a library for citizens is under way. The existing library, members of the board think, is not adequate in terms of scale or being user-friendly. Therefore, the suggestion is to create another library in the compound, in a discreet way, which merges or hides into the landscape. It will be a modern, user-friendly facility. This will be done without touching the building because Frere Hall is a protected heritage structure.

Over the years, a great many precious objects and artefacts have been stolen from the Frere Hall premises. They include a number of paintings and seraphs that were an integral part of a fountain (built in 1890) named after the renowned Parsi philanthropist Eduljee Dinshaw. Mr Feroz and his colleagues also intend to reproduce them.

This sounds promising, especially bearing in mind the historicity of this work of architecture. Frere Hall is Karachi's first neo-Gothic piece of stonemasonry. It was constructed to honour the services of Sir Henry Bartle Frere, who became commissioner of Sindh in 1850 and 12 years later, governor of Bombay. He is accredited with many accomplishments, one of which is imparting a "modern" look to Sindh.

The building is made with buff, dark, grey and red stones, with vousoirs of pointed arches and a pitched roof. This means the challenge is twofold: its historic significance and architectural grandeur need to be preserved.

Mr Feroz is hopeful that it's going to happen. He feels, though it is still a work in progress, a large amount of money — between Rs600 million and Rs1 billion — is required for the project. The major chunk of the amount will be spent on restoration and retrieval because some of its parts have been damaged extensively. Then the landscape right now is fairly unsightly. It should be integrated into a contemporary landscape so that it becomes pleasing to the eye.

To the question raised from certain people about too much focus of restoration workers being on district South of the city, Mr Feroz responded that it's cliché to crib about it. "Karachi [in its early days] used to be district South. The rest came later," he argued, adding one has to start with something that's iconic and manageable. "We need to decide whether to leave it like that or celebrate it."

The board has already undertaken important work. It was significant, first and foremost, to determine the things that could be simulated or reproduced. The vegetation challenges have also been addressed. "Now there is not a single bush which is not mapped or documented. On April 12, we will have a major event to unveil the restoration plan. The idea is to give back to the city because we have memories that we can relate to," Mr Feroz added.

(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 15, 05/04/2019)

'Master Plan' to be a separate authority from SBCA

The Sindh government is framing legislation to make 'Master Plan' a separate authority independent from the Sindh Building Control Authority in the light of directives of the Supreme Court.

The legislation would be finalised within one month for presentation before a committee constituted by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah comprising members of the Sindh cabinet and technocrats. After consideration by the committee, the legislation draft would be sent for the approval of the cabinet.

This emerged on Monday from a meeting of the cabinet committee which met here at the office of the secretary of local government presided over by Sindh Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani.

The meeting was attended by Provincial Transport Minister Syed Owais Shah, Law Adviser to the Chief Minister Murtaza Wahab, local government secretary Syed Khalid Haider Shah, DG of SBCA Iftikhar Qaimkhani, DG of KDA Abdul Qadeer Mangi, director of SBCA Mushtaq Soomro, eminent architect Yasmin Lari, CEO of Heritage Foundation Asad A. Khan, chairman of Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners Dr Mir Shabbir Ali, dean Faculty of Civil Engineering NED University and others officers concerned. At the meeting reports of meetings of four subcommittees constituted by the chief minister were also presented.

Yasmin Lari informed the meeting participants that on the directive of the apex court a fresh survey of heritage buildings was completed in which 1,600 buildings were included which were declared by the government.

The Heritage Foundation had been working on their maintenance and repairs, she added. She also said that the heritage buildings would be included in the proposed master plan authority.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Saeed Ghani said: "We are bound to implement all directives of the apex court, but at some points we had to file a request in the court for review of its verdict in the light of ground realities."

Regarding the recent anti-encroachment drive carried out on court orders, he said there were thousands of people affected by the operation who were still not provided with alternative places for running their business due to legal formalities. He said rehabilitation would be time-consuming and needed land and funds.

He said that because of inordinate delay in getting due share from the NFC award, many projects of the Sindh government had been suspended.

Disappointing performance

Presiding over another meeting, the local government minister said that the performance of directors, deputy directors and assistant directors was disappointing as they had failed to come up to the expectations in fulfilling their legal obligations.

"We want to take the local government in the right direction, but if someone feels that they are unable to discharge their responsibilities they better quit the job and go home."

New Saudi CG meets chief minister

The people of Saudi Arabia consider Pakistan a fortress of Islam and are keen to see Pakistan a prosperous and developed country and will continue to extend full cooperation to Pakistan so that the country could become prosperous.

These views were expressed by newly posted Saudi Consul General Bandar Fahad Aldail, who called on Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah here on Tuesday at CM House.

During the meeting, welcoming the Saudi consul general, the chief minister referred to investment opportunities in Sindh and offered Saudi entrepreneurs full cooperation to make investment and take advantage of the opportunities.

Earlier they exchanged views regarding bilateral relations and promoting trade and other matters of mutual interest.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 24/04/2019)

Maulvi Musafirkhana is now a relic of past

If one passes by Maulvi Musafirkhana today, it is unlikely that they will be able to recognise where the building is now. With the passage of time, the yellow-stone grand structure, situated on MA Jinnah Road, has fallen into decay and the unchecked encroachments in its premises have completely defaced it.



Passage of time

Sindh Central Record Management Committee Chairperson Dr Kaleemullah Lashari said that the building was in its original condition until 1955 and it was only later that commercial activities began in the area.

The building was conceptualised as a caravanserai, providing lodging facilities to travellers from low-income households and working white-collar jobs free of charge. "Prior to the creation of Pakistan, there were only three hotels in the city, Palace Hotel, Central Hotel and Prince Hotel, and everyone could not afford to stay there," he said.



Maulvi Mushafirkhana building was designed by James Strachan and the responsibility for its construction was undertaken by Haji Muhammad Maula Dina. The city administration of the time paid half of the estimated cost while the rest was borne by Dina. In addition to the remaining cost, Dina, who was also a contractor, did not charge for labour and other work.

According to a shopkeeper, Manzoor, who for the past 60 years has been selling straw blinds and mats in the area, people settled in the rooms of several buildings in the premises and even set up huts in the caravanserai which they later turned into permanent structures. He said that on top of one of the doors of the dilapidated building, an inscription on a marble plaque reads Mauli Maula Dina Dharamshala, clearly indicating that it used to be a boarding and lodging facility. The words on the plaque too have faded with time.

Traveller's respite

When the caravanserai was established, the inner lanes in its premises were so wide that camel carts could easily make their way through, but now they have become so narrow that only a single person may pass as dozens of homes and factories occupy the area.

Munawwar Ali, an aged man who was born in the residential plots surrounding the caravanserai, said that he has some childhood memories when the Maulvi Musafirkhana was still a grand structure. "There were no petrol or diesel run vehicles then. People used to travel on horses and camels," said Ali adding that people with fruit carts and hawkers would go inside the building.

"These narrow and dark lanes used to be wide in the days gone by, and camel carts and horse carts could easily pass through these lanes".

But now, it is overcrowded, over-occupied. "There used to be a Gora Qaburistan in front of the Maulvi Musafirkhana. There used to be water and fodder pools in the nearby areas. But now all these things have vanished".

Shopkeepers said that when Pakistan was established, migrants settled at the caravanserai but instead of taking shelter temporarily, they made the building their permanent abode. The area around the building is littered with several shops including sewing machine repair shops as well as leather and shoe making factories.

The walls, the top rooms and windows of the main building designed on Victorian architecture no longer resemble the masterfully crafted structure it originally was.

A calligrapher, Mubashir, pointing to an outer wall of his shop shared that the original wall was made of yellow-toned stone, but the paint and limestone applied on it has caused the building's façade to fade. Mubashir's shop was established in the 1970s in a narrow lane.

He said that he had learnt from his elders that many people going for Hajj or Umra through sea, used to stay at this Maulvi Musafirkhana. He added that many traders also sought lodgings at the caravanserai.

The various governments that came into power in Pakistan completely neglected this historical building. No government paid any heed to redress the dismal situation nor did anybody thought of restoring the building.

Hope for restoration

Lashari said that the law for the protection of the historical buildings was formulated in 1994 in Sindh, after which all the historical buildings were declared as heritage sites. He added, however, that the rampant residential and trade encroachments in the inner and outer areas of the buildings, due to the negligence of the municipal institutions, has masked the original façade of the building. He said that the restoration process of the historic building can be laborious and time-consuming task, but it was not impossible. He said that experts are available in this regard who can guide the project.

(By Aftab Khan The Express Tribune, 04, 30/04/2019)

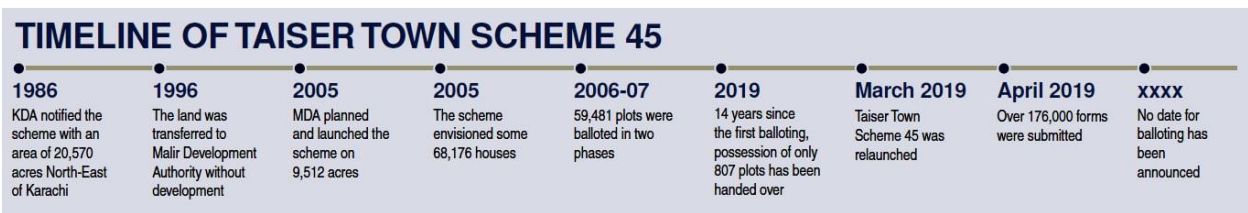
Dawn Investigations: In Malir’s Taiser town, sweet dreams are made of dust

All through March, a visit to any Silk Bank branch across Karachi showed long lines of people queuing up in pursuit of the same dream.

Thousands of form-seekers waited patiently to reach the desk, then walked away with a three-page document that they saw as a key to their life goal, “Apna ghar ban jaye bas! (just to build my house!)”, in the words of one woman standing in the line.

Their eyes are all on a large patch of dusty ground 20 minutes from Sohrab Goth. Here lies the heavily advertised ‘best residential scheme’ in Karachi — Malir Development Authority’s (MDA) Taiser Town Scheme 45.

This is a fresh launch of an old project which has promised since 2005 to provide shelter to a low- and middle-income population of 2.5 million.



Instead, it is a saga of broken dreams, poor development, wild bushes, clouds of dust and howling dogs.

And this is 23 years after the scheme was initially launched by MDA in 1996, and 14 years after it was re-launched once again by none other than General Pervez Musharraf in 2005.

When asked if they know where the scheme is located or what happened to past launches of the same project, many of the prospective allottees stare vacantly and insist: “Sarkari project hay, fraud nahi ho ga (It is a government project, surely there is no fraud here).”

But a visit to the site suggests otherwise. The land lacks basic civic amenities including electricity, gas and running water. MDA claims it has set up the necessary infrastructure but a visit to the site shows a large uninhabited space, crumbling drains and beat-up roads that lead nowhere. A local estate agent and thaikaydar have set up a model 80-yard house to attract potential buyers but around it there is no sign of development. The only place in the area that has electricity (illegal connections according to the power utility) is a settlement called Afghan Camp (also known as Muhajir Camp) where internally displaced persons (IDPs) were allowed to camp by the federal government.

So who are the people eagerly filling out forms and paying the non-refundable fee of Rs1,000-2,000 for Taiser Town Scheme 45 and its 30,000 plots measuring 80, 120, 240 and 400 yards? They are drivers, cooks, maids, salon workers, young professionals, teachers and of course middle-income investors in search of returns greater than single digits on their hard-earned savings — a motley crew of lower- and middle-class people tired of monthly rentals and stingy returns on their savings.

According to a State Bank report, the yearly estimated housing demand is 400,000 units while the actual supply is only 150,000, leaving a shortfall of 250,000. Last year, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that 5 million low-cost houses would be built across the country over a period of five years.

With more than half a million of its residents living in slums and squatter settlements, the lower- and lower-middle class families of Karachi find themselves struggling on a daily basis in dingy accommodation with high rents and inadequate infrastructure.

The monthly rent for a small 8x10 space with a kitchen and small bathroom is around Rs5,000 while a tiny 300 sq ft two-room apartment costs between Rs8,000 and Rs13,000 per month in lower-income localities all over the city.

Talking to Dawn, M. Ali, a driver working for a local company, said that he has submitted forms for Scheme 45 in both the 80- and 120-sq yard categories. He lives in a two-bedroom house in Qayyumabad. "I have a small family that includes my wife and children. I barely make Rs18,000 a month of which Rs8,000 goes straight into rent."

The rental includes charges for electricity, gas and water. Ali is permitted by the landlord to keep one TV, an iron and a small fridge. Many landlords only allow fans, tubelights and single burners for cooking; several have thrown out tenants who were found to be using televisions, washing machines, etc. "Plots all over the city are expensive and with my salary I don't think I can buy a house. This installment plan seems reasonable," he says.

The scheme has been heavily advertised in traditional media and many private firms have made widespread use of social media marketing to get the message across. Talking to Dawn, several applicants from the low-income segment said they came to know about the scheme after estate agents in their areas started visiting them and told them about it. Many applicants have even been approached by estate agents — loitering around Silk Bank branches — offering them up to Rs80,000 if they are among the lucky ones to be balloted. This tactic of driving up prices artificially seems to have been borrowed from Bahria Town's playbook; after all, MDA was a major player in the mega scam that spawned Bahria's Karachi project. (Silk Bank's role is confined to collecting the fee for the plots; this story does not imply any illegality on its part.)



Meanwhile, the prices for old allotments seem to have surged. There is a sudden spike in SMS ads for Taiser Town, though till last year people were mostly receiving targeted ads for Bahria Town plots. A quick glance through various online property sites shows the cost of land has gone up, in some cases from Rs400,000 to Rs10,00,000 for an 80-sq yard plot from earlier allotments. A few calls to some estate agents operating in the vicinity show that rates have indeed gone up for old plots but there are not many buyers.

A real estate agent and contractor, Ali Murad says he has been in this area since last year but "things have started picking up pace and interest has revived". He showed Dawn the model house in the Scheme 45 (which has been set up by the realty firm he works for) the cost of which is approximately Rs2.5 million (cost of

land + construction). "Since the launch of the new scheme, plot prices in Phase-I and II have also gone up. Currently an 80-sq yard plot alone has a premium/own' of Rs500,000-1,000,000 depending on the location. There are some 11 houses currently under construction and I hope more people will follow suit."

False hopes

The advertisement campaign, on Facebook and traditional media, pushes all the right buttons for this demographic. "Low-cost mega project of MDA Government of Sindh", one ad announces. "The best residential scheme in Karachi around which wholesale markets are being set up", says another. "Adjacent to Northern Bypass, Gulshan-e-Maymar and Dreamworld Resort" screams a third, and "Golden chance for the citizens of Sindh to own a house" claims a fourth.

To top it off, MDA has now thrown the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into its sales pitch as well. The new map of the scheme shows the M10 road, on which it is located, is linked to the CPEC route while officials insist that high-rises and business area development will bring in lucrative rewards. If real estate agents are to be believed, over 800,000 forms have been handed out while sources at Silk Bank cite the number as 450,000. MDA authorities claim that over 176,000 filled forms have been deposited so far while the bank is tabulating data from branches all over Pakistan and the number is expected to go up.

Many families have submitted multiple forms, with fees ranging from Rs1,000 (non-refundable) along with refundable booking fee of Rs9,000 for 80- and Rs15,000 for 120-sq yards and Rs2,000 (non-refundable) along with refundable booking fee of Rs30,000 for 240- and Rs50,000 for 400-sq yard plots. "The more forms we submit, the greater the chance," says Ahmed, a painter. He says he has submitted three forms — one each under his CNIC, his wife and his son. "I can take a hit of Rs30,000 but I'm hopeful I'll get a plot." So far no date for balloting has been fixed.

So what exactly is the fate of this scheme which was first launched in 1996?

"Whenever MDA needs money, it publishes ads in the papers saying 'this number of plots are being balloted, kindly deposit money'. It's a good way of generating funds," says Tasneem Siddiqi, who heads Saiban — the NGO behind the low-cost housing project Khuda ki Basti in Karachi as well as in Hyderabad and Lahore.

In fact, Khuda ki Basti, also in Scheme 45, is an early example of the incremental housing model. Need assessment of applicants is carried out and the delivery of land is immediate. Successful applicants must set up residence on the plot and begin immediate construction of a shelter. The cost of land is paid in installments and the land title is delivered after a period of few years while infrastructure is developed using the collection pool. This helps keep speculators and investors away.

A former DG of Hyderabad Development Authority, Mr Siddiqi blames political powers for the derelict scheme. "In 1999, the Musharraf government and MQM became partners and made millions through this scheme. MDA DG Ameerzada Kohati [against whom several corruption references were later filed, and who later moved to Dubai] and Sindh governor Ishratul Ebad were hand in glove. Someone needs to find out how much money was collected during the balloting. What happened to those funds?"

About another major MDA project, New Malir Housing near National Highway, he says: "The same situation exists over there. No development. For people to move there, development is needed."

Chairman of Department of Architecture & Planning at NED University Dr Noman Ahmed expresses similar concerns: “There is a strong chance the latest scheme will fall into the hands of speculators once again and the target group will be missed out.” The biggest flaw, he points out, is that MDA has once again not carried out a needs assessment. “The strategy isn’t much different from commercial developers — open applications have been invited and computer ballots will determine who gets the plot,” he says.

“This is the third time MDA is going on a massive scale for balloting in Scheme 45. There are two types of people: the really needy ones who want to make a house of their own and the other are investors with disposable income. These small plots are seemingly ideal investments but what people don’t realise is that their investment is doomed,” says Mr Siddiqi.

In 1979, KDA launched Shah Abdul Latif Town on National Highway with 43,000 plots of 60-, 80- and 120-sq yards. Balloting was done, allotment letters were issued but the recipient pool was not the needy group that required immediate housing.

The plots were held up for speculative purposes and the scheme remained unoccupied for so long that eventually encroachments started coming up. A similar situation prevails in MDA Scheme 45. Successful buyers from the earlier allotments had no immediate interest in developing and occupying this land.

Meanwhile, according to a retired land official, “Those allotted plots in Sectors 53 and 54 of Scheme-45 in balloting during Musharraf’s time were not given allotment letters despite paying their installments; instead people displaced by the construction of the Lyari Expressway were resettled on that land by then Nazim Mustafa Kamal.”

(The fate of another low-cost housing scheme, Hawkesbay Scheme 46, launched by the Lyari Development Authority in the 1990s is even more intriguing. According to sources, while files exist on paper, there is nothing on ground. It is, in effect, a ghost housing scheme.)



Gloomy beginnings

The Board of Revenue, Sindh, is the original owner of all the land in the province and responsible for collecting revenue and managing land records. The body also allots land to citizens and societies including the Karachi Development Authority (KDA), MDA and Defence Housing Authority (DHA) for development.

Taiser Town Scheme 45 was first notified by KDA in 1986 with a controlled area of 20,570 acres in the north-east of Karachi comprising dehs including Mokhi, Nangan, Bijar-ji-Bhutti and Taiser — all named after folklore characters. Mai Taiser (pronounced ‘tie sir’), for instance is said to have been the sister of Mokhi, a folk

heroine featured in Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai’s poetry.

Fast forward to 1993, MDA was established under the Malir Development Authority Act 1993. The authority had the mandate “to make provision for the development of certain areas of the Karachi Division and improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of such area”.

In 1996, KDA transferred Taiser Town Scheme 45 to MDA without any development. MDA launched the scheme in September 2005 on 9,512 acres for a low-cost housing scheme and initiated infrastructure development thereafter. The plans included about 68,176 residential plots, beside commercial and amenity plots, to serve 1.2 million people.

On Jan 15, 2006, then president Pervez Musharraf performed the computer balloting for Scheme 45 at the Governor House, Karachi. Those present included then Sindh governor Dr Ishratul Ebad, chief minister Dr Arbab Rahim, city nazim Mustafa Kamal, naib nazim Nasreen Jalil, and other members of the Sindh cabinet. The employees of Governor House also had a quota set aside for them.

A news report published on May 6, 2006 said: “Allied Bank has received a total 309,300 applications for the low-cost housing scheme, Taiser Town. Total amount deposited with banks was Rs4.794 billion, including Rs154m as cost of forms.”

By August 2007, complaints started to trickle in about the delay in allotments. “Around 400,000 people had applied for plots in different categories of Taiser Town and only 70,000 people succeeded. We have asked the Sindh government to allocate 6,000 acres initially in Deh Paiee and Deh Ghaggar to accommodate the leftover applicants,” another report published on August 7, 2007 quoted the then MDA DG Kohati as saying.

Interestingly, since 1985, 1,879.53 acres of land in Scheme 45 have been allocated to 45 private housing societies, with many turned into thriving private sector projects including Garden City and Karim Housing Project. There are also sectors reserved for the Lyari Expressway Resettlement Project. All these rely on infrastructure set up by MDA.

‘Plots on paper’

“I was allotted a 400-sq yard plot back in 2006 and paid Rs1.2m for it. The last payment was made sometime in 2009,” says Arif Pervez, one of the allottees from that scheme. He managed to visit the site a few years ago. “There is an existing main gate but I don’t even know the exact location of the plot. It seems to exist on paper only.”

Mrs N, an elderly lady who also did not want her full name used, says her husband was allotted a plot in 2006. “We had moved back from Dubai after my husband retired. We managed to get a decent apartment in Clifton but wanted a house eventually so that we could live with our sons,” she says. “I regret the day we saw Gulshan-e-Maymar in the vicinity and were impressed and went for Scheme 45. My husband passed away a few years ago and since then my sons have been running around to get the 400-sq yard plot transferred in our name. We paid the full amount so why should we pay bribes now? Kyon dhoka dete hein? (Why do they deceive us?)”

Sohail Khan has the possession of a 120-sq yard plot in Scheme 45 but says he will most probably die before seeing his house there. When asked why he doesn't sell the plot, he says, “If I sell it, I will never be able to buy a plot this big in any other part of the city. For the past 12 years I have been waiting and saving money to build a house but every time I visit the place, it's the same,” says the retired school teacher.

“Whenever MDA needs money, it publishes ads in the papers saying ‘this number of plots are being balloted, kindly deposit money’. It's a good way of generating funds,” says Tasneem Siddiqi, a former DG of Hyderabad Development Authority

Even the employees of the Governor House who were allotted plots under quota have been unable to build homes there due to nonexistent amenities.

In fact, since the early 2000s those affected at various stages after the scheme was launched have been voicing the betrayal of their hopes in letters published in various newspapers since then.

A letter in Dawn dated May 3, 2004 reads: “I draw the attention of the relevant authorities to the legitimate outstanding claim for allotment of the land applied for under Scheme No. 45, as far back as March 1987 when the land was under KDA. The subject matter was personally referred to former Sindh chief minister Qaim Ali Shah on Jan 13, 1990, and an assurance was given to attend to the problem. It is regretted, however, that the land has not been allotted, nor have the crores of rupees already paid for been refunded...”

Another letter from a disillusioned investor dated April 23, 2010 reads: “...I was allotted a plot measuring 120 square yards. With all dues cleared, I am still waiting for the allotment order to be issued to me...”

“We were allotted a 240-square yards plot of land in Taiser Town by the MDA through ballot on Feb 27, 2007. It is now over 12 years we have been trying to get possession of our land with no result,” reads yet another letter published on March 13, 2019. The official Facebook page of Taiser Town Scheme 45 is littered with the voices of those who have not received possession letters despite timely payments. Many point out how the place is nothing but wasteland.

The MDA dismisses these complaints as “propaganda by rivals” and has issued statements that anyone indulging in negative publicity will be dealt with by the FIA. One might ask: what “rivals” is MDA alluding to? After all, it owns the real estate in question — unless of course the land authority is conducting itself like a private developer trying to attract buyers.

‘All is well’

In his office situated behind the National Stadium, MDA Secretary Muhammad Arshad Khan is flanked by well over half a dozen acolytes who practically fill in the gaps every time he struggles to recall a number. Tea flows freely as one assistant after the other walks in with files and maps related to Scheme 45.

Talking to Dawn, Khan vehemently tried to dispel the notion that Scheme 45 will fail once again. “Where can you get Rs1,000 per square yard in Karachi? In our surroundings, private developers are selling land at the rate of Rs35,000-40,000 per square yard. It is nothing but propaganda by dubious characters and private builders in the area whose interests are hurt.”

He went on to clarify that this is not a new scheme. “The plots are those that were left over in Phase-I and II balloting between the years 2006-08.”

When asked why no development has yet taken place in the area, he blames the allottees and their failure to pay their dues in full. “Only 64pc payment has been received from earlier schemes. We have set up the required infrastructure and Phase-I possessions are currently being given out,” he says, stressing that people must start building their homes.

It's worth noting that ‘shortage of funds’ did not prevent the authority from constructing all the major roads, boulevards, culverts and bridges in Bahria Town Karachi that impressed thousands into buying plots in the housing scheme. Not only that, but the thousands of acres on which BTK is located — and which were gifted to the land developer by the MDA — were supposed to be used for an incremental i.e. low-cost housing scheme.

The Supreme Court judgement last year that declared Bahria's acquisition of land in Malir district to be illegal and void ab initio described MDA as having “...acted as a property dealer and even as a go-between in the deal [between the Sindh government and Bahria Town]...A business venture of this type cannot be said to have any meaning for the poor people...”

A document shared by the MDA shows only 807 possessions have been handed over by the authority in Phase-I. The total number of possessions left behind in Phase-I and II combined is 59,481. So what is preventing allottees that have paid some installments from paying the full amount and seeking possession?

A source in MDA says that seasoned investors and common folk know the authority will not cancel their plots and even if it did, they can get a stay from court.

When pointed out that the place lacks civic amenities and infrastructure, he says: "Most buyers don't go for possession and prefer to wait and watch. Investors are holding on to these plots. This time we have carefully planned the whole scheme so as to curb this practice. Only one plot per CNIC will be allotted and we will only ask for development charges once all payments have been cleared."

He adds: "We can't do it all alone. All institutions — KE, KWSB, SSGC — need to be onboard to develop Taiser Town Scheme 45 else nothing will change" he insisted. When asked how these institutions are onboard with the MDA in surrounding private schemes, the secretary simply shrugged and said "I don't know" with an air of exasperation. Interestingly, by March 2016 KWSB had already provided four three-inch water pipelines from Dumlotee to BTK, well before anyone had even moved in there.

Meanwhile, in an interview published in the local press in March this year, Additional DG of MDA Sohail Khan claimed that it was unfair to say the authority did not do any work. "We didn't do road carpeting but did smooth out/pave the way for roads. If we had done road carpeting in 2004, it wouldn't have lasted for two rains and people would have accused us of corruption." In the same interview, he said that Rs520 million was generated after selling commercial plots in Shah Latif Town in New Malir Housing Scheme and used for paying four months' salaries of MDA staff. Incidentally, the role of the Grade-20 official, who was earlier MDA DG, was extensively questioned during the Bahria Town case.

The history of the consultancy services acquired by MDA for Scheme 45 is also very telling. Back in 2003, MDA hired M/s ECIL (Pvt) Ltd for survey, investigations, planning design and construction supervisor services of the scheme. The MDA cites the company as a reputable one with experience of works in 19 different countries. On the ECIL website, there can be found a summary of 'Master Planning of 20,570 acres for Taiser Scheme 45', showing the current project status as still "in progress".

In 2009, the Federal Ministry of Communications in its inquiry report on the September 2007 Shershah Bridge collapse, held ECIL and the National Highway Authority (NHA) responsible for the tragedy. The 70-metre Baldia loop of the Shershah Bridge collapsed on Sept 1, 2007, a mere 20 days after its inauguration by then President Pervez Musharraf. The accident claimed nearly half a dozen lives, injured dozens and cost the exchequer billions of rupees.

The report recommended that M/S ECIL should immediately be removed from the list of government-approved consultants and blacklisted. Fast forward to 2015 and ECIL was back in the news for substandard performance in the upgradation of the Multan International Airport.

However, despite the very controversial past, ECIL has been rehired by the land authority for the current scheme.

Meanwhile, the management consultants in the earlier iteration of Scheme 45, Paragon Pvt Ltd, had been blacklisted by MDA, ostensibly for 'poor performance'. Yet that same consultancy's services have once again been acquired.

On the issue of vacating land currently under 'qabza' of Afghans and IDPs, the secretary of MDA says: "The government will have to resettle them." The settlers have set up a shanty town with a population of over 1,000. They were parked here in 2013, the federal government extended their stay to 2015 and now 2019 has been set as the new deadline.

However, MDA claims it conducted an anti-encroachment drive on April 1 and recovered 45 acres of land in Sector 11 of the scheme, with bulldozers mowing down illegal homes.

"MDA needs to adopt a methodology that makes this scheme effective and serves the poor," says Professor Noman Ahmed, stressing that the authority must identify people with immediate housing needs. "Go for incremental housing. Deliver the plots and make these people inhabit those lands before granting the title or legal rights to prevent the land from becoming a tradable asset," says Dr Ahmed.

Meanwhile, the queues outside Silk Bank started growing longer as March 31 – the date for form submission – neared. Seeing the overwhelming response, and hoping for more collection, MDA extended the date to April 15 and then to April 23. By then, millions had already been deposited into the authority's account, while no date for computer balloting has been announced. Nevertheless, the amount will continue to accrue profit for the authority.

No date has been set for balloting, which sources maintain won't take place before six months, though it should be done within 60 days. Till then, the money gathered – which runs in billions – will accrue profit. In this backdrop, one thing is apparent. So far, MDA's plans sound great on paper. In reality, dust is gathering on the documents of earlier allottees while sand continues to blow all over the site.

(By Sumaira Jajja Dawn, 01, 06/05/2019)

Non-compliance with order on Karachi military land irks SC

The Supreme Court on Thursday expressed dissatisfaction over a compliance report submitted by the defence secretary regarding removal of encroachments and commercial structures from lands belonging to the military lands department in Karachi and ordered that its directives on the matter be implemented in letter and spirit.

A two-judge bench of the apex court, comprising Justices Gulzar Ahmed and Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel, resumed at its Karachi registry the implementation proceedings in a case about operation for removal of encroachments from amenity spaces across the metropolis, including the cantonment areas.

At the outset of the hearing, defence secretary retired Lt Gen Ikramul Haq along with attorney general Anwar Mansoor Khan filed a report regarding compliance of the court's directives issued on Jan 22 for removal of commercial activities from land belonging to the military lands department across the city.

However, the bench members termed the report "unsatisfactory and an eyewash" and asked the defence secretary why all the directives contained in the order had not been complied with in letter and spirit.

AG, defence secretary told to end commercial activities from cantonment areas

Attorney General Khan informed the bench that apart from a couple of points all the directives in the order had been implemented in letter and spirit.

The head of the bench, Justice Ahmed, told them that the entire order remained to be implemented and asked why a large marriage hall on the Pakistan Air Force land and the Global Marquee wedding hall near the FTC building had not been demolished in compliance with the order.

Expressing dismay over the state of affairs, the judges said the defence ministry was not acting on court orders and wondered what the purpose of the Supreme Court was.

"Should the apex court be shut?," asked Justice Ahmed while looking at the government's top law officer and defence secretary, adding they needed to implement the court's orders to first remove encroachments including the marriage halls and other commercial constructions from the cantonment areas in an anti-encroachment operation.

When asked whether the army had the authority to allot state land, Attorney General Khan maintained that the army was not a beneficiary of such moves.

Justice Ahmed noted that parks and playgrounds in the city had been taken over and named after martyrs. "Who knows maybe even I will become a martyr or be killed," he said.

The attorney general said that although martyrs were afforded a high status, there were a number of conditions that must be fulfilled to become a martyr.

"Do you mean to say I will not be able to become a martyr?," the judge remarked in a lighter mood and added "we were born to be martyred".

Citing the example of Defence Housing Authority, the judge said that state land in Karachi had been handed over to private parties by the military.

The bench told the defence secretary to ensure that all the encroachments being used for commercial activities were removed from all the military lands across the city in compliance with the court order. It also instructed the director, Military Lands Karachi, to submit a compliance report to this effect by the next hearing.

The bench also expressed displeasure with the Pakistan International Airlines authorities for not demolishing a marriage hall being run on its land despite the order and told the officials concerned to demolish such marriage halls "right today".
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 01, 10/05/2019)

CS, mayor issued notices on plea to develop unattended amenity plots

The Supreme Court on Friday issued notices to the chief secretary, Karachi mayor and others on an application seeking direction for the authorities concerned to develop the amenity plots lying unattended across the metropolis, including Clifton.

A two-judge bench comprising Justices Gulzar Ahmed and Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel, which took up the matter at the Karachi registry, asked the authorities to submit their replies till the next hearing.

The application was filed by the Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan, a non-governmental organisation, pleading to become an intervener in a case pertaining to removal of illegal encroachments from public parks, playgrounds and other amenity spaces in the metropolis.

The court is asked to order setting up of a 'Karachi Planning and Development Authority' for a new master plan of the metropolis

The applicant sought the apex court's intervention with regard to formulation of a plan for workable urban planning and development, arguing that presently it was being neglected by the Sindh government, the Sindh Building Control Authority and other relevant authorities, as they had completely failed to carry out the same to the benefit of the people of Karachi.

The applicant said it was imperative that a most important initiative taken by the Supreme Court in tackling the issue of illegally transferred land, illegal occupation of land and wrongful conversion of the usage of several plots was continued to save the city of Karachi and provide its citizens with proper basic amenities of parks, hospitals, schools, residential areas as this was their fundamental right.

Advocate Arshad Tayebaly submitted that the intervener had been working on these issues with the Institute of Architects Pakistan-Karachi chapter over the last several years and had done extensive research in this area.

The counsel submitted that certain plots in the metropolis needed immediate attention so their illegal conversion could be avoided. "There are many empty pieces of land in the city, both amenity plots and others, that are lying unused and have become trash dumps," he added.

He further submitted that these plots had to be developed for their intended use.

The counsel also mentioned that a plot known as "Hippodrome" in Block 5 of Clifton, which was located next to the Karachi Grammar School, was required to be developed as a park but was completely neglected.

He further informed the court that similarly the area known as Neher-i-Khayyam in Clifton also needed to be cleaned. Numerous plans had been made to clean the said area, but it remained in the same state and there was no progress for cleaning it, he added. The applicant said these were just a few plots which needed immediate attention and restoration to bring green and public spaces to these locations.

He added that there were countless other plots in the city, which were still vacant and pleaded to the apex court to issue necessary directives to the authorities concerned to develop them with full speed and bona fide intentions.

The applicant said it could provide a detailed list of plots lying vacant as dumps and where the public parks were required to be made.

The counsel mentioned that the apex court through its order, dated Jan 22 and Jan 24, had directed the relevant authorities to take necessary action with a view to stop increasing number of illegal conversions.

However, the applicant urged the apex court to direct them to first build and develop the plots and lands laying vacant, as these may be subject to illegal conversion if not developed for intended use.

The counsel further submitted that the applicant had been working with the residents of Clifton's Block 5, who had instituted several suits against the illegal commercialisation in their residential area, as there were various establishments including restaurants, clubs, studios and schools that were functioning on residential properties.

It was stated that despite the issuance of a stay order by the Sindh High Court and the public notice issued by the SBCA against illegal conversion of residential properties into schools and other establishments, commercial activities continue with blatant contempt.

The court was pleaded to order the authorities concerned to set up a Karachi Planning and Development Authority for preparing and implementing a new master plan of Karachi with regard to zoning of areas, creation of public spaces and allotment of amenity plots. It also asked the court to direct the authorities concerned to immediately develop the amenity plots and public spaces which were presently vacant and unattended including those located in the Clifton area.

The apex court was also asked that a proper distinction be made between legal and illegal conversions and all those plots which were being illegally converted such as those in Clifton be stopped immediately.
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 15, 11/05/2019)

Slum dwellers await govt response for proper facilities

Students of the University of Karachi have conducted a survey to look at the problems and difficulties faced by people living in katchi abadis of the metropolis.



Under the supervision of the KU dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Prof Nasreen Aslam Shah, students of the KU's Women's Studies Centre and Department of Social Work, conducted a survey titled Awaiting Government's Assistance: Victim of Socio-Economic Issues Living in Slum Areas to highlight the problems and difficulties faced by people living in katchi abadis.

The KU study observes that social and economic problems of katchi abadis cannot be addressed without official support. The survey team visited 12 towns of the city and collected 2,200 samples of which 500 were examined and evaluated in detail.

The students went to various katchi abadis and squatter settlements, including Future Colony, Mansehra Colony, Shafiq Colony, Quaid-i-Azam Colony, Jamal Goth, Madhu Goth, Millat Town, Akhtar Colony, Baloch Colony and Sharafi Goth and queried the inhabitants.

They collected samples after meeting every person individually and questionnaires were filled according to the replies by the locals.

The questions were asked in sequence so that people could easily share their problems and provide maximum information about their difficulties. They were not bound by choices; each of them had the liberty to express themselves in their own words and that is why they easily shared their feelings with the data collectors.

KU survey team collects data from various katchi abadis to highlight their civic, economic problems

To collect information in detail, almost 99 per cent of the area women, aged 20 to 40 years, were questioned. The reason for selecting females was that they could express their social and economic problems better than their male counterparts.

Karachi, also known as Mini-Pakistan, comprises people of different races, cultures, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Individuals and families from most parts of the country migrate to the megacity to earn their bread and butter.

The survey report mentioned that as this port city has the ability to provide food, shelter and earning facilities to all, it has seen a lot of rural-to-urban migration every year due to which the whole informal system of living has grown over the years.

Both men and women need to work

The students found out that Karachi's financial system demands that both men and women (particularly if they have migrated to earn their livelihoods) should go to work. Sometimes, a whole family has to work to meet their daily expenses.

According to the study, on one hand, Karachi provides many facilities, on the other, there are many problems its dwellers have to face. Unemployment, lack of basic civic facilities, increasing crime rate, uncertain situation of the metropolitan, environmental hazards and other factors are challenges which one has to face on a regular basis, particularly those who live in katchi abadis.

The students say this situation is a result of the state's inability to provide basic facilities and carelessness on part of political parties which do not address the problems of the people living in slums.

They say that the population is increasing day by day and so are the problems. They suggested that although the situation is quite complex, if the government has the will to address them, it would gradually improve and social and financial system could be stabilised with proper planning.

The survey points out that the unavailability of clean drinking water, poor drainage, shortfall of gas and electricity, broken roads, out of control traffic movement on the roads, piles of garbage, unemployment and inflation are some major problems which should be fixed on priority.

The survey revealed that females, children and aged people often complain of lack of food due to which they often fall sick. It also mentioned that 56pc of the total internally migrated people belong to various districts of Punjab.

The report finds that owing to poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, these people adopt various ordinary jobs to earn their bread. On average, they earn from Rs5,000 to Rs20,000 per month.

According to the findings of the KU survey, around 37.6pc population comprises locals who have been living here since early days of the city's establishment while 56.6pc people have come to the city during the last three to 20 years.

The survey report underlines that 61.5pc people have come to find jobs whereas the city's attraction motivated 4.1pc people to come to Karachi and the availability of basic facilities brought around 15.3pc people to the city.

As people who belong to other parts of the country do not have the privilege to enjoy most of the facilities in Karachi, they have to live in houses which do not have proper infrastructure or in shanty towns or squatter settlements.

52.6pc people have no proper houses

A large number of people have to live below the poverty line and 84.8pc of migratory people do not have proper residences and around five to eight people share small housing units. The survey team found that 52.6pc people did not own proper houses.

As per the report, 58.4pc are part of migratory families and three to six children could be found in every house of which the females are in a majority. About 60pc of those children go to school whereas 40pc females have faced serious health issues due to the lack of food, 28.2pc due to the absence of clean drinking water, 27.4pc work overload and 4.4pc environmental issues.

The report highlights that 70.6pc children do not have access to a balanced diet and seasonal fruits. Most of the earning of migratory people is spent on medical treatment, food and entertainment.

In a majority of cases, two to three family members earn but as their family size is quite big, all the earning does not help them much.

(By PPI Dawn, 16, 14/05/2019)

Which master plan?

WHILE hearing matters related to encroachments and allegedly unauthorised use of state land in Karachi, a bench of the Supreme Court recently directed government functionaries to take measures to return the city to its 'original master plan'. Interestingly, though Karachi benefited from many development plans since 1947, none were notified by the Sindh government. Although some work happened to align with the city's various development plans, there was no single legally binding planning document to guide urban growth and governance.



For instance, when the city became Pakistan's capital in 1947, the Greater Karachi Plan was prepared in 1951 to scientifically accommodate its administrative functions. It proposed to site the capitol complex some 20 kilometres away in Gadap, linked to the existing city through fast-

moving rail and road connections.

When the capital moved to Islamabad, much of the scheme became ineffective. To tackle incoming migrants, the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan was prepared in 1958, which aimed to house newcomers in self-contained satellite towns, with broad-based industrial and commercial locations as the focal spines. Landhi-Korangi and North Karachi were two initial locations, but the high pace of residential occupation could not be matched with relatively slow industrial development, slowing down further after nationalisation.

In 1973, the Karachi Development Authority's master plan department prepared a comprehensive development plan after a lengthy process of data collection and analysis. It projected future development trends and identified locations for new neighbourhoods, commercial and industrial areas as well as infrastructure to support the demands of the city dwellers.

Karachi is growing in a rudderless manner.

The same department also made the next plan for 1986-2000 with effective input from national and international experts. Sadly, none of these plans were given legal cover. After civic agencies were merged, the (now defunct) city district government prepared the Karachi Strategic Development Plan (KSDP) 2020. While the city council adopted this plan, it lost credence after the devolution plan was undone by the provincial government some years later.

It is common logic to establish a vision of the city in relation to existing realities and anticipated changes. The 1986-2000 planning document consisted of six distinct scenarios and attendant strategies: infilling and consolidating developed areas; assuming a low-to-moderate urban growth; predicting (conservatively) no growth and aiming to upgrade infrastructure; focusing on development of low-income settlements; planning exclusively for later development; and providing services to cantonments and housing societies.

The KSDP also had many useful options for managing transportation and mobility in the wake of rising car ownership. The prevailing situation urgently demands a conceptual vision of the city developed through consultations with all sections of society. That vision may be gradually and periodically translated into development and management plans covering tangible time and space parameters.

A legally binding plan is a safeguard against rising influences of market forces, consumerism and globalisation. Market forces will inevitably seek the best conditions to maximise profit, and engage in any activities that offer lucrative returns, colluding with all types of stakeholders, both overtly and covertly.

Be it real estate or trading, consulting or contracting, brokerage or banking, health or education, every sector and area is exploited. Only the fittest can survive, leaving trails of masses to suffer the negative repercussions. A legally validated plan, however, poses a check on any project or programme that is not duly incorporated in its stipulations.

The built environment of a city is envisioned through its city plan, and enforced by building control agencies to ensure the city is developing and functioning in a rational manner. Although the 1973-1985 and 1986-2000 plans were both different in approach, content and outputs, both offered a useful mechanism to guide development.

They were never officially notified, although sizable funds and professional input had gone into their making. It was obvious that their notification would have obstructed the whimsical disposal of land for mega real estate ventures and arbitrary high-cost development projects. With an administration that is unable to check such offenders, the city is growing in a rudderless manner.

The Supreme Court can help direct the concerned authorities to bring the planning process back on scientific grounds and give it legal cover. The policy and execution roles of the federal, provincial and city governments must be clearly drawn, with the upper tiers of government voluntarily delegating their existing powers to the planning agency to ensure effectively implementation.
(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 09, 16/05/2019)

Mayor warns against rapid urbanisation

Mayor of Karachi Wasim Akhtar has said that rapid urbanisation in Pakistan poses various challenges and they need to be dealt with today, otherwise the situation will become even more complicated.

He said this while speaking to a delegation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which called on him here on Thursday, said a statement.

The mayor said that metropolitan cities were becoming more instrumental in transforming population, economic activities, social and cultural interactions.

“Asia is experiencing urban growth at higher rates than overall population growth and by 2050 urban areas will account for two thirds of the total population in Asia.”

The UNDP delegation informed the mayor that the UNDP had established an urban platform in collaboration with the Metropolitan Corporation of Islamabad.

“The urban platform aimed at generating dialogue and developing feasible and efficient long-term solutions for some of the most pressing challenges related to urbanisation.”

(By APP Dawn, 15, 17/05/2019)

Over 600 allottees of housing project set to get compensation after 18 years

An accountability court on Wednesday approved a plea bargain between the National Accountability Bureau and two detained builders, who pledged to compensate around 600 people affected by a housing scheme scandal after 18 years.

Rauf Ahmed Ruffi and Manzoor Ahmed Ruffi, the owners of M/s Ruffi Builders and Developers, have been booked and detained in a case pertaining to cheating the public at large by denying possession of plots to around 600 allottees, who had made their payments around 18 years ago for the Ruffi Global City project.

On Wednesday, the matter was fixed before accountability court-III judge Dr Sher Bano Karim, when the accused persons moved an application pleading to the court to accept their plea bargain signed with the federal anti-graft watchdog authorities in the land scam estimated at around Rs1.57 billion.

The accused persons had moved an application through their defence counsel Mudassar Zaidi mentioning that his clients had entered into a plea bargain arrangement with NAB authorities under Section 25(b) of the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999 and the anti-graft watchdog had discharged them from the reference filed against them.

Accountability court approves plea bargain between NAB and builders

Therefore, the court was also pleaded to accept the plea bargain between the accused persons and the NAB authorities in accordance with the provisions of the NAO, 1999.

Advocate Nadeem Pirzada, who represented the committee of the affected persons, also informed the court that the affected persons had agreed to the new terms and conditions of the plea bargain offered by the builders, who had undertaken to compensate the affected persons.

He gave the consent on behalf of the committee of the affected persons and stated that his client had no objection if the plea bargain was approved by the court.

NAB prosecutor Shahbaz Sahotra submitted that the allottees would get plots at the same place where the project was initially promised to be launched 18 years ago by the builders. He also mentioned that the NAB authorities had already accepted the plea bargain with the accused persons after declining their offers twice earlier since they did not agree to the terms. The prosecutor gave his consent to the plea bargain.

After hearing arguments from the prosecutor, the defence counsel and the counsel representing the affected persons, the judge approved the plea bargain in the terms and conditions agreed between the parties, and disposed of the reference against the accused. The court also issued release orders for them.

Disqualification

However, the court disqualified the accused persons from holding any public office, contesting elections or obtaining loans from banks for 10 years.

Earlier, the affected persons had rejected the plea bargain between the accused persons and the NAB authorities objecting to the terms and conditions proposed by the builders.

According to the anti-graft watchdog, M/s Ruffi Builders and Developers had launched a housing project named Ruffi Global City on a 45-acre piece of land along the Superhighway and had booked houses and received money in instalments. Later, they allegedly denied possession of 415 houses allotted to the public and also extorted money from them, it added.

The watchdog had initiated an inquiry on the basis of the complaints of the affected persons and subsequently filed a reference against the builders last year.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 15, 30/05/2019)

SC orders KMC to present Karachi's master plan on next hearing

The Supreme Court (SC) ordered on Wednesday the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) to present Karachi's master plan on the next hearing.

A three-member-bench headed by Justice Maqbool Baqar and comprising Justice Faisal Arab and Justice Munib Akhter heard the KMC's plea at the Karachi registry. The counsel for KMC, Sameer Ghazanfar, argued that the area near the nullah in Pakistan Employees Cooperative Housing Society (PECHS) had been encroached. He said that the municipal corporation was responsible for cleaning the drainage system but it couldn't do so due to encroachments. He added that the width of the nullah had also reduced due to the illegal occupation of the land.

The court asked where the master plan was. The related authorities failed to provide the plan to court.

The court expressed annoyance with the authorities over their failure to provide the plan. Justice Baqar remarked that the city was being run without a master plan and asked who was responsible for it.

The court adjourned the case till the next hearing.

Plea to review death sentence

The apex court rejected the second review plea filed by a convict, Rustom Sheikh, who has been sentenced to death.

A three-member-bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Asif Saeed Khosa and comprising Justice Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel heard the plea through video link from Islamabad.

CJP Khosa remarked that the only option available to the convict now was to appeal to the president of Pakistan. The court rejected the second review plea and also rejected the request for extension to file an appeal for mercy to the President of Pakistan.

The counsel for the criminal argued that the parties in the case had reached a settlement but due to the sections of terrorism, the case couldn't be dismissed. He said that Rustom is to be hanged to death today (Thursday) and asked that the court grant them an extension to file a plea for mercy.

The court remarked that the SC had completed its procedure and it was the right of the convict to file the appeal for mercy. The CJP remarked that the criminal can file an appeal for mercy to the president of Pakistan. He added however, the court cannot hear the review plea again after its rejection.

CJP Khosa referred to four verdicts of SC in this regard and said, "The law binds us, therefore we cannot hear the review plea again".

CJP Khosa said, "You only have one option open to you, to file a plea for mercy to the president of Pakistan again". He added that if the court hears the convict's review plea for the second time, all other criminals too would file review pleas again.

According to the police, Sheikh murdered two of his relatives in March, 1999. The deceased include Bashir Ahmed and Hyder Bux. The anti-terrorism court of Khairpur sentenced the criminal to death in October, 1999. All the pleas filed against the sentence awarded to him and the appeal for mercy has been rejected. His death warrant has also been issued.

Pre-arrest bail rejected

The same bench also rejected the pre-arrest bail pleas of accused, who have been declared absconders in a triple murder case. After their pleas were rejected, the accused, Habibullah and Allah Bux, fled from the court and escaped.

The CJP remarked that the accused have been absconding since 2011. He asked how the court could grant them bail. He inquired why the accused were on the run for seven years.

The counsel for the accused argued that the accused felt threatened by the opponent party.

The CJP remarked that while the accused may have been threatened, they did not have respect for the law. What's the guarantee that they won't escape after being declared absconders, he asked, adding that it was unfair that the accused have come to ask for bail after being on the run for seven years. The role of accused in the case is clear, said Khosa adding that the court has to decide if the case is false or not.

The government lawyer argued that the accused did not deserve the bail in any case. The accused have allegedly killed Sajjad and two others. The case against the accused was registered at Daharki Police Station in 2011.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 30/05/2019)

Number of unclaimed bodies at Edhi graveyard cut by half due to key CPLC project

After more than three decades and the burial of over 200,000 unclaimed corpses in the 30-acre Mowachh Goth graveyard of the Edhi Foundation, the number of bodies being buried without identification has almost halved during the over

three years thanks to a biometric scanning project that helped in identification of such bodies and tracing of their families.

The project, known as Shanakht, or Identity, has been successfully launched by the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) with the assistance of the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra).

It achieved a milestone only last month when it identified a 2,000th body brought to the Edhi morgue as that of an unidentified person.

The Shanakht project helped identify a 2,000th unidentified body at a morgue last month

An official said the biometric scanning technology helped identifying the 2,000th body and was handed over to the victim's family for burial.

The system, which was launched in 2015, has emerged as a major success to solve the city's one of the crucial issues regarding identification of unclaimed bodies and tracing their families since hundreds of such bodies were buried by the Edhi Foundation every year at its Mowachh Goth graveyard.

"We launched the project in late 2015," said CPLC's Amir Hassan, the man behind the Shanakht project. "The results are really encouraging. The exercise that took so much time and efforts of different individuals and institutions are finally yielding results. By mid-May 2019 we identified 2,000th body which was lying unclaimed at the Edhi morgue. With the passage of time, it will improve further and we hope to touch 100 per cent mark soon."

The system has been designed to work in the following manner.

When volunteers of the Edhi Foundation or Chhipa Welfare Association find an unclaimed body they would take its multiple thumb impressions with the assistance of CPLC staff at their facilities and send them to Nadra through CPLC software along with all relevant details and findings of police and a medico-legal report. Nadra takes a day or two to respond to the CPLC with all particulars about heirs of the victim.

Before Shanakht was put in place, there was no other system to identify such bodies and the Edhi Foundation used to bury them after keeping them for three days for any relative to contact and identify them at its morgue in Sohrab Goth.

They would take a photograph of the body for their record so that a relative who might turn up afterwards could identify their loved ones after leafing through the picture album of the buried persons. The number of the bodies identified with the help of photographs has, however, remained very negligible, given the lack of a technology-based mechanism.

But now, the number of bodies being buried at the Mowachh Goth graveyard of the Edhi Foundation proves the effectiveness of Shanakht.

"The number of bodies buried has declined to a large extent," said an official at the country's largest charity. "If we go through the data of only five years before the launch of the CPLC project, it shows that we buried total 1,030 unidentified bodies in 2010; 1,791 in 2011; 1,517 in 2012; 1,650 in 2013 and 1,657 unidentified corpses in 2014. After 2015, the number is gradually on a decline as in 2016 number of unidentified bodies buried at Mowachh Goth graveyards stood at 615, 499 in 2017; 261 in 2018 and in 2019 we have so far buried 86 unidentified corpses."

After initial success in tracing families of the unidentified bodies in the city, the CPLC has expanded its project in finding relatives and loved ones of those unidentified people who have been admitted to hospitals in an unconscious condition, injured or critically ill. Mr Hassan, the head of Shanakht, said that in August 2018 the CPLC had set up a facility desk at three major public hospitals of the city — Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center (JPMC), Civil Hospital Karachi and Abbasi Shaheed Hospital —to identify and trace the family of unidentified patients through biometric verification.

"Since then [August 2018] we have identified and traced families of some 36 patients who were brought unconscious to hospitals mostly after accidents of different nature," said Mr Hassan. "In most cases, these patients suffer a memory loss or remain unconscious. We followed the same procedure and technology which we do for the unclaimed bodies and make efforts to reach their families. The results are promising and we hope it will become more effective with the passage of time."

However, he deplored that the quality of response from emergency unit of one of the major hospitals remained below the desired level, which negatively affected the performance of the project. At the same time, he appreciated the role of other hospital's management for being vigilant and cooperative with the CPLC.

"We receive very good and quick response from the Civil Hospital but unfortunately, it's not the case with the JPMC. If the hospitals remain vigilant and quick to inform us about any such patient suffering memory loss or in an unconscious state, we will be able to react quick and trace his family," he said.

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 10/06/2019)

SBCA allowed to demolish 326 'illegal' under-construction buildings

The city administration on Thursday decided to raze as many as 326 'illegal' under-construction buildings in different parts of the city.

Official sources told Dawn that Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani gave the approval to the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) to start demolition against the illegal under-construction structures and buildings which were uninhabited.

They said the decision to this effect was taken at a high-level meeting in pursuance of orders of the Supreme Court.

The meeting, presided over by the city administration chief, was attended among others by the SBCA director general, deputy commissioners of districts South and East and senior police officials.

The officials said the deputy commissioners concerned were directed to monitor the campaign and provide support to the demolition authority.

The SBCA chief told the meeting that a task force had been formed for implementation of the apex court's order in this regard. He told the meeting that 326 illegal buildings had been identified for demolition in different parts of the city.

According to him, the illegal buildings included 31 in Gulberg Town, 72 in Liaquatabad Town, 13 in New Karachi Town, six in North Nazimabad Town, 13 in Gulshan Town-I, four in Jamshed Town-I, 52 in Jamshed Town-II, 28 in Saddar Town-I, 26 in Saddar Town-II, 54 in Lyari Town, 16 in Malir Town, four each in Korangi and Landhi towns and three in Bin Qasim Town.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 14/06/2019)

SHC grants NAB DG two weeks to submit report on illegal land allotment

The Sindh High Court (SHC) granted on Wednesday two weeks to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) director-general (DG) for the submission of a report regarding the illegal allotment of 94 acres of land in Malir by former Sindh chief minister Qaim Ali Shah.

A two-member bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Omar Sial heard the case. The former Sindh CM appeared before the court with his counsel.

The court inquired where the NAB DG's detailed progress report was, to which the NAB prosecutor argued that two weeks were required for submission. Justice Agha remarked that the orders to submit the report with signatures of the NAB DG were clear. He added that the court wants the NAB DG's report instead of the report submitted by the investigation officer (IO).

The court granted two weeks for submission of the report and ordered the IO to complete the investigation by September 9. The court also extended the interim bail of the accused.

According to the NAB, Shah illegally allotted 94 acres of land to Mehran Society and Golf Builders. Later, he cancelled the allotment and now Sindh government is in possession of the land.

Money laundering case

The SHC issued notice to Khidmat-e-Khalq Foundation (KKF) over the plea filed by former senator Ahmed Ali, affiliated with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, in relation to money laundering through the welfare organisation. The court also ordered to fix a date for hearing of the case after judicial vacations.

A two-member bench comprising Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Saleem Jessar heard the plea against the transfer of the money laundering case to Islamabad. The Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) Assistant Director Aijaz Ahmed appeared before the court. FIA officials submitted a reply.

The court inquired from FIA officials if the KKF was still operating to which, the officials replied that while the organisation had closed down on paper, it was still present on the ground.

The assistant attorney general maintained that Ali himself was a part of the KKF. The case has been transferred from Karachi to Islamabad. The judicial bailiff informed the court that the KKF's office was closed and nobody was there to receive the judicial notice.

The court inquired from the petitioner's counsel why his client's account had been sealed and remarked that the accused must have committed corruption. Ali's counsel, Baqir Mehdi, argued that evidence of money laundering was not clear.

The MQM's former senator challenged the decision of transferring the money laundering case to Islamabad's anti-terrorism court (ATC). The plea argued that the transfer was initiated on a letter by the home department and it was illegal. The trial of the case should be conducted where the crime has occurred.

Corruption reference

In a separate case, the two-member bench, comprising Justice Agha and Justice Sial, ordered the NAB's investigation officer (IO) and prosecutor to ensure their presence before the court with all relevant documents over the bail plea filed by former information secretary Zulfiqar Ali Shallwani in the millions of rupees corruption reference.

The counsel for the petitioner argued that his client had been imprisoned for one and a half years. He said that statements of nine witnesses have been recorded. He added that the plea has been under trial for eight months and each time a hearing is scheduled, NAB officials ask for an extension.

NAB's prosecutor argued that the IO of this reference was in Islamabad and asked that the hearing be adjourned. The court ordered NAB's IO and prosecutor to ensure their presence at the next hearing with all relevant documents.

The court has also forwarded the matter to the chief justice, calling for the formation of a new bench for the reference.

The corruption in the information department was done under the guise of automation. According to NAB, two accused, Ata Muhammad and Noor Muhammad Leghari, are on bail while the other accused, Shallwani and Mansoor Ahmed Rajput, are in prison.

Heavy traffic

The SHC expressed annoyance over failure to allot land for the construction of bus terminals and sought details on the land while hearing a case pertaining to complete restriction on entry of heavy traffic in Karachi.

A two-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Ai Mazhar and Justice Agha Faisal heard the case.

The court asked if they wanted to bring back heavy traffic on the roads of Karachi. The court remarked that the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) was not providing the land and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) did not have the funds for the construction of bus terminals. Are we solving our problems? The problems of traffic are the problems of Karachi's citizens.

The counsel for KMC argued that they did not have possession of 150 acres of land at Northern Bypass. The counsel maintained that money to purchase the land hasn't been paid and that's the reason the allotment process couldn't be completed. He added that the KMC was facing a financial crisis and cannot make the payment.

The court inquired from the counsel for SRB as to why they were creating an obstacle when the chief minister had given his approval for the project. The court ordered the parties to consult each other over the payment.

The court remarked that the approval of CM means that the land should be allotted. The court ordered to hand over 50 acres of land in Mochko to KMC for oil tankers and sought the details of land reserved for the construction of bus and oil tanker terminals. The hearing has been adjourned till August 6.

Illegal allotment

The high court cancelled the interim bail of former Karachi Port Trust (KPT) secretary Gulab Khan in the corruption reference on KPT Cooperative Housing Society.

A two-member bench headed by Chief Justice Ahmed Ali Shaikh and Justice Omar Sial announced the verdict on bail pleas filed by co-accused of former federal minister Kamran Michael. NAB officials arrested Khan from the SHC. The court also rejected the bail plea of another accused, Muhammad Ismail.

According to the NAB, 16 plots in KPT Cooperative Society were illegally allotted at extremely low rates. Michael collected Rs110 million as bribe for the allotment of three commercial plots.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 20/06/2019)

Rescue services in Karachi on the verge of collapse

Rescue emergency services in Karachi are on the verge of collapse. While the provincial government and city administration have never really taken the issue seriously, welfare organisations that have been filling the void till now, find it difficult to operate as the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) has demolished dozens of their booths as part of the recent anti-encroachment drive.



The booths, set up across the city, were the backbone of the communications system of these welfare organisations' ambulance and rescue services. Any calls or messages received for assistance would be directed from the central command system to these booths, which would then relay them to the ambulances closest to the area. The removal of these booths has considerably increased the response time as the ambulances must now be directed from the central command system.

The action has left millions of residents of the port city helpless as the only other alternative – the Sindh Rescue and Medical Services (SRMS) – operated jointly by the Aman Foundation and the Sindh government, simply cannot cope with the high volume of emergency calls.

The numbers

"There are around 1,100 to 1,400 emergency calls received by rescue services in Karachi every day," said Khaqan Sikander, the general manager of Strategic Operations at the Aman Foundation. "The Sindh Rescue and Medical Services normally handles 30% of them," he added.

But with the disruption of the communications networks of other welfare organisations, such as the Edhi Foundation, Chippa Welfare Trust Alamgir Welfare Trust, Saylani Welfare and Falah-e-Insaniat Trust, the SRMS has seen a sudden spike in the requests for assistance.

An unsavoury partnership

In December last year, the Sindh government inked an agreement with the Aman Foundation, creating a partnership for the provision of free emergency rescue services for the citizens of Karachi. Under the agreement, the Aman Foundation's ambulances, which cost around Rs2,000 per trip, would be provided free to citizens and the cost would be borne by the provincial government.

The government was to release the funds for this purpose in advance. The Sindh government then hired an auditor, who was deployed at the Aman Foundation's centre to review the number of calls and responses. The auditor would release a quarterly report, on the basis of which the provincial government would release the funds.

"The Sindh government was supposed to pay Rs359 million for a nine-month period starting December," said Sikander. "Unfortunately, we are still waiting for the last tranche of Rs80 million." Unless that happens soon, the Aman Foundation will no longer be able to run the service.

According to Sikander, the service would be better off if the same payment model was applied to it as in Thatta-Sujawal, where the Aman Foundation has been working together with the Sindh government for the past three years. "There, the Sindh government releases payments for the whole year," said Sikander, adding that life-saving services can only function in that way. "If we are cash-strapped and struggling to cover our expenses the whole time, we cannot focus on rescue operations."

Sikander added that it was a good initiative on the part of the government to launch the service but if the payment mechanism was not rationalised, the service would collapse. He suggested the creation of a public limited company to handle the affairs so that the financial issues could be smoothed.

Meanwhile, the health department routed The Express Tribune's inquiry regarding the reason for the delay in disbursement of funds for the project to the finance department and the chief minister. "We have nothing to do with this scheme," said an official of the health department. "The finance department and the CM House are directly dealing with the Aman Foundation."

When The Express Tribune reached out to the finance department, a senior official admitted that there were some difficulties in making payments for various projects. He attributed the delays to the shortfall in transfers from the federal government. The official, who asked not to be named, added, however, that the issue would be resolved soon after the provincial budget for the new fiscal year is approved.

A precarious situation

This does not, however, placate Sikander. "On the one hand, the other welfare organisations have been seriously affected by the anti-encroachment drive, thereby increasing the volume of calls to our service," said Sikander. At the same time, the foundation has seen a marked decrease in the donations it receives each year. Sikander attributes this to the weakening economy. "I cannot even imagine what we will do in July," he said.

With a serious shortage of funds and the summer heat causing even more life-threatening diseases, the free service will have no other choice but to close shop if the funding from the provincial government doesn't come through.

(By Kashif Hussain The Express Tribune, 04, 21/06/2019)

Right to shelter

IT is disappointing how almost every strategic development initiative becomes a nightmare for the urban poor. Similar views were expressed during a recent rally against the demolition of shelters along the Karachi Circular Railways (KCR). Not long ago, intensive evictions displaced over 200,000 people to make way for the Lyari Expressway that benefits a few thousand motorists. Historic peri-urban settlements along the super highway were mercilessly uprooted by a mega developer in collusion with the powers that be in Sindh to launch an elite real estate venture. Official coercion and intimidation were used to deprive these hapless livestock herders, orchard managers and farmers of their basic right to exist on their own lands. It seems that the words of our Constitution guaranteeing fundamental rights to all are inconsequential when it comes to the urban poor.



The issues faced by the urban poor are severe. Upon arrival in big cities, they have no ready option to access formal housing. Most are hosted by relatives or acquaintances in already congested informal settlements. If they find the opportunity to develop an abode, they build them in an incremental manner. Since most are daily wagers, occasionally employed or self-employed in precarious conditions, they aren't able to save much to invest in shelter.

The issues faced by the urban poor are severe.

In most cases, these constitute a single room with bare cement walls, a katcha or semi-pukka roof and a small open space for cooking, washing, etc. Households often exceed a dozen occupants. Locations include urban invisible spaces such as along the edges of railway tracks, waterways and creeks, unbuilt plots in formal schemes, hills and general wastelands. Water is either acquired from faraway places like mosques or through commercial vendors. Sanitation facilities are either nonexistent or rudimentary.

The urban poor have lived this way for years with virtually no hope of change for the better. On the contrary, fears of eviction and extortion (from musclemen as well as law-enforcement functionaries) cause many a sleepless night. Estimates suggest at least a third of Karachi's population live in such mediaeval conditions.

Past and present episodes show that these vulnerable urban dwellers have no capacity to prove their right to exist in the city.

Neither existing adjudication processes nor state policies on shelter have any safeguard for the landless to survive in cities. For instance, provincial laws exist to review settlements and settlers' rights in a prescribed manner. But initiating scientific surveys and negotiating with landowning agencies to regularise long-standing settlements is an extremely slow process overwhelmed by political considerations. One political party that dominated Karachi's management and development for over two decades labelled katchi abadis as dens of criminality in order to protect its electoral superiority over the rising numbers of neo-urban dwellers. This and several related reasons meant the concerned department entrusted to manage katchi abadis in Sindh made little headway.

The work of NGOs such as Orangi Pilot Project and Saiban practically demonstrated that gradual upgradation of such settlements is possible, provided the government ensures safety of tenure. However these lessons could not be translated into public housing policies.

The superior courts' verdicts have often caused greater harm than good to the legitimate — if not legal — rights of urban poor to exist in cities. The usual perception is such that access to urban land for housing exists without any constraint. The reality is that land is sold and transacted purely as a commercial commodity, not utilised as a social asset. While many verdicts instruct the concerned government departments to 'clear' the lands 'occupied' by 'illegal' dwellers, they are unable to stretch their guidance to include how and where these people are to live.

Political support for the rights of urban poor is very limited. When the authorities were mobilised to build Lyari Expressway, a few civil society activists supported the evictees in the courts and in various forms of protest. Many mainstream parties decided to look the other way in their hour of need. These days, too, KCR affectees and many uprooted from other places are fending for themselves. But there are still lessons that the vulnerable and their few supporters can learn to make their voices heard.

Affectees can form coalitions and reach out to support organisations to develop rehabilitation plans for negotiations. If the vulnerable bargain using their own solutions, the government and judiciary may consider them. From land ownership to developing affordable housing stock, numerous workable alternatives exist. For instance, demanding effective implementation of the Sindh Katchi Abadis Act, 1987, can help identify which katchi abadis can be granted security of tenure.
(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 24/06/2019)

Sindh can't spare more than Rs1,000 for Empress Market area

In November last year, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) demolished over 1,700 shops built in and around the iconic Empress Market structure. The action was taken on the orders of the Supreme Court, which had called for restoring 'Karachi to its former glory'.

For the Empress Market at least, the KMC says it has a plan. It says it will start the repair and renovation work of the structure after consultation with archaeological experts, urban planners and heritage consultants. The problem, however, is that neither the KMC nor the Sindh government has any funds to do so.

The provincial government, for its part, had kicked off a rehabilitation project to revamp the surroundings of Empress Market. Special Secretary to the Local Government Department and project director Niaz Soomro told The Express Tribune that almost Rs1 billion have been spent from the original PC-1 amount of Rs.1.006b allocated for the project. The project envisaged the reconstruction of Jehangir Park, Mansfield Street, Mir Karam Ali Talpur Road, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road, Sarwar Shaheed Road, and Shahrae Iraq. These have all been completed.

Meanwhile, work is still being carried out on the food street at Mir Karam Ali Talpur Road and night bazar at Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road. This is where the provincial government has hit the snag.

According to Soomro, they had submitted a revised PC-1 of Rs1.3 billion to complete the project. The new amount is yet to be approved by the development committee, however, the Sindh government has allocated a sum of Rs1,000 for the project in the new fiscal year's budget.

When asked about the funding, Soomro expressed the hope that seeing the importance of the project, the funds would be allocated for it by the local government. "As soon as the funds are disbursed, we will complete the project within three months," he added.

Empress Market revamp

With regard to the Empress Market itself, KMC Municipal Commissioner Dr Saif-ur-Rehman said that archaeological knowledge and expertise is necessary to ensure the historical appearance and preservation of the market's iconic structure. To that end, the PC-1 of the project is currently being prepared.

Owing to its age and absence of care, the structure of Empress Market has been dilapidated because of natural wear and tear, while its windows and roofs also need extensive repair. The building's historical wall clock also needs to be repaired.

"The renovation work will incur millions of rupees and the actual cost of the project will be estimated after the finalisation of the PC-1," said Dr Saif-ur-Rehman. "At the moment, the KMC does not have the requisite financial means to carry out this development work, therefore, we will request the Sindh government to fund the project."

He further said that at present, that Sindh government is in the process of constructing a boundary wall around the market and after its completion, the KMC will utilise its own funds to construct a park around the market to beautify the area.

While the KMC seems to have positive plans for the historic structure, shopkeepers whose shops were demolished in the market have strong grievances against the move.

Affecteds speak out

Speaking to The Express Tribune, the shopkeepers of the market explained that during its "strict" anti-encroachment drive, the KMC evacuated hundreds of shops which led to an increase in unemployment. They added that the renovation projects, which the KMC and the Sindh government earlier announced, are yet to be implemented.

The president of the Empress Market's grocery, vegetable and fruit merchants' association, Liaquat Ali, said that the KMC grazed the shops but did not provide an alternative place to the affected shopkeepers.

"Shopkeepers have suffered a huge loss because of the KMC's anti-encroachment operation. Even if alternative spaces are provided to the affected shopkeepers to set up their shops, it will not carry the same business value," Ali said.

The market

Originally known as the KMC Market, the Empress market was constructed by the English before the partition of the subcontinent. After partition, the KMC built many shops within the structure and also constructed other registered markets in the surrounding area. Many people rented shops there and set up their businesses which successfully ran for many years because of the hustle and bustle of the area.

According to Liaquat Ali, shopkeepers not only paid the rent for their shops but also paid taxes for carrying out business activities. However, after these shops were demolished, the overall business of the market was severely affected.

"Demolition of the shops not only affected the shopkeepers and their families but the KMC also suffered a loss of revenue generated through the shops," Ali said. "Empress Market had been a central marketplace of Karachi and now only about 125 shops are left there".

Alternative spaces

Ali requested the mayor to allot alternative places to the affected shopkeepers immediately so that those who have been rendered unemployed because of the demolition of the shops can start their businesses anew.

He also added that the current shops of the market should undergo maintenance so that their historical significance is not destroyed.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, KMC's senior director for estate Imran Qadeer said that efforts are being made to provide shops to all the affected shopkeepers of the Empress Market and many of them have already accepted offers of alternate places, while the construction work is under way on these allotments.

"New shops will be built very soon and will be allotted to those who wish to move their businesses there, while some shopkeepers have also demanded to be shifted to Empress Market again once it's renovated," said Qadeer.

Imran Qadeer added that about 352 affected shopkeepers have been offered a temporary place in Parking Plaza's Shahabuddin Market, which most of the shopkeepers have accepted.

The KMC also offered some alternative shops in Frere Market which shopkeepers refused to accept. Likewise, the meat merchants refused to accept offers for alternate shops in Ranchore Lines and have demanded that they are provided shops in Empress Market again.

Some 484 shopkeepers from the Umar Farooq Market, which is connected to Empress Market, have been offered places in Lyari Khadda Market which they have accepted. These shops will be handed over to them after carrying out the necessary procedure. (By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 24/06/2019)

Cantonment board halts demolition of Sea Breeze Plaza

The Karachi Cantonment Board (KCB) has left the operation to demolish the 13-story dilapidated Sea Breeze Plaza on MA Jinnah Road unfinished, which was initiated on the orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP).

So far, eaves on the building had been removed with the use of heavy machinery, under the supervision of the Karachi Cantonment Board officials.

According to cantonment board officials, the operation has been suspended temporarily and it would resume within the next two days.

Sea Breeze Plaza comprises only commercial units and the operation has adversely affected the businesses of traders whose offices are housed in the building. The traders complain that razing the building will displace them, eventually impacting their incomes and households.

“Where will we go if the building is razed?” asked one business owner, requesting anonymity. The building has existed for many years, he remarked.

Traders also claimed that the report of National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK), determining how withered the building’s structure is, was yet to come. However, SCP has issued orders for its demolition before the release of the report, they complained.

They maintained that goods worth billions of rupees were kept inside the building which could be damaged during the operation, expressing concerns that they were given only 15 days to vacate the building.

According to them, the KCB has outsourced the demolition of the building to contractors.

Traders appealed to the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Chief of Army Staff and Prime Minister Imran Khan, to suspend the operation until NESPAK completes its investigation and releases a report.

The apex court’s Karachi registry had ordered the KCB to take immediate measures for razing the Sea Breeze Plaza, on May 9, this year, declaring that the building imperiled citizens’ lives.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 27/06/2019)