

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2020

HOUSING



Urban Resource Centre

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Karachi's Hindus homeless in their homeland

Once, the Hindu community of Meghwars were the resident mochis - shoemakers - of Karachi. They belong to the city as much as the city belongs to them.

But while their elders claim they have dwelt in the old city areas for over 200 years, few of them own a house - or any property - here. And it is not for lack of trying.

The Meghwars, locally called Maheshwaris, are the unfortunate victims of the age-old 'pagri' system, under which they have long rented houses. Now, being denied tenancy, allegedly on the basis of their religion, they are on the verge of homelessness.

With the pagri system, a landlord lets a 'tenant' use his property - forever in most cases - after receiving a "pagri," an amount that is a little less than the prevailing market price. In return, the tenant pays a nominal monthly rent and stays there for years on end without fear of eviction, while the property remains in landlord's name.

But here's the catch. The pagri system has no legal standing. With verbal commitments, neither landlord nor tenant can make a case for themselves if the other breaches the agreement.

As a result, the Meghwars, most of whom relied on the pagri system for housing, are in a fix.

According to several members of the community, barely a handful of Karachi's Meghwar families own a house in Lyari, where most of them live.

"Our people are unable to rent an apartment in any residential buildings here," the community's president, Kako Kanji, lamented, pointing to religious discrimination as the cause for this. "It's like we are being separated from the rest of society."

According to Mohan Lal, such discrimination against the community only emerged a couple of years ago. "Over the past few years, the hatred has become quite apparent."

Other community elders claimed that even builders asked about their religion before allotting apartments. As a result, they said, of around 100 Maheshwari families in the neighbourhood, only a few have managed to buy apartments, while most were denied rented accommodation even in newly constructed residential buildings.

"The owners are forcing us to vacate [the apartments rented on pagri]. It is a herculean task to find a place to live," explained Kanji.

With few options left, displaced families are moving in with others from the community, forcing two or three families to live together in a single cramped apartment, said Lal.

A lost profession

Being refused accommodation is not the only instance of discrimination against the Meghwars, nor the only attempt to erase their long-standing connection to the city's fabric.

According to Lal, society's hostility has also forced them to give up their ancestral profession of shoemaking. "And now the younger generation has lost interest in it. Most of us are reduced to being sanitary workers," he deplored.

Kanji Megji, another community elder, added, "There is no job left for us but that of sanitary workers."

Megji, who has seen the good, the bad and the ugly over the years, bitterly criticised the apathy of the elites. "We were staunch supporters of the Muslim League [at the time of the Partition] and have remained loyal to the Pakistan Peoples Party, but they only remember us during elections."

Babo Namori, who too belongs to the community, recalled the school his grandfather had built in Lyari. "Now its name has been changed and the plaque displaying his photo has been removed," he grieved.

He added that one of the oldest burial places for Hindus in the city's Mewa Shah Graveyard has been encroached too. "Only a small part of it is left for us. That too will be annexed soon," he predicted sadly.

Beaten down by persistent attempts to uproot them, Lal said their only hope for survival lay in permanently moving out of the old city areas. "But where should we go?"

Other community elders suggested that they be provided land in the city's outskirts. That way, society would get its wish of separating them, they added.

What they did not say, though, was that such a move would also take them far away from the place that has long been their home, where their roots lie deep.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 05, 06/07/2020)

SBCA orders evacuation of 10 more buildings

Hours after a five-storey building collapsed in Liaquatabad, the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) declared as many as 10 buildings in the city 'dangerous' and gave orders for their evacuation.

The Liaquatabad building, near Sindhi Hotel, caved in on Tuesday night. Rescue teams as well as officials from the fire department, police and Rangers launched a search operation. However, no casualties were reported till the filing of this report.

According to Liaquatabad DSP Aslam Khakhrani, the police had earlier evacuated the building after receiving a complaint about it tilting to the side.

Khakhrani claimed that though the SBCA had been informed about the building being on the brink of collapse, no official from the regulatory body had visited the site after it fell.

Meanwhile, the SBCA issued warning letters to residents of 10 structures on Wednesday, asking them to leave the buildings as soon as possible. SBCA experts and engineers surveyed the structures in Liaquatabad, Saddar and Lyari following rainfall in the city.

The SBCA demolition squad, separately, conducted several operations against illegal structures in different parts of the city. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 09/07/2020)

Housing scheme

THE policy and fiscal incentives announced by the PTI government to push construction activity has two objectives. First, the ruling party is desperate to deliver on its promise of building 5m affordable housing units for low- to middle-income families. Soon to complete its second year, the government is still struggling to launch its ambitious Naya Pakistan Housing Programme. Some urban public housing schemes announced in Punjab under its banner, for example, have either been abandoned or have yet to see the light of day. Secondly, the PTI is anxious on account of the economic slowdown that set in shortly after it came to power. The stringent stabilisation policies imposed by the IMF deal had further decelerated growth before Covid-19 sent the economy spiralling into recession. The prime minister now hopes to lift the economic gloom, kick-start growth and create jobs by spurring construction activity in affordable housing. But can he?

Ideally, such incentives as a blanket amnesty on investments by end December, a price subsidy of Rs300,000 per unit on the first 100,000 low-cost homes costing up to Rs2.5m, interest rate subsidy for five-marla and 10-marla houses for five years, allocating Rs330bn for housing finance by banks, and substantial tax relief given by the centre and the provinces to developers and builders should revive projects. But that is unlikely to happen in the short term, at least not in the way the government is hoping for. Such policies have seldom worked.

For starters, the demand for housing remains depressed because of the uncertainty induced by Covid-19 as reflected in consumer surveys in recent months. On the supply side, there's little evidence to suggest the presence of a sufficient appetite for large investments despite generous incentives. As far as mortgage financing is concerned, banks are not likely to take the credit risk unless strict foreclosure laws ensuring minimum judicial intervention are enacted to enable banks to swiftly recover their money in case of default. Even if everything goes according to script, the incentives package will add to the existing urban sprawl, benefiting affluent people and developers/investors rather than create low-cost housing for low-income segments. A better way of channelising private investment in truly affordable housing lies in the government leasing out unused state land in urban and semi-urban areas along railway tracks, highways, motorways, etc for 100 years or more at nominal rentals to developers for constructing high-rises with two- to three-bed units. Such projects should be equipped with education, health and entertainment facilities along with commercial areas. Initially, the government may encourage construction of such housing complexes for its employees up to Grade-16, lien-marking their post-retirement benefits as security to ease investors' concerns. Once the foreclosure laws and mortgage finance industry are restructured, and an enabling environment created, this model could be replicated for the rest of the population without any financial burden on the exchequer.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 14/07/2020)

SBCA took bribe to allow construction of seven-storey Gulbahar building, court told

Police on Tuesday submitted a charge sheet before a judicial magistrate against some officials of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) in a case pertaining to the collapse of a multistorey building in Gulbahar, saying the illegal construction was allowed against a bribe.

Twenty-seven people had lost their lives when the [multistorey building collapsed](#) in March this year.

The investigating officer of the case charge-sheeted SBCA deputy director Imran Ahmed alias Shaikh and building owner Javed as main accused while deputy director Sarfaraz Jamali, assistant director Maqsood Qureshi and building inspector Irfan were named for negligence and abetment.

However, the IO did not charge-sheet then Katchi Abadi director Mohammad Raqeeb and then director-Liaquatabad Amir Kamal Jafri and building inspector Abid Hussain Bhutto for lack of evidence.

The IO filed the charge sheet before the judicial magistrate (Central) and showed three sons and wife of building owner and SBCA employee Latafat Mirza as absconders.

IO names building owner, SBCA officials in charge sheet, exonerates three for 'lack of evidence'

The charge sheet said that the SBCA had allowed seven-storey building on a 74-square-yard plot after taking a bribe and added that deputy director Imran had collected Rs150,000 from Javed against the construction of each floor of the building.

It further stated that at one stage the SBCA had demolished the third floor of the building and thereafter, the deputy director had collected an additional Rs150,000 from the owner of the building and allowed the construction to continue.

The charge sheet said that according to statements of area people, Latafat was also a representative of SBCA and he used to collect money from the area against illegal construction. However, the IO said that he could not locate and get more information about him.

The IO stated in the charge sheet that Raqeeb, currently posted as director in Lyari Town, in his statement said the SBCA director general had constituted a Katchi Abadi cell on Nov 13, 2019 and he was made the director of the cell.

However, he said the DG had abolished the cell in March this year, adding that then director-Liaquatabad Amir Jafri had sent a letter to his office regarding the details about Katchi Abadi including the area in which the building had collapsed.

The charge sheet said that as per Raqeeb the area in question was not included in Katchi Abadi while Jafri also said that this area came within the jurisdiction of the SBCA and it was the responsibility of SBCA to control illegal construction in Katchi Abadis as well.

The IO said that the owner of the collapsed building was in jail and deputy director Imran and other nominated officials of the SBCA were on bail.

According to the prosecution, 27 people including women and children lost their lives and 23 sustained injuries when the multistorey building collapsed in Gulbahar in March.

A case was registered under Sections 322 (manslaughter), 119 (public servant concealing design to commit offence which it is his duty to prevent), 337-H (punishment for hurt by rash or negligent act), 427 (mischief causing damage to the amount of fifty rupees), 109 (abetment) and 34 (common intention) the Pakistan Penal Code at the Rizvia Society police station.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 15/07/2020)

Culture dept asked to remove 55 'dangerous' buildings from heritage list for demolition

The civic administration has asked the provincial authorities to delist more than 50 'dangerous' buildings from the list of structures listed under the Sindh Cultural Heritage Protection Act as protected heritage so that these could be demolished for public safety, sources and officials said on Monday.



They said the Karachi commissioner in a formal request to the Sindh culture, tourism and antiquities department had asked to remove from its list some 55 buildings in the metropolis declared protected heritage.

All the 55 buildings, they said, were found dangerous and could cause any incident. "In a fresh survey conducted by the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) total 422 buildings in Karachi were identified and declared as dangerous and unsafe," said an official. "Among these 422 buildings, 55 are those declared protected heritage under the Sindh Cultural Heritage Protection Act by the Sindh culture, tourism and antiquities department over past several years. Under the defined rules, one could not demolish, renovate or alter the protected heritage structures."

SBCA survey finds 422 'unsafe' buildings, including 55 protected heritage structures, in city

The SBCA and the Karachi commissioner office had recently chalked out a plan to demolish all the 'dangerous' and 'unsafe' buildings to avoid any incident, he said and added that the plan was devised after last month's incident in Lyari where a multistorey residential building collapsed killing over 20 people.

Before that incident, a building in Rizvia Society, Nazimabad met the same fate in March leaving some 25 people dead.

Occupants being asked to vacate building

In line with the fresh plan, he said the civic administration and the SBCA had started sending notices to the occupants of those dangerous buildings, majority of which were still in use.

Many of the protected heritage-declared buildings were also being used for both residential and commercial purposes and the occupants of those dangerous structures had also been sent notices to vacate them.

"But there's another problem with the buildings declared protected" but that have been found to be dangerous, said the official. "According to the Heritage Act, a protected building or structure could not be damaged or demolished. So even if the buildings are

vacated by the occupants, the administration cannot demolish those structures due to this legal cover. Therefore, the commissioner has approached the culture department for the solution.”

The fresh move from the Karachi commissioner came amid ongoing monsoon season when the fears of collapse of vulnerable structures has already increased.

Several incidents during the fresh spell of rains have multiplied fears and the civic administration has further enhanced its efforts to get a nod from the culture department before it's too late.

“In the recent rains, a young man sustained serious wounds when a portion of a dilapidated two-storey residential building collapsed in Lyari,” said the official. “Another incident was reported in Liaquatabad but fortunately it caused no loss. The area people and officials in both areas have told the authorities that the two buildings were already in bad shape and the recent rains further eroded the already vulnerable structures.”

According to the SBCA survey, he said, 303 of the 422 dangerous buildings are located in district South, 14 in district East and 10 in district Central.

“We are in talks with the occupants of these old and dangerous buildings. One can only hope that they would vacate the buildings but at the same time most of them rely on the government to provide them with alternative accommodation,” said the official.
(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 21/07/2020)

All construction activities in Bahria Town Karachi are illegal, SBCA tells SHC

The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) on Tuesday informed the Sindh High Court that all the construction activities at Bahria Town were unauthorised and illegal and its “Bahria Greens” project was launched without obtaining a sale and advertisement no-objection certificate from the authority.



When a petition filed against Bahria Town's new scheme came up for hearing before a two-judge bench headed by Justice Khadim Hussain Shaikh, an SBCA deputy director (design and complaint) filed comments stating that before launching a large publicity campaign of “Bahria Greens” on media for booking/sale of plots, Bahria Town did not obtain the NOC as required under Section 5 of SBCO 1979.

It further said that a layout plan for land measuring 4,696.685 acres was issued by the Malir Development Authority (MDA) in August 2014 and Bahria Town had applied for issuance of a revised NOC for the same which could not be considered due to non-fulfilment of conditions of the NOC issued earlier.

“M/s Bahria Town (Pvt) Ltd continued construction of multi-storey buildings/bungalows and development of the project without valid approvals/NOCs from the SBCA and other agencies and matter was under enquiry with NAB authorities and also sub-judice before the Supreme Court of Pakistan,” the SBCA said.

It further maintained that in its January 14, 2018 judgement the apex court had imposed a ban on construction of beyond six floors which was also applicable to Bahria Town Karachi while in its May 2018 order in a suo motu case, the Supreme Court had also directed the allottees of the project to deposit their instalments in a special account opened by the additional registrar at the Karachi registry.

Ad campaign for plots in Bahria Greens project is launched without obtaining NOC

“Since no approval of building plan granted by SBCA all the construction activities at Bahria Town is unauthorised and illegal from SBCA's point of view. Therefore, a letter was issued to Bahria Town dated 20-11-2018 whereas a public notice was published in newspapers dated 28-11-2018 for awareness to general public after legal vetting by the legal section of SBCA. Furthermore, NOC for sale and advertisement stands invalid vide letter dated 30-11-2018,” it maintained.

The SBCA said that a meeting with a delegation of Bahria Town was held under the chairmanship of the SBCA director general in July 2019 wherein it was assured by the builder that complete information regarding number of plots available in the scheme along with data of constructed buildings will be provided within a due course of time, but no further progress was made in this regard.

A report was submitted to the SBCA chief with regard to an advertisement of Bahria Central Park Apartments that appeared in newspapers and another report was also submitted and an order in the matter was awaited, the SBCA report said, adding that SBCA chief on a report submitted by the director-design in March had referred the matter to the principal law officer.

Accordingly, a letter had been issued on June 10 to the deputy director (Gadap) with a request to provide details, report about site position and court cases, but no intimation had been received from him as yet, it concluded.

Petitioner Tariq Ishtiaque, through his lawyer Khawaja Naveed Ahmed, submitted that the Bahria Town had launched the “Bahria Greens” project without the approval of the authorities concerned and it also had no land for such a scheme.

It may be recalled that on March 21 last year, a three-judge SC bench had accepted the Rs460 billion offer by Bahria Town to implement the court's May 4, 2018 judgement, which held that the grant of land to the MDA by the Sindh government, its exchange with the private land of the developer and anything done under the provisions of the Colonisation of Government Land Act, 1912 by the provincial government were illegal and of no legal existence.

The land was granted for launching an incremental housing scheme, but the MDA exchanged it with the land of Bahria Town to launch a scheme of its own, the bench in its verdict had regretted.

IGP, Rangers chief issued notices

Another division bench of the SHC on Tuesday issued notices to the inspector general of police, director general of Sindh Rangers, SSP-Malir and others on a petition seeking whereabouts of a "missing" person.

Petitioner Saira Bano submitted that personnel of law enforcement agencies had picked up her brother, Mohammad Amin, on the night of July 14 from their house in Shah Faisal Colony and since then his whereabouts were not known. She pleaded for the recovery of her brother.

The bench headed by Justice Abdul Maalik Gaddi issued notices to the respondents for Aug 7.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 22/07/2020)

Auction of old Sabzi Mandi plot cancelled due to Covid-19

The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation said on Friday that the auction of a plot at Old Sabzi Mandi had been cancelled and the resolution adopted by the City Council was deferred.

A spokesman for the city's municipal administration said that after the auction, many people approached the director land and officials concerned and maintained that they could not take part in the auction due to Covid-19 as they were in isolation at the time of auction and requested the KMC to cancel it so that they could take part in the second auction.

"The director land apprised high officials of the matter and the KMC has decided to cancel the auction in the larger interest of the people of Karachi," the spokesman said and added that the security deposit amount had also been refunded as no amount was deposited in the KMC's account.

"The plot 2B 2700 is still the KMC's property and no one claims it," he said, adding that the plot was a commercial one and designated for a petrol pump and that's why many parties were interested in the auction.

He said that after improvement in Covid-19 situation, the KMC would issue advertisement in leading newspapers for the auction so that each party could have equal right to get the land.

"Some people are spreading false and fabricated information about the plot but in fact the auction was cancelled on July 24. The KMC reserves legal right to take action against such people who are trying to defame the national institution," he added.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 01/08/2020)

Karachi's fading heritage cries out for 'ownership'

To a fanciful mind, the domineering colonial-era building without doors and windows at the busy intersection of Dina Mohammad Wafai Road and Mohammad Bin Qasim Road, a few hundred metres away from the Sindh Secretariat, appears haunted.



Coming across it for the first time, one cannot help but slow down to take in its eerie appearance, crowned by a cupola that tells the tale of a glorious but long-forgotten past.

This is Karachi's Shafqat House - a heritage site fast losing its beauty to years of neglect. But this ghost of the past has held onto its charm, drawing some to its rooftop to see the deteriorating cupola that sets it apart from other colonial-era buildings.

Yet its charm hasn't proven enough to convince the relevant authorities and the city's people to work for its restoration and preservation, or to take ownership of it.

A tale of abandonment

The three-storey structure houses approximately 40 apartments and around half a dozen shops. Though it is mostly empty, a family still resides on the first floor, while a tailor shop runs on the second floor. The third floor, as the building's occupants put it, is a no-go zone.

"It is dangerous," was all one resident would say on the matter. He went on, "We are the chowkidaars [guards] of this building," insisting that it was in good condition.

But the crumbling facade tells a different tale.

While one resident claimed its doors, windows and balcony fencing were taken away by erstwhile residents around five years ago, a shopkeeper there said that these, made of iron, were dismantled and stolen by drug addicts.

They explained that the owner, Ghani Bhai, died years ago, while his family abroad continued to collect rent via a secretary.

This detail, nevertheless, was insignificant in the face of their current predicament.

While the resident sorrowfully expressed the belief that the heritage structure would soon be demolished, the shopkeeper claimed residents were forced to leave.

“From what I know, the owner wants to construct a plaza in its place,” he alleged, adding that though the building looked splendid when he moved his shop there, it had been destroyed by drug addicts and neglect.

A lack of ownership

The neglect is apparent in the fact that the rear portion of this historical treasure being turned into a cattle market went unnoticed by the authorities.

“Cattle owners have been renting it for two years. They pay good rent,” the shopkeeper stated. “No one takes ownership of this building now - neither the government, nor the owners.”

Given this, antiquities and archaeology department director general Manzoor Ahmed Kansiaro’s narration of an attempt to demolish it about two years ago comes as no surprise.

“The attempt was averted by my department,” he claimed. “This building is listed as a heritage site so no one can demolish it or destroy its original grace.”

He elaborated that though the government did not own Shafqat House, his department provided the owners of such buildings with free consultations on architecture, albeit without financial support.

In the case of Shafqat House, however, he admitted to “not exactly knowing who the owners are” or having any documentation about the building.

“So we cannot get an FIR registered against anyone for defacing this heritage site,” he explained, adding that his team would check if any other attempts to demolish it had been made, apart from the one two years ago.

Not the only one

The tragedy of Karachi being robbed of its heritage is not just limited to Shafqat House.

“There are several such buildings in this area. Our history is vanishing,” rued Ahmed, who lives near Shafqat House, adding that the government was uninterested in protecting heritage sites.

Architect Yasmeen Lari explained that builders made better offers to the owners of such sites than the government, adding that funding was not really the issue when it came to their preservation.

Instead, she claimed, the problem lay in the apathy of those assigned the duty of preserving and protecting heritage sites.

Lari pointed out that the encroachment and demolition of such buildings started around 26 years ago. “No one cares. Even the government plans to demolish 55 more [such] buildings in Karachi,” she said, stressing the urgent need to protect and save these heritage buildings. “It’s a collective responsibility. We must save them for our future generations.”

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 05, 05/08/2020)

Heritage sites

There are many colonial-era heritage buildings in Karachi and most of them are in a neglected state. Many aesthetically beautiful structures have disappeared altogether and multi-storey ugly monsters have sprung up in their place. Shafqat House, a three-storey building located in the Civil Lines area of Karachi just a few hundred metres away from the Sindh Assembly, is one such building crying out for the attention of the authorities and city residents for preservation. The attractive building houses around 40 apartments and three dozen shops. Now it is almost empty. Only one family lives on the first floor while a tailoring shop functions on the second. The building’s occupants described the third floor as ‘no-go’ zone for reasons they are not familiar with. The building is denuded of most its doors, windows and balcony fencing. The back portion of the building is being used as a cattle market for the past two years. It is difficult to say whether the authorities are ignorant of the existence of cattle market or they are simply feigning.

As is the case with old buildings there are speculations that the owners, if there are any, plan to demolish the building and construct a plaza in its place. A Sindh archaeology department official confirmed that a few years ago an attempt was made to demolish the building, but this could not be done because it is a protected heritage site. He says the government provides free consultation on architecture on such buildings. Yasmeen Lari, renowned architect, blames lack of ownership for the neglect of

heritage sites on the authorities, saying finances were not much of an issue in protecting such sites. In the West historical buildings, homes of scientists and writers and of other such personages are preserved with utmost care, and places are mentioned as located in the vicinity of heritage sites. Ironically, in most developing countries heritage sites and buildings are mentioned as located close to cinema halls and other suchlike places.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 06/08/2020)

Action against dilapidated buildings ordered

The city administration on Thursday directed the Sindh Building Control Authority to ensure that residents of buildings in dilapidated condition were evacuated to a safer place.

The decision to this effect was taken in a meeting at the commissioner office held to review actions taken in pursuance of the Supreme Court orders for the removal of illegal buildings, including those converted from residential to commercial, and dangerous buildings.

The meeting was chaired by Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani and attended among others by director general of SBCA Ashkar Dawar, Deputy Commissioner East Ahmed Ali Siddiqui and DC South Irshad Ali.

The SBCA chief briefed the meeting participants about the efforts being made for evacuation and demolition of dangerous buildings and illegal under-construction buildings. He said that a survey of the SBCA had been completed and action for demolition of illegal buildings was under way.

He also told the meeting regarding the occupation in dilapidated buildings, saying that notices were served on occupants but they were avoiding evacuation to safer places. The commissioner asked the officials concerned to take concrete and immediate actions to comply with the apex court orders in this regard.

It was decided in the meeting that the SBCA would take immediate action for the removal of illegal under-construction buildings and for evacuation of residents of dilapidated buildings.

All deputy commissioners were asked to submit reports to the commissioner within a week on actions taken in this regard.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 07/08/2020)

Worsening civic conditions

Over the years, the state of cleanliness in Karachi has been worsening, and going by the present state of affairs nobody knows where the deterioration would stop. Fortunately, Prime Minister Imran Khan has taken notice of the worsening civic conditions and deployed the National Disaster Management Authority for desilting choked stormwater drains that cause havoc particularly after rains. So far 25 choked points of three major nullahs, out of a total of 40 such points hindering smooth flow of rainwater, have been cleared. Gujjar nullah, Korangi nullah and Mowach Goth nullah — the three major stormwater drains — have been cleared between 40% and 50%. Around 66,000 tonnes of garbage have been removed from nullahs. Also, the drainage system in Lyari, like in the entire city, has nearly completely collapsed. Gutter overflows are there in the whole area endangering human health and hindering movement of people.

Meanwhile, the Sindh government and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation have once again proven themselves incapable of removing the offal of sacrificial animals even after several days of Eidul Azha. Offal have been left unattended beside roads and streets spreading unbearable stench. Conditions in many localities are so bad that residents have complained that they are finding it difficult even to breathe. As a fresh spell of heavy rains is expected to start from Thursday, the uncleared remains of animals are feared to cause havoc in the city. The existing situation has exposed the hollowness of the promises made by the provincial government before Eidul Azha that offal would be removed promptly. Physicians have warned that if animal remains are left uncleared, this might lead to the outbreak of epidemic diseases.

While politicians continue to promise that things will improve soon, the civic deterioration only goes on worsening.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 07/08/2020)

Imran launches Rs5tr Ravi City project

Prime Minister Imran Khan has again asked the civil and police bureaucracy to improve governance and root out corruption as it is damaging the country's economy beyond repair.

"Corruption begins from elite segment of a society," he said while speaking to the civil and police bureaucracy at the CM secretariat through video link.

Reiterating that there would be no political pressure on bureaucracy, the prime minister said the officers should work on merit and introduce carrot and stick policy in their respective departments. "I will stand by the officers who work on merit."

Mr Khan said the government had given maximum perks and privileges and allowances to the bureaucracy and now it was their turn to deliver and give results. He lauded the Punjab government for taking appropriate and effective measures to control the spread of coronavirus in the province.

At the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Ravi City project, the prime minister said the PTI government had spent its first two years under most trying times as it had to save the country from default and from the corrupt scampering for an NRO. "They even offered support to the government for the passage of FATF bill as well as the Kashmir issue in return for an NRO," he added.

He said the Rs5 trillion Ravi City project would create millions of jobs as there were 40 industries connected to the construction sector.

PM asks bureaucracy to check corruption

Asserting that failure is not an option, PM Khan said there might come a lot of resistance and roadblocks but the team working on the project should focus on timelines and execute the historical and landmark project. He said the wealth created from development projects would be spent on education and health of people, which was the core objective of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf.

He also chided the PML-N's previous government for launching metro bus and train projects that were to offer further Rs28 billion subsidies.

Later, the prime minister tweeted: "Today I felt great excitement in doing stone laying of Ravi City, one of the biggest mega projects we have launched in our history. This will save Lahore by stopping spread of unplanned urban sprawl, raise water table and revive river Ravi, preventing it from becoming a sewerage nala".

He said waste water would be treated and released into the Ravi to improve ground water table. He said a forest area had been earmarked to plant some six million trees to turn around the environment quality in Lahore.

He said the project would help bring in foreign exchange through overseas Pakistanis investment in the project, adding that the money lying within the country (but out of formal economy) could also be utilised till December 30 this year.

The prime minister earlier held an exclusive meeting with Chief Minister Usman Buzdar and MNAs from Faisalabad. At the meeting, MNAs piled complaints about the scarcity of clean drinking water, sewerage system upgrade, repair of roads and other civil amenities.

MNA Raja Riaz told the prime minister that police corruption level had increased in Faisalabad three times and there was no governance to check increase in prices of essential items, including wheat flour and sugar. He complained that Lahore Wasa (Water and Sanitation Authority) was getting funds of Rs2.2 billion, but Faisalabad Wasa was running its affairs with a meagre Rs262 million budget.

The prime minister directed the chief minister to resolve all issues being faced by the people of Faisalabad. He also directed the chief minister to visit Faisalabad next week and resolve issues and said the federal government would support in case of financial constraints.

The prime minister also chaired a meeting to review reforms in the education sector in Punjab and asserted that a uniform education system alone would end the class system in society.

The prime minister was accompanied by federal ministers Shibli Faraz, Shafqat Mahmood, Hammad Azhar, PM's advisor Mirza Shahzad Akbar and Naya Pakistan Housing and Development Authority chairman retired Lt Gen Anwar Ali Haider.

Punjab Chief Secretary Jawad Rafique Malik, IGP Shoab Dastgir and other senior bureaucrats were present in a meeting with the prime minister.

(By Mansoor Malik Dawn, 01, 08/08/2020)

Ravi city project

THE launch of the multibillion-dollar, Dubai-style city project on the Ravi riverfront does not sit well with the PTI government's election manifesto which had promised to reshape the country's development strategy by moving away from the mega brick-and-mortar schemes and invest in citizens for inclusive, sustainable growth. In spite of appeals from experts to cancel the River Ravi Urban Development Project owing to environmental and other reasons, Prime Minister Imran Khan chose to move ahead with the planned launch on Friday. With the government struggling hard to kick-start growth and push the contracting economy out of recession, Mr Khan is apparently pinning his hopes on the revival of stalled construction activities for an early turnaround. Hence, his government has in recent months announced significant fiscal and monetary incentives for builders and developers to boost housing, especially for the low-income segment, in the country. The intervention is showing some positive results with the increase in domestic consumption of cement and other building materials in July.

The expected private investment of Rs5tr on the development of the new city, which would be spread over an area of 100,000 acres and straddle the river north of Lahore, may boost construction-related industries and create thousands of jobs over the next several years. But can the project, which is being undertaken without an independent, comprehensive socioeconomic impact assessment, help Lahore tackle its numerous civic problems: shortage of safe drinking water for a majority of its population, inadequate drainage, overpopulation, degradation of the living environment, shortage of schools for children etc? The answer is in the negative. Instead, it is feared that the scheme will further weaken the delicate ecological balance as floodplains are being used to build high-rises, and the poor and their livelihoods will be upstaged to pave the way for luxury living of the wealthy and powerful.

In the past, the prime minister has repeatedly spoken of the urban sprawl and its impact on the environment and citizens. However, the construction of a new city is not the answer to these problems. Nor can it be a substitute for better urban planning. Instead of new cities/urban settlements, we need to invest heavily in improving the deteriorating infrastructure — water supply, drainage, education, health, environment etc — in the existing ones. Also, the government needs to bring these public services to smaller towns in order to control unchecked growth in labour migration from less developed areas to major urban centres for jobs and better services. Just 'development' or short-term economic prosperity through mega brick-and-mortar projects may not work out without assessing their benefits for the majority of the people. Instead, we need 'responsible development' that ensures the prudent use of public money and requires the government to invest heavily in human development and improvement in the quality and extension of essential public services to all for sustainable economic growth.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 10/08/2020)

SC orders removal of all hoardings in Karachi

- CJP criticises provincial, local govts over flooded roads, unhygienic condition
- Justice Gulzar expresses displeasure over performance of mayor
- Says KE authorities should be booked and prosecuted over electrocution of citizens
- Court irked by non-revival of Karachi Circular Railway
- Bench stops construction on Karachi Gymkhana premises

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the city administration to immediately remove all billboards and hoardings from public spaces and properties.

A three-judge SC bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed also ordered Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani to examine the billboards installed at private properties and remove them if found to be dangerous for the public.

The chief justice criticised the provincial and local governments over flooded roads and streets and unhygienic condition of the city as rainwater has not yet been completely drained out.

He expressed displeasure over the performance of Karachi Mayor Waseem Akhtar and asked him when the tenure of the city government would complete.

The mayor said the tenure would end on Aug 30.

The chief justice expressed serious resentment over the performance of K-Electric as well as the prolonged loadshedding and said the chief executive officer and other officials of the power utility should be booked and prosecuted as a number of people had been killed due to electrocution during rains in the city.

The court also summoned the KE officials.

At the outset of hearing, the SC bench took notice of falling of a billboard near Metropole Hotel that left two motorcyclists injured a few days ago and asked about the details of the incident.

Advocate General for Sindh Salman Talibuddin informed the bench that two officials had been suspended and a case had been registered.

The chief justice came down hard on the SSP (south) when he said the nominated suspects had not yet been arrested and efforts were being made to apprehend them.

The chief justice observed that installation of billboards on buildings was very dangerous and put the lives of people at stake and asked the commissioner why such permissions were being granted.

The commissioner said these people sought permission on the pretext of private properties.

Karachi Circular Railway

The SC bench directed the provincial authorities to expedite work on underpasses, overhead bridges and fencing at the level crossings to ensure that the operation of Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) was not obstructed because of road traffic.

In February, the court had directed the Pakistan Railways to revive and operate the KCR within six months and asked the provincial government to build necessary infrastructure like underpasses and overhead bridges at the level crossings.

On Monday, the railways secretary informed the bench that the KCR track had almost been cleared.

At this, the chief justice regretted that the time granted by the court was over, but the KCR had not yet been revived.

When the bench asked representatives of the Sindh government about the infrastructure, the provincial transport secretary said an amount of Rs5 billion had been allocated for the purpose and Rs3bn had been released.

The bench expressed resentment over the delay and asked why the tender had not been issued so far.

In March, the court was informed that the Pakistan Railways would revive the KCR at an estimated cost of Rs6bn within the stipulated period.

The bench had said the PR might continue its deliberation on upgrade of the KCR through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and on approval and sanctioning of such upgrade, but without obstructing the already functioning KCR.

The railways secretary had pointed out that there would be around 24 level crossings which would cause serious road traffic hazard and the Sindh government in consultation with the PR would address this issue and make plan to build underpass and overhead bridges for smooth flow of road traffic.

Karachi Gymkhana

The SC bench granted a stay order against constructions on the premises of Karachi Gymkhana by suspending an order issued earlier by the Sindh High Court.

The SHC had allowed the gymkhana to continue construction work and restrained the commissioner and other authorities from intervening.

The SHC order was challenged in the apex court.

On Monday, the Sindh advocate general and the Karachi commissioner informed the SC bench that Karachi Gymkhana was included in the list of heritage sites and under the law no new constructions could be carried out on its premises.

Meanwhile, the commissioner office sent a letter to the Karachi Gymkhana president, asking him about the stay order granted by the Supreme Court. It asked the gymkhana management to immediately stop the construction work and warned that in case of failure, legal proceedings might be initiated against it in accordance with the law.

Demolition of building

The apex court directed the Karachi commissioner to complete the demolition of an under-construction building adjacent to an amusement park in Gulshan-i-Iqbal.

Earlier, the court had declared the lease of a two-acre plot, located on Rashid Minhas Road, illegal and directed the authorities concerned to demolish the under-construction residential-cum-commercial multi-storey Royal Park building.

On Monday, the commissioner submitted that they were demolishing the building floor wise and sought time to complete the task. Meanwhile, the counsel for the affected allottees moved an application before the SC bench, seeking return of their money with interest. The court issued notices to the respondents for the next hearing.

Kidney Hill Park

The SC bench directed the Karachi commissioner to demolish a private school and houses and remove encroachments from Kidney Hill Park (Ahmed Ali Park) and submit a compliance report.

At a previous hearing, the court directed the mayor to remove the encroachments from the land of Kidney Hill Park and file a compliance report. The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) had informed the SC bench that it had retrieved the 62-acre land of Kidney Hill Park and a PC-I of Rs950 million had been submitted to develop it as a model park.

However, a representative of Shehri-Citizens for Better Environment had contended that only 55 acres of the land had been retrieved and a private school and houses still existed on the remaining 7.5 acres.

The bench had directed the commissioner to remove the encroachments from the remaining land after due verification of the site and record.

Mall in Clifton

The apex court summoned the Karachi Development Authority director general along with record of allotment of a plot on which Com 3 Mall was constructed adjacent to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Park in Clifton.

Earlier, a representative of Shehri-Citizens for Better Environment had contended that the plot in question belonged to the park. On Monday, a lawyer for the owner of the mall claimed that allotment of the plot was made in accordance with the law.

Illegal constructions

The Karachi commissioner informed the SC bench that illegal constructions and encroachments had been removed from Shahrah-i-Quaideen and greenbelt was restored.

Earlier, the apex court had ordered demolition of the building after it was pointed out that originally the plot did not exist on the map of the Sindh Muslim Cooperative Housing Society and it had been carved out from the service road amenity/drain land and other encroachments.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 01, 11/08/2020)

Court grants bail in billboard case

A local court granted bail on Monday to Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) deputy advertisement director Muhammad Siddiq and approved the pre-arrest bail plea of KMC advertisement director Wazir Ali, in a case pertaining to a billboard falling on motorcyclists near Metropole Hotel last week. The South judicial magistrate was hearing the case at the Karachi City Court. Siddiq was presented before the court by the police and was granted bail by the magistrate against a surety of Rs100,000. The court also accepted Ali's pre-arrest bail plea and restricted the police from arresting him till August 12. It further directed Ali to cooperate with the police in investigation.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 11/08/2020)

Billboard manace

THE recent spell of monsoon rain in Karachi has brought the menace of billboards to the Supreme Court's attention once again. A few days ago, a large hoarding near the city's Metropole Hotel broke loose from its moorings during a thunderstorm and injured two motorcyclists passing on the road below. Taking note of the incident, the apex court on Monday ordered that all billboards and hoardings on public buildings and properties across the metropolis be taken down. Further, the three-judge bench asked the city commissioner to inspect billboards on private buildings and have them removed where they pose a threat to the public.

Urban centres in Pakistan have long been blighted by the mushroom growth of outdoor advertising. In 2014, Karachi alone had an estimated 3,000 plus hoardings and billboards. The sale of outdoor advertising is an extremely lucrative business for government officials, cantonment authorities, and outdoor advertising agencies. Even green belts and footpaths in some places are commercialised, a blatantly illegal step given they are amenities and hence cannot be put to commercial use. In 2016, when over a dozen 20-year-old trees were chopped down to make space for billboards on one of the city's main thoroughfares, the Supreme Court took the view that the law did not allow for outdoor advertising on public property and ordered the KMC, DHA and cantonments boards to remove it. Moreover, it ruled that billboards and hoardings clutter the city's landscape, increase visual pollution and pose risks to pedestrian and drivers alike. The land authorities took their time to comply with the court's directives. In several places, the infrastructure to mount billboards was left intact in anticipation of the storm blowing over and resumption of business as usual. Sure enough, hoardings and signboards have begun slowly popping up all over the city; sometimes, even when mounted on private property, they defeat the considerations of public safety. Only when corrupt elements in the district municipal corporations and cantonment boards are punished will this game of whack-a-mole end.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 12/08/2020)

Karachi: The story of a city

I was introduced to Karachi in the mid-1950s when barely four. Out of a village from north Punjab which was the only place I knew before then this was as big as it could get. The Clifton Beach was a vast expanse before you made it to the coastline. The arched monument where they now have a children's park was the only landmark around which hawkers sold ice-lollies and Pakolas to a sprinkling of visitors. Gandhi Garden and surrounding areas were lush-green with foliage that grew widely and wildly. It was deep evergreen and gave out purple-petal flowers with a beautiful fragrance. Karachi smelt of the plant that is no more.



Mohammad Ali Society was the eastern most edge of the city. Drigh Road was another city and a halt on the train-track. So was Malir. Now I believe the DHA has gone into the sea while Bahria is creating alternate cities in the north. I don't think it rained then because I have no memory of flooded roads. The buses moved us to wherever we needed to go and the conductors carried a satchel which had multi-coloured tickets for

different destinations as he cut one to each passenger.

I then got reacquainted with Karachi in 1970 still short of 20. By now it was a city of lights. I could see more and sense more. It stayed up late and was noisy. We passed by the Metropole hoping to steal a peep. Bambino had arrived but so had Scala; to these I would get intimately familiar later. Politically, these were the days of the lull before the storm. There was a sense of ethnic sensitivity. I learnt about places belonging to the Sindhis which meant there were non-Sindhis as well. I also learnt that a few were Punjabis which meant there were also non-Punjabis. My 1950s memories were minus such definition.

Then things happened. In 1971, we lost the Bengalis without a thought that they were once us. They had become the other and remained so all of 1971. First ever national elections of 1970 had thrown up Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as the uncontested leader in West Pakistan and with the break-up of the country he emerged a victor in what was left of the country. He assumed power in 1972. He heralded two trends. The common man became the centre of the political equation because of his vote. This was to be a game-changer for the future. However it brought along identity making people acutely aware of their antecedence and sense of belonging — the Sindhis specially so since that is from where ZAB belonged. ZAB's PPP in Sindh then passed a law declaring Sindhi as the official language and the medium of instruction for Sindh's schools and colleges. Karachi revolted.

Consisting of 'Muhajirs' from UP, Bihar and other parts of India they not only brought their unique culture they coalesced around Urdu as 'their' language of identity. Along with Islam, Urdu had been the leveraging element for the Muslim League to pitch for Pakistan. It soon graduated to a language of defiance against the onslaught of imposed Sindhi resulting in the unfortunate 1972 Language Riots in Karachi. In the early 1970s it was common to see wall-chalking castigating Sindhis. There were shops and

houses gutted by arson and fire and it was understood those belonged to Sindhi occupants. Sindhis relocated to interior Sindh in large numbers. From being a salubrious, homogenous mix people became identity driven. It wasn't yet fear but a sense of eeriness was in the air.

The 'Muhajir' was reborn. The language riots and a policy-founded quota system in government jobs by the PPP government in favour of the lesser qualified Sindhis gave rise to increased alienation among the Muhajirs. Fear became the driver of reinforced ethnic alignment. The APMSO and then the MQM were born under Altaf Hussein. It wasn't out of nothing that the sphinx rose. As he galvanised and exercised power with a reign of terror from the mid-1980s to around 2015 Karachi had an owner. He became the symbol of absolute power and exercised it through extortion, torture, murder, arson and killing. Even when he exiled himself he remotely lorded over the city reducing Karachi to a crime capital. Karachi had lost its face and its spirit forever. Crime replaced politics even if politics was exercised in its own name. Karachi became a hunting ground for competing gangs of malice and malfeasance. Crime, corruption, tribalism and crass neglect followed soon after.

Repeated dithering over countering MQM's lawless activities meant it was being tolerated at the cost of the city's peace and its future. Many decided to close businesses and locate elsewhere. Despite the MQM, the political party, many Urdu-speaking people that it represented suffered excessively at the hands of the fascist ways of the party's militant wing. Tales abound in how the politics, the society and the civility, and hence the city, degenerated over decades to a point where none has remained viable. As the city structure and its spirit collapses around itself newer cities are being founded. Perhaps that is how and why cities decay and ultimately vanish and that is how new cities emerge. Perhaps that is what we are witnessing in Karachi.

The case in point is how it has become impossible to manage refuse or clear drains. Twenty tons of it gets created every day in a city that now counts over 20 million. Already at sea-level even gravity cannot help except pile and overflow. All systems are broke. No one collects the waste and none disposes it. There is just no municipal system in place despite all the structures and their trappings. When it rains it inundates all and scatters the filth from its heaps to all corners of the city. Potable water or electricity are now the laments from the past. The city has a bigger challenge: drowning in its own filth. The city has no owners.

MQM was used and manipulated for political ends by all and sundry including those who initiated operations against it to cleanse it but ended up fraternising it for political gains. When the city's demise became obvious a rearguard action was undertaken to decimate the toxic leadership of MQM and then to defang the party of its militant ways. Its large 'Muhajir' majority remains unhinged and lost under a listless and a diluted MQM. The inertia of the 'real' MQM looms inhibiting replacement leadership.

The world saves its heritage and its cities. We don't have to let ours go under as monuments to our incompetence. A strong and representative local bodies system is constitutionally mandated — all across the country. That is where the top court could perhaps enable a safety for Karachi. Mandate the governments to institute and empower those who can run their affairs. Rather than rectify and remedy we let cities slide into non-function and oblivion. The PPP does not own the city, nor does anyone else. The existing local government is a sham. There is no political responsibility. That is how cities die.

(By Shahzad Chaudhry The Express Tribune, 15, 16/08/2020)

Karachi sans master plan

COLONIAL masters created powerful allies by bestowing upon them large tracts of lands in various parts of the subcontinent in exchange for their unconditional loyalty and services in times of peace and war. This elitist and unjust practice was later continued in Pakistan with much zeal and gusto, making it virtually a right for all those who had some influence over or stake in state affairs, though it's moot if the state receives loyalty and service, in real terms, from the recipients of state lands.



Historically, the greater chunks of precious lands have been awarded to powerful elites — politicians, civil and military bureaucrats, judges, journalists, capitalists, feudals, developers, etc — leaving little provision for the poor and landless. No wonder, then, that one fifth of our population has no proprietary rights or shelter, despite the fact that it's these people who have

been loyally rendering services in all economic spheres — agriculture, industry, construction, transport, mining, fishing and so on. These landless masses have been disentitled from public lands only because they lack a political organisation or legislative representation to assert their fundamental rights against the interests of well-entrenched propertied classes and rent-seekers.

The most appalling effects of this elitist land policy are manifest in Karachi, a metropolis whose lands have become an odious object of rapacious scramble by corrupt politicians, corporate interests, powerful institutions, compromised administrators, collusive regulators and politico-ethnic mafias. Indeed, the city's plight presents a symbiotic nexus between the unjust enrichment of these powerful actors and the city's unchecked, unplanned and ungovernable expansion. It has become more robust in the wake of the state authorities' half-done operation: retrieving the city from a violent meltdown, but leaving its fundamental structural, administrative and regulatory problems unfixed. The city continues to suffer from many a malaise:

Master plan: Perhaps nowhere in the world is a city expanding so quickly (horizontally, vertically and demographically) without a master plan. Karachi has none. The plan conceived during the Musharraf era and sanctioned by the Supreme Court never saw the light of day, mainly due to resistance by multiple jurisdictions, KMC, cantonments, Lyari and Malir development authorities, the Board of Revenue, etc. Each had its own conflicting land policy and implementation machinery. None wished to fall under one overarching authority to bring the disparate divisions into an orderly whole. As a result, administrative chaos persists.

Great chunks of public land have been awarded to the elites, leaving little provision for the poor.

Regulation: Notwithstanding Karachi's plethora of authorities and regulations, the city has been developed less in accordance with law and more in the interests of powerful developers. For instance, it is routine to see zonal regulations being 'softened' to convert large swathes of residential areas into commercial zones, disturbing and straining already scarce ecological resources. In fact, hanging the zoning regulations/area standards has been the surest way of making billions of rupees. The beneficiaries are builders, politicians, bureaucrats and sometimes even criminal facilitators, but the cost of tampering with the physical capacity, zonal density and urban aesthetics is paid heavily by the city — a 'living' organism — when it loses its natural habitat for breathing, living and growing.

Infrastructure: Among Karachi's many woes is the continuous disarray and disfiguring of its physical infrastructure. Under the nose of its multitier administration — provincial, local, cantonment, regulatory agencies, etc — powerful mafias continue to encroach upon lands meant for public amenities: parks, graveyards, schools, clinics, etc. Appallingly, additional storeys are illegally added to buildings constructed on small plots in narrow lanes and congested areas. These fragile structures not only imperil their residents but also create obstructions for rescue and municipal operations.

In fact, seasonal urban flooding, which plays havoc with roads and low-lying areas during the monsoon, is largely caused by the illegal encroachment on the KMC nullahs. Encroachments block access to heavy machinery required to dredge these nullahs. In 2018, on the recommendation of the Water Commission, the Supreme Court directed the authorities to remove encroachments from 30 large nullahs that drain most of the city's effluent. The order was never implemented as the commission stood disbanded. The federal government has now asked the National Disaster Management Authority and the armed forces to help clear the clogged nullahs in Karachi, which is a statutory duty of the city and provincial governments.

Borders: Since the city's land has become scarce, large corporate and institutional builders are pushing its boundaries north and eastward. DHA City and Bahria Town have already developed their respective mega projects over thousands of acres of land along the strategic Super Highway/M9. But their thirst for land is not quenched. Recently, both have separately acquired large tracts of public lands for 'future use'.

Similarly, thousands of acres of public land have been allotted to developers and investors under the umbrella of Zulfiqarabad — a city to be developed in district Thatta. But given all the secrecy, we don't know whether or not these public lands have been allotted to DHA, Bahria or others through a mandatory public auction. Even if codal formalities have been met, the land aggrandisement in the guise of high-end development by powerful interests is not justified on moral grounds, given the fact that more than half the city's population lives in katchi abadis. Moreover, the excessive grant of public land to powerful developers and elites will have disastrous consequences — promoting inequality and injustice, displacing local communities, disturbing demographic balance thereby breeding political and ethnic conflicts, and more.

Therefore, it is time the elitist aggrandisement of land is stopped. Let the landless and shelterless have a piece of land, which is their historical right.

(By Shahab Usto Dawn, 06, 17/08/2020)

Judgement reserved on builder's plea

An accountability court reserved on Wednesday its judgement on an application of builder Zain Malik for recording his statement through video link from the United Kingdom in a case pertaining to alleged illegal amalgamation of commercial land for a multistorey building in Karachi.

Former Karachi mayor and Pak Sarzameen Party chairman Syed Mustafa Kamal; Zain Malik, son-in-law of the real estate tycoon Malik Riaz; former Karachi district coordination officer Fazlur Rehman; former executive district officer Iftikhar Kaimkhani and others are facing trial in the case.

On Wednesday, the matter came up before the accountability court-III judge Dr Sher Bano Karim.

Mr Kamal, Mr Kaimkhani, Mr Rehman, Mr Mumtaz Haider, Mr Syed Nishat Ali, Mr Mohammad Dawood, Mr Mohammad Rafi and Mr Mohammad Irfan appeared on bail.

Advocate Amir Raza Naqvi moved an application on behalf of Zain Malik under Section 540-A of the criminal procedure code read with Section 70-C of the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999.

In the plea, it was submitted that the applicant was abroad reportedly for his treatment and could not travel to the country due to his health condition.

Therefore, it was requested that Mr Malik's statement may be recorded through video link from the UK and charges may be framed against him in the present case, as an accountability court had recently indicted former ailing president Asif Ali Zardari in the Park Lane case after recording his statement through video link.

However, NAB special public prosecutor Shahbaz Sahotra opposed the plea, arguing that the applicant was trying to delay the trial proceedings by moving such application, as first the applicant should surrender before the court, as required under the law.

He further contended that the applicant was still absconding, as he never appeared before the court to join the trial, therefore, his application for recording his statement through video link could not be allowed, as there was no such precedence.

Mr Sahotra maintained that Zain Malik's case was different from that of Mr Zardari's, who had duly obtained bail from the court of law and also surrendered before the court, before his health condition had deteriorated and subsequently the court had allowed the request to record his statement through video link.

After hearing arguments from both sides, the judge reserved her verdict on the application to be announced later.

Meanwhile, the defence counsel was given two-day time to submit any case law, wherein any suspect had been allowed to record his statement prior to his/her surrendering before the court in the past.

A defence counsel for Mohammad Yaqoob also moved an application, pleading to the court to condone his absence for the day since he was out of the country and could not travel back due to flights closure.

The judge fixed the matter on Sept 3.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 20/08/2020)

Blaze erupts in three-storey building

A fire erupted in a three-story building, housing a wooden furniture workshop on the ground floor, and cloth and shoe factories on the upper floors, near Lasbela Chowk on Thursday.

As a result, furniture and other goods were burned to ashes. Six fire tenders and four Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) water tankers were sent to the site to control the blaze, which took two hours.

Saddar fire station in-charge Zaheer Ahmed Siddiqui stated the fire had erupted on the ground floor but soon engulfed the upper floors. While some craftsmen were sleeping inside the building, they were safely evacuated and no casualties were reported, he added. He further said the narrow, congested lanes had hampered rescue efforts.

Area resident Zahid told The Express Tribune wooden furniture worth Rs250,000 was moved inside the building hours before the incident and was destroyed. The cloth factory, too, was burnt completely, but the second floor suffered only partial damage, he related.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 21/08/2020)

Contradictory urbanisation

BY now, the vulnerability of Pakistan's urban future in its current trajectory is abundantly apparent. Current policy and academic rhetoric appears to have taken some cognisance of this fact, though requisite actions are yet to follow. Sprawling major urban centres face considerable pressure on municipal infrastructure (roads, water supply, sanitation and solid waste management), while the free-for-all growth of smaller towns that house up to 200,000 residents without requisite infrastructure poses another stark challenge.



Over the past two years, the Punjab government has taken a handful of steps to address one source of vulnerability — the unmitigated urban sprawl. Its attention has focused on Lahore, where the problem of the city eating into fertile agricultural land is more advanced (though not qualitatively different) compared to other cities in the province. Interventions include changes to residential building by-laws, height

restrictions, approval processes, and zoning regulations to encourage vertical construction. One notable step was the near-doubling of the floor area ratio that now allows for more square footage to be covered on the same plot and, in some cases, with the allowance of an extra floor.

The idea behind these changes — some more well-thought-out than others — is to curtail outward growth and increase residential unit supply in areas closer to the city. Instead of far-flung housing developments that require long commutes to places of work, home-buyers and renters will look for closer affordable options, thus reducing the need for expanding road networks, cutting down on commute times and garnering its associated environmental benefits. The downside is the greater strain density places on pre-existing infrastructure (roads, sanitation and water supply lines, electricity), which was originally designed for a lower load.

Citizen preferences must be understood not just from the lens of infrastructure planning but also from a cultural and social perspective.

The underlying theory with these steps is that planning and regulatory frameworks that encourage a particular type of built environment can have a significant impact on citizen preferences and behaviour. In other words, supply will perpetuate its own demand.

This may very well be true in the long run, but citizen preferences need to be understood not just from the technocratic lens of infrastructure planning but also from a cultural and social perspective. To put it more simply, we need to know what aspects influence people's residential choice decisions, what are their constraints other than just spending power and, most importantly in my view, what are their aspirations. What is the idealised vision of their own residential life that they see?

Sociological research on consumption preferences identifies particular parts of society (cultural, political and economic elites) as carrying a greater say in shaping what most people desire. This is done not just through the direct demonstration of their own lives of privilege but also through intermediaries such as mass media and the advertising industry.

For just over a century, decision-makers in government and upper-income groups in general have both lived and celebrated one particular type of residential lifestyle — the sprawling single-unit dwelling. As documented by William Glover among others, housing development during the colonial era remains the high-water mark of this tradition with large residences being developed just outside what was considered the city centre at the time. It also marked a stark departure (as colonialism does in general) from what urban dwelling had organically grown as prior to colonialism in spaces such as the Walled City of Lahore.

Ascension to statehood in 1947 provided an opportunity to rethink urban development but, instead, decision-makers pushed through with more of the same. Apart from the occasional low-income scheme, the vast majority of the state's resources on urban development were spent in line with colonial modes of development to create schemes like Gulberg, Shadman, Garden Town and Muslim Town in Lahore.

The same trend continues largely unhindered today with the growth of private and military-led housing development schemes. The model is the same, even if there is now some variation in terms of size and scale of plots on offer compared to the 20th century. Smaller schemes targeting middle-income buyers use the same language and visuals, feeding on and shaping the aspirations of upwardly mobile citizens. Adjectives such as 'exclusive', 'spacious', 'world class' and 'luxurious' remain the vernacular of real estate developers regardless of their clientele.

This is the preference baseline that the government now belatedly wants to transform by shifting a few by-laws. Yet the contradiction here is that while these new building regulations are expected to create a supply of affordable and accessible smaller units, the state continues to sell the old imagery of desirable sprawl through other ways. The first is the retention of prime centrally located real estate for housing elite officers and the provision of plots of land during service and upon retirement. And the second, newer and more glaring one is by launching projects such as the Ravi Riverfront Development scheme.

The rendered images from this new mega project encapsulate all the same adjectives listed above. Spread across three phases, the scheme if ever realised will eat up thousands of acres of agricultural land to create mostly single-unit dwellings. Even if it's not realised, the political capital being expended by the provincial government in marketing it, and by the prime minister's personal interest in showcasing it, will reinforce pre-existing preferences of what a desirable residential lifestyle should look like.

So it really does boil down to this contradiction and one that the government needs to resolve: A state elite that talks about vertical growth and reducing sprawl continues to patronise the exact opposite for itself and upper-income groups. Other than being a systematic mechanism that sustains inequality (blocking out lower-income groups from particular lifestyles), it is also one that will prevent the stated goal of sprawl reduction from being realised as the private sector continues with its current trajectory.

(By Umair Javed Dawn, 06, 24/08/2020)

Sindh abolishes capital value tax on immovable property

In an attempt to encourage the construction and real estate business, the Sindh Assembly passed a law to 'abolish capital value tax' on immovable property on Monday.

According to the Sindh Finance Amended Bill, the Sindh government will not charge this tax on the leasing, sale and purchase of immovable property.

"The law will not only revive the construction industry but will ensure that other allied industries also thrive," stated the legislation's objectives.

Provincial revenue minister Makhdoom Mehboobul Zaman, who moved the bill, stated that around 40 sectors would directly or indirectly benefit from the new law.

"The Sindh government used to earn over Rs5 billion with this tax, but we have made this law for a good cause, on the directives of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari," he claimed, suggesting that the federal government should follow in Sindh's footsteps.

The opposition parties, too, supported the bill, calling it the need of the hour.

Backing the legislation, opposition leader Firdous Shamim Naqvi asserted that Sindh already recovered more property tax than the other provinces, but provided minimal benefits to those linked to the construction industry.

"Owing to the lack of facilities [provided to them] the majority of investors opt to invest in Punjab and elsewhere," he claimed. "The PPP-led Sindh government should also think not just about Karachi, but Hyderabad, Sukkur and Larkana regions as well, encouraging businessmen to initiate mega-projects."

Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's Khawaja Izharul Hassan, who also voted in favour of the bill, requested the federal and provincial governments to exempt people from paying withholding tax too.

Harassment of female journalists

Moreover, after the recent emergence of the harassment of several female journalists, the provincial assembly unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the act, while demanding a full-fledged, transparent investigation by the Federal Investigation Agency's cyber-crime wing.

"Female journalists are being victimised by social media accounts affiliated with the ruling party in the Centre [the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf]," stated PPP lawmaker Sharmila Farooqi, who moved the resolution highlighting the danger to female journalists who had been critical of the incumbent government's policies. "These accounts are not just threatening hard-working, respectable female journalists for doing their work, but have also created an unacceptable culture of abuse to try to silence them."

She added that these journalists were being bullied online and also faced the threat of sexual and physical violence, putting their security at risk.

The resolution stated that proper legal action must be initiated against the culprits. It also demanded that the FIA report following the inquiry be made public in order to expose the miscreants.

The house further called for the federal government to ensure freedom of expression, as guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 25/08/2020)

Karachi protesters demand CBC CEO's resignation

Residents of Defence Housing Authority (DHA) and Clifton surrounded the Cantonment Board Clifton (CBC) office at Khayaban-e-Rahat for hours on Monday, protesting the management's lack of action in the face of flooding and the unavailability of clean water, electricity and gas in the upmarket area.

Several parts of DHA and Clifton remain inundated and without electricity even five days after the record-breaking rainfall on Thursday.

Presenting a seven-point agenda, the protesters demanded the resignation of the CBC CEO and the DHA administrator, the clearance of rainwater from the entire locality within three days, the provision of clean water and restoration of the electricity and gas supply within 24 hours, the reconstruction of infrastructure and water drainage system within 30 days, a forensic audit of CBC and DHA accounts, and an anti-bacterial spray drive in the area.

Demanding accountability, several protesters stated they were paying hundreds of thousands of rupees in taxes, but did not receive the necessary services.

While the protest was initially peaceful, former Citizens Police Liaison Committee chief Ahmed Chinoy sparked anger by trying to convince the protesters to agree with the CBC's stance and understand the technical issues it was facing.

Arguing with Chinoy, the angry residents pushed away the security guards deputed at the office gates and entered the premises. Though they tried to enter the building, they were charged by the police.

Though the CBC CEO came out briefly to talk to the gathered residents, he quickly went back inside without completing his address when faced with booing from them.

Later, an eight-member delegation of the protesters met the CBC CEO, vice chairperson, South DIG and others, though the negotiations appeared to be unsuccessful.

Those present at the meeting claimed the administration refused to sign the meeting's minutes, adding that this showed its non-seriousness about resolving the residents' concerns. "The CBC and DHA administration are only providing verbal surety for resolving the issues instead of making an agreement in black and white," stated one of them.

Announcing another protest on Thursday at noon, they demanded that their taxes should be waived for the next five years, in compensation for the losses faced by residents and traders in the area.

(By Aftab Khan The Express Tribune, 04, 01/09/2020)

Land reforms now

MUCH has been said over the past few weeks about wheat shortage and imports to ensure regular supplies and fair prices but little attention has been paid to the poor state of agriculture, where the root of the problem lies, or the plight of the people who depend upon it.

According to the latest Economic Survey, agriculture recorded a growth rate of 3.2 per cent during the last fiscal year but for several previous years the farming sector of agriculture had been showing little or negative growth. Its overall performance rose due to the livestock sector's performance.

In 2018, government launched a Rs277 billion Prime Minister's Agriculture Emergency programme. The 10-point programme ranges from enhancement of productivity of



wheat, rice, sugarcane and oilseeds and water conservation to backyard poultry farms. We are almost in the middle of the five-year programme and it should be worthwhile to find out how many of the objectives have been achieved and how much of the programme will survive post-pandemic planning. Earlier too, agriculture development packages including credit, price support and marketing facilities, were offered. While these measures did have a positive impact on the economy they did not touch the iniquitous land ownership pattern that is a major cause of the sluggish performance of agriculture.

Agriculture is important on three counts. First, it offers the means of guaranteeing food security. Secondly, it remains a significant contributor to the GDP. And thirdly, it accounts for a little over 33pc of the national labour force. A holistic approach to agricultural development will concentrate as much, if not more, on the well-being of the cultivators as on the promotion of state interest. It is essential to look at the hardship of petty landholders.

The life of owners of tiny pieces of land is unmitigated misery.

According to the latest agriculture census, farms less than an acre constitute 19pc of the total number of farms but the area covered is 1pc of the total; farms under five acres constitute 64pc of the total but the area under their command is only 19pc of the total farm area. On the other hand, farms of 25 acres to over 150 acres constitute only 5pc of the total number of farms but they constitute 35pc of the total area. There have been suggestions that land in the possession of bigger landlords has increased since the last land reform of more than 40 years ago.

The life of owners of tiny pieces of land is unmitigated misery. They cannot afford the essential inputs, nor can they use the machines. They have little access to credit. They are too poor to make any progress in social life and their use of educational facilities is limited.

The solution lies in serious and genuine land reform. Some well-meaning economists argue that the time for land reform has passed. Perhaps the world has fallen in love with corporate farming. However, the case for land reform was not based on the need for efficient farming alone; a more compelling reason was the urgency of reducing the peasantry's land hunger and that reason has not disappeared.

The genuine land reform that was promised before independence, at least to the people of Punjab, has never been carried out. There is little doubt in informed quarters that the land reforms of 1959 and 1970s benefited the landlords more than the deprived peasantry. If the land reform of 1977 touched some privileged landlords it was not implemented.

These days most people have stopped talking of land reform because of the fear of transgressing religious injunctions. This is so because in a judgement that has never ceased to confound students and practitioners of law, the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court declared land reform un-Islamic in the 1980s. Now land reform can mean many things beside obliging landlords to part with land in excess of the prescribed limit but everything about land tenure has been given up. A petition questioning the bar on land reforms filed in the Supreme Court by senior lawyer Abid Hasan Minto in 2011 is still pending.

We are referring to land reform in the most comprehensive meaning of the term. It does include rationalisation of the anomalies in the fixation of upper ceiling of holdings. But the land reform being advocated here includes, besides fixation of ceiling on ownership, a host of other matters—from equitable division of output between landlord and tenant and standard agreements between landlords and commercial farmers (mustajirs), to guarantees against damage to soil fertility caused by unscrupulous and wanton exploitation of land, and minimum wages for farm labour. And of course the state's duty to ensure all farmers' access to credit and extension services, if such facilities have survived anywhere, is also included.

Without comprehensive land reform you may have development that will leave the bulk of peasantry as badly off as ever but if development that includes the uplift of the cultivators is intended then land reforms must be carried out sooner rather than later. Talking of agriculture's rejuvenation without land reform will be like entering a race with a cart that has no horse before it.

Tailpiece: Because of a flaw in the law, the NAB chairman has been granted powers to make rules for the bureau's functioning with the approval of the president, that is, the government. For a long time, the NAB chairman did not want the rules to interfere with his whim and caprice. Obligated by the Supreme Court, he has submitted a draft of rules to the court. One does not know whether the government has been consulted. Media reports suggest that the rules have been designed to increase the chairman's powers beyond what is contemplated under the NAB Ordinance. If these reports are true, NAB will become a more horrible instrument of tyranny than it already is. Meanwhile, here are two recent headlines: 'Pakistan's problem is [lack of?] good governance' is attributed to Punjab governor Mohammad Sarwar, and 'Provinces cannot be administered by average leaders' to Federal Minister Fawad Chaudhry.

(By I.A Rehman Dawn, 06, 03/09/2020)

Building on Karachi

TODAY could be meaningful.



Prime Minister Imran Khan arrives in Karachi laden with bags of money. Lots of it. This money is piggybacking on a plan to fix things deemed unfixable. This plan is a

manifestation of a thought process that aims to untangle deep political webs and straighten them out into actionable solutions. The quest for these solutions is a project in motion.

Good intentions and all, right? Much ado about something — anything. Our state's capacity to say what needs saying has traditionally outweighed its capacity to do what needs doing. Karachi is a case in point. Decades of decay amid decomposed governance has taken a toll. It was bound to. It was only when water reached neck high, literally, that the authorities moved. Or will move after today's prime ministerial announcements. Then things may improve, or not; political entanglements may get disentangled, or not; and rivals may team up, or not. And yet, whatever happens in Karachi will give us a glimpse of what may be in store for the next few years.

It starts with a basic premise: every problem has a solution. If we cannot find this solution, we either lack ability or we lack intent. Our governments have been self-sufficient in both. The result is visible to all — a wide matrix of core, outer-core and peripheral problems that have festered into gaping governance wounds. How long can one keep rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?

How long can one keep rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?

Karachi will tell us if we are in fact prioritising solutions or staying insistent on the justification of problems. Karachi will show us if visceral disagreements can in fact be bulldozed into agreements. If so, lessons will be learnt and precedents set. Karachi will show us if projects can in fact be chiselled out of policy planning. If so, lessons will be learnt and precedents set. And Karachi will inform us if governance mayhem can in fact be forcefully channelled into focused service delivery. If so, lessons will be learnt and precedents set.

The initiative in Karachi is fuelled by the potency of disillusionment. Years of anger, frustration, despondency and hopelessness have now bubbled over into the watery streets of the urban metropolis. It is the anger of being taken for granted by governments; it is the frustration of seeing things getting worse by the year; it is the despondency of knowing the rulers are unwilling and incapable of improving the lives of citizens; and it is the hopelessness of expecting nothing will change.

But this is not how countries are run.

Change starts with asking the right question. It is not why we cannot fix Karachi's problems but why we have chosen not to fix them; it is not why we cannot educate every Pakistani child but why we have chosen not to; it is not why we cannot reform our criminal justice system, or our police, or the creaking healthcare system, but why we have chosen not to.

Now the federal and provincial governments say they have chosen to fix Karachi. Let us believe them for now. Can this choice, this re-prioritisation, this renewed focus translate into prudent planning that in turn translates into efficient implementation? The Pakistani state's capability is about to be tested. Project Karachi will show to us if the state has the wherewithal to put its money where its mouth is by delivering quantifiable and identifiable governance outcomes on a timelined spectrum.

What will this entail?

Someone will need to even out the odds. The provincial government led by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah will lead the initiative but he will need to manage a decision-making matrix that will include federal people of various persuasions. We may be looking at a framework that optimises coordination between competing interests within the umbrella of provincial autonomy. A tough call. With billions of rupees, millions of issues, thousands of problems and hundreds of interests — the task at hand promises to be an arduous one.

Success — even a relative one — will have far-reaching consequences for the rest of the country. Politics as a byproduct of governance — instead of the other way round as has been the norm — will be emulated in other areas. A model will emerge. Citizens will demand governance at their doorstep. The state will learn to figure out how to morph politics into deliverables. Fixing things will be an exercisable option.

The future of governance is hazy. What is clear is that the present cannot continue. A broken system must self-heal and evolve. Education, health, justice and security of life and property are problems that need to be overcome before we can envision a future that is less hazy and more promising. If the state cannot fix Karachi, it cannot fix the strategic issues of citizens' empowerment.

The target for the state should be clear: build Karachi and then build on Karachi. Every stakeholder may want to digest the enormity of the challenge and the scale of its consequences. When every key person is on board, there is little reason why the plan should not work. Money in hand and the state apparatus at hand, the federal and provincial leadership has everything it needs to get going. There is a whiff of hope in the air. Perhaps this time we have hit rock bottom and there is no place to go other than up; perhaps enough is actually enough and it is time to change the way this country has been governed; and perhaps the governments have realised time is upon them to deliver on their promises.

A whiff is all we have but for now, even that is sufficient. PTI, PPP, MQM and all other stakeholders in Karachi are in the spotlight. They will need to subjugate their petty political interests, their electoral manipulations, their personal objectives and their gravy train of patronage under the mainframe of reforming this urban decay.

(By Fahd Husain Dawn, 06, 05/09/2020)

Karachi rains: Scores displaced from Naya Nazimabad

Over 400 families have been displaced from Naya Nazimabad, claim the residents, with their homes still submerged in water even over a week after torrential rain thrashed the newly developed residential society, along with the rest of Karachi.

Located between hills in Central district, the residential complex comprises four blocks, among which Block C and D are most affected. However, knee-deep water inundates the rest of the area, too, forcing many residents to shift to safer abodes.

Among them was Syed Hamza Amir, who had planned to get married in the coming months and start the new chapter of his life at his new home in the area. He and his family had shifted to Naya Nazimabad two days before Eidul Azha. However, just about a month later, they ended up having to move out as rainwater surged into their house.

Reliving the nightmare, Amir narrated, "Water flooded the society from all sides...We were hardly able to save our lives."

The flooding has ruined all the furniture in his house and put a damper on his hopes and plans. "We shifted to Naya Nazimabad because the environment there was peaceful. But now we don't have a home," lamented Amir.

According to another resident, Saleem Javed, the residential society has actually been built over a lake. "People still refer to its location as Manghopir Lake," he claimed.

Complaining of the lack of proper drainage in the area, he told The Express Tribune that the society was flooded after last year's rain too. "But not at this scale and intensity," he added, sharing that the entire ground floor of his house in Naya Nazimabad was under water.

As the residents voiced their grievances, dewatering measures continued in the flooded residential society - though the glacial pace tested their patience.

Observing the exercise, a displaced resident, Muhammad Wasif, dubbed the dewatering efforts by the society's management too slow. "It will take at least a month before I can shift back home," he said dejectedly.

The sentiment was shared by many others.

They told The Express Tribune that the Pakistan Army, Rangers and Pakistan Navy personnel, along with district administration officials, had come to their help during the record-breaking rain, and several suction machines were installed at various points.

However, now it seems the society's management has abandoned everyone, they decried, adding that it hadn't made sufficient efforts to help displaced residents move back.

This was further affirmed when The Express Tribune approached a senior official of the West district administration. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, he said the Naya Nazimabad management hadn't formally approached the administration for any assistance. "[Still], we helped the residents in shifting to safer places and dewatering the society," he said, adding that further assistance would be provided if the management approached the district administration.

"It is a private housing society and it is solely the management's responsibility to take measures for ensuring residents' safety and security," he commented.

The realisation seemed to be lost on the management, though, unmoved by over two dozen families staging a protest outside the administration office.

A security guard stood alert outside the administration block, telling The Express Tribune that he had been instructed to not to allow anyone to approach the management

Khurram, one of the protesting residents, said over 400 families had been displaced from Naya Nazimabad in the downpour's aftermath. "They now want to come back, but the management has been of no help to us," he said amid shouts of protesters demanding the water's drainage.

An official overseeing the drainage efforts, Ghazi Khan, later approximated that around 1,500 families lived in the society, while vowing to put in all-out efforts to drain the water.

Exasperated by their prolonged ordeal, residents, however, have demanded that relevant authorities dewater the area at the earliest possible.

Their yearning for their homes was evident by some among them trying to wade across the flooded streets to get a glimpse of their houses. But the efforts proved futile.

"I wanted to see my home but unfortunately, it is not possible," said a dismayed resident after his failed attempt. "I cannot even get to it."

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 06/09/2020)

'Won't raze illegal homes sans alternative housing'

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Sunday said that the Sindh government will not knock down illegal settlements along Karachi's drains until their occupants are provided with alternative places to reside.

Addressing a rally of party workers at KDA Chowrangi in the city's district central, he was of the view that the government would clean stormwater drains but would not render people living in illegal structures around nullahs homeless. He stressed upon the need for taking care of the affectees of the anti-encroachment drive.

Bilawal mentioned that the Green Line mass transit project wreaked havoc to Karachi's drainage system, emphasising that the megacity's drainage system will have to be fixed. "People suffered a lot due to unprecedented monsoon rains in the metropolis." Urging party workers to rally behind him the way they used to support slain PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, he said that the party's government in Sindh would "snatch the National Finance Commission [share] and other rights from the Centre" with their support.

The statement came a day after Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a historic Rs1.1 trillion financial package for the execution of a transformation plan meant to address the city's chronic issues and meet its developmental requirements.

Briefing the media about the Karachi package at the Governor House on Saturday evening, the premier had said that the federal government was fully aware of the problems being faced by the people of Karachi over the past many years and the PTI government had now decided to resolve all the perennial issues of the metropolis.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 07/09/2020)

Can the Karachi plan revive the city's lifeline projects?

It's no secret that Karachi's a mess, falling prey to everything from political clashes and natural disasters to sheer negligence and incompetence - and endless snags in multiple development projects.

The recent rainfall appeared to be the last straw for the millions who call the city home. And with cries for change echoing all around, Prime Minister Imran Khan finally announced a Rs1.1 trillion 'Karachi Transformation Plan,' signifying intent to revive the metropolis by completing many of its languishing mega-projects.

But the question remains: will the plan suffice to revive the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) and complete the Greater Karachi Bulk Water Supply Project (K-IV) - two crucial projects that have been delayed for a multitude of reasons?

Wheels in motion?

Of Rs572 billion reserved for transport infrastructure in Karachi Transformation Plan, Rs305.23 billion has been earmarked for KCR's restoration.

An intra-city rail service connecting what are now the South, East, West and Central districts, the project was originally set in motion in 1964. At its peak, it ran 104 trains a day, facilitating thousands of commuters.

The wheels ground to a halt in 1999, and the tracks rusted away, encroached by vegetation and illegal structures until the Centre made the first solid move towards restoring it. In 2008, it incorporated the Karachi Urban Transport Corporation into the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, visualising it as the regulatory body to oversee KCR's revival.

Following this, Japan International Corporation Agency entered the scene, working on solutions for the KCR's revival, including the resettlement of those displaced by it, with plans to undertake the project on soft loans.

But differences soon arose.

In November 2016, The Express Tribune reported a deadlock between JICA and the Sindh government over the agency's financial commitments. Meanwhile, reports accusing the Sindh government of planning irregularities in the project also emerged, eventually resulting in JICA stepping back.

The project was then included in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on the Sindh chief minister's request and then-PM Nawaz Sharif's orders. The Rs249.2 billion project was to be handed over to Sindh, which was to see its completion with Chinese funding.

What ensued were further delays and shirked responsibilities.

The matter was taken up by the Supreme Court this year, with the apex court setting deadlines after deadlines for KCR's revival - which the authorities repeatedly failed to meet.

Now, as part of the Karachi Transformation Plan, the aim is to complete it in the coming three years, under Sindh's supervision, opening avenues for a city in desperate need of well-functioning public transport.

On paper, the initiative includes the replacement of the current track by a dual gauge track, allowing trains with different track gauges to pass. Laying the tracks along the 43.2km-long KCR path alone would cost Rs300 billion, of which Rs249.2 billion is to be borrowed from China, with Sindh providing the rest.

Separately, Pakistan Railways has also been restoring a part of the track, aiming to set two trains running from Orangi in motion in the coming three months, in line with court orders.

The track from City to SITE station has been restored, while the track from City to Orangi station is yet to be restored. The remaining track will be restored and underpasses and overhead bridges constructed in the second phase by the Sindh government.

Let it flow

Apart from the KCR project, the long-awaited K-IV bulk water project has also been included in the plan.

Of Rs92 billion set aside of water supply projects in Karachi Transformation Plan, Rs80 billion has been reserved for the execution of K-IV's first phase - which has been embroiled in controversies over financial and design-related issues. As a result, work has been stalled for the past year, even as the city struggles with a worsening water crisis.

K-IV's foundation stone was laid in 2016 and it was to be completed in two years. Four years on, only 20 per cent of the work has been done.

The project aims to supply 260 million gallons of water per day (MGD) to the city, building a 121km canal system from Keenjhar Lake to Karachi.

Experts outline three major hurdles for the project: its route, design and increase in construction cost over the years. However, they said, issues regarding its design were resolved three months ago, with the consultant given two months to fix it.

On the other hand, they see light at the end of the tunnel with the PM announcing funds for the project under the Karachi Transformation Plan, hoping it will suffice to resolve cost-related problems.

Earlier, the Sindh government had tasked the National Engineering Services Pakistan to review its design, with the latter submitting a report three months ago. But this gave rise to a new problem: the report stated it was necessary to alter the project's route, increasing the cost.

Subsequently, a technical committee was set up to review NESPAK's report. Though it rejected the change in route - NESPAK's main proposal - it concluded there were design issues that needed to be address.

Work on the project reportedly restarted gradually a few months ago.

But, even though Phase 1 will ease the crisis, it will take more than its completion to rid Karachi's of its water woes. Hence, the second and third phases, supplying 390MGD of water out of the 650MGD capacity, are equally important.

Acknowledging Karachi's water shortage, the PM announced K-IV's inclusion in his plan, saying that both Sindh and the Centre would contribute to Phase 1. Following this, the city's water scarcity problem would be permanently resolved within three years, the PM promised.

Whether this promise comes to fruition, though, is yet to be seen.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 07/09/2020)

Transforming Karachi

Karachi has finally come under the much-needed national focus — thanks, unfortunately, to the recent record-breaking monsoon rains in the city that triggered unprecedented urban flooding and caused widespread damages — to the lives, civic infrastructure as well as public and private property. With the massive flood devastation calling in question the performance of the authorities and portraying Karachi as a city nobody owns, the governments at the Centre and in Sindh province — more precisely the PTI and the PPP — finally decided to join forces for transforming Karachi within a span of three years, realising that if Karachi prospers, the whole country will, and vice versa.

Prime Minister Imran Khan thus came down to Karachi from the federal capital on Saturday along with his close aides and announced a historic Rs1.1 trillion 'Karachi Transformation Plan' that is aimed at ridding the financial capital of the country of the six major municipal and infrastructure issues it has been suffering from for years and years. Addressing a press conference alongside Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and Governor Imran Ismail, the PM said that the two governments had decided to deal with Karachi's problems "together", adding that the plan would be implemented through a Provincial Coordination Implementation Committee (PCIC) to be led by the Sindh CM.

As per the breakup of the Rs1.1 trillion package, the transformation plan features six mass transit projects worth Rs572 billion, including the Karachi Circular Railway, the Bus Rapid Transport and other transport services. Besides, Rs267 billion will be spent on projects related to solid waste management and cleaning of stormwater drains. An amount of Rs141 billion will be utilised for sewerage treatment. Projects worth Rs92 billion will ensure supply to clean drinking water to the citizens of Karachi. And Rs41 billion will be spent on several projects for construction and repair of roads.

And now we come to the most important question: where will the money come from? Well, according to Asad Umar, the Federal Minister for Planning, Development, Reforms and Special Initiatives, both Centre and the Sindh government will provide Rs400 billion each to ensure that the ambitious plan could be put into practice to complete within the three-year timeframe. The two sides are to spare the money from their development budgets. As for the provision of the remaining Rs300 billion, according to

the planning minister, talks have been in progress — with whom, he did not elaborate. However, it appears as if this monetary gap will be bridged through foreign funding.

Given the past experience, there are apprehensions as to the release of the funds that have been pledged and thus the realisation of the transformation plan. However, the air of harmony — which prevailed during the press conference that the PM addressed and the 'Karachi Committee' meeting prior to that — provides valid reasons for all stakeholders to harbour optimism this time around. The two sides avoided the typical war of words that describes the kind of working relation that they have developed over the last couple of years, and singularly focussed on Karachi and its various problems during the PM's six-hour stay in Karachi. That the PM accepted the Sindh CM in the lead role does go to show that the two rival parties are ready to bury the hatchet for the sake of Karachi — in fact, for the sake of the whole country.

It remains to be seen though how the two sides rise above their political interests and complement each other's efforts. They will, anyhow, have to. If Karachi is to be prevented from a total collapse, a strong PPP-PTI partnership is a must.
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 07/09/2020)

Karachi: the sinking metropolis

Torrential rains over the past few weeks swept away the city of Karachi, brought it to a standstill and resulted in economic losses worth billions of rupees. The broken sewerage network, clogged stormwater drains and unplanned construction left little space for rainwater to drain, which ultimately found its way through people's homes, offices and enterprises, sweeping away their fortunes.



But was it just the rains? Looking deeper, it becomes clear that the issue is much graver. The rains only washed away the façade of a functioning city and exposed its ugly vulnerabilities.

Karachi is one of the 10 worst cities in the world on the Global Liveability Index. The metropolis has a population of 16 million, though many claim that this is grossly understated. With the exception of a few posh localities, the city is densely populated with dreadful air quality, poor road infrastructure, low-quality public transport system and severe water shortage. As per the World Bank, urban green-space is now merely 4% of the city's built-up area; 60% or less population has access to public sewerage; and 45 citizens compete for every bus seat compared to 12 in Mumbai.

Last week, the Prime Minister announced a grand Karachi Transformation Plan worth Rs1.1 trillion, to improve water supply, drainage and public infrastructure. The plan would be supervised by a committee headed by the Chief Minister Sindh.

But before this plan can be executed, there are two critical issues that need to be addressed: political economy and governance. Political economy will ultimately decide who picks the tab for the promised development, while governance would dictate who gets to spend this money and how.

On the political front, PPP's rule in Sindh has left little room or resources for the local governments to function effectively. Karachi being the bastion of MQM has been getting peanuts, despite the fact that it contributes 12-15% to the national GDP. Over the next 10 years, the city is expected to contribute \$330-450 billion to the country's economy. As per World Bank estimates, the city needs around \$9-10 billion over the same period to finance its infrastructure and service delivery needs. This means that even if we plough back 2-3% of what the city contributes to the economy, it can be rescued. But misaligned incentives have so far prevented this.

Moreover, Sindh has an annual development outlay of merely Rs170 billion, while the federal public sector development programme is Rs650 billion. Even if both the federal and provincial governments, along with development partners, pick the tab for Karachi's transformation, they are likely to take years and will have to compromise on other constituencies craving for resources.

Then comes the governance. Across the world, there are many models followed to govern large cities, ranging from mayor-council structure to city commissions and professional city managers. But nowhere in the world is there as fragmented a structure as witnessed in Karachi. Although on paper the city is managed by Karachi Metropolitan Corporation headed by the mayor, there are scores of other agencies and entities diluting KMC's authority. These range from district municipal corporations with limited control of KMC, cantonment boards, Karachi District Council, Karachi Development Authority, Malir and Lyari development authorities, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board, Sindh Solid Waste Management Board, Sindh Building Control Authority and more. Everyone is keen to assert their jurisdiction when it's time to collect the rents, but no one is there to assume responsibility when it's time for accountability. This fragmented structure has been the primary reason that no development plan has ever been successful in Karachi.

Without having the political will and incentives for the decision-makers, as well as a single unified governance structure, transformation of Karachi will remain a distant dream.
(By Hassan Khawar The Express Tribune, 14, 08/09/2020)

Displaced families set up 'tent city' in Sindh

The downpour across Sindh last month left scores of families displaced. A new 'tent city' has formed on the outskirts of Umerkot city, with roughly 70,000 families from Sanghar, Mirpurkhas and Umerkot districts having found refuge at a desert mound near Pakistan Chowk, Umerkot. The displaced families have made makeshift arrangements and set up camp.

Over 90 per cent of those displaced, comprise of Hindus belonging to the Odh, Meghwar, Kolhi, Bheel, Gurgula and other subcastes. The remaining consist of Machhi, Solangi and Khaskheli Muslim families. Most of those camping at the site are farmers and daily wage-earners. By government estimates, around 700,000 displaced people are in Umerkot district.

"We were five families living near Bacha Band and all [of us] have moved here in search of a safe place," Bhemo Bheel told The Express Tribune. "We were moving towards Mithi but stopped at this place."

Bhemo complained that no one had provided his family with ration or tents. "Nothing has been given to us as yet," he said. "But at least we are safe here from stagnant water and mosquitoes."

"Cooked rice is given to my family once a day and that's something I should be thankful to God [for]," said Naseeba Odha, with a toddler in arm. Naseeba's family, along with several others displaced by the rains in Sanghar district, had arrived in Umerkot in search of safety. "We all travelled, found this place an ideal one". Naseeba could not say for how long she and the others would stay at the mound.

Meanwhile, families from Sindhry, Khipro, Pithoro, Sufi Faqeer and other remote areas are moving towards Umerkot along with their belongings and livestock.

According to the inhabitants of 'tent city', dozens of other families from across Mirpurkhas division are heading to Umerkot, or moving to other areas of Tharparker desert.

Bhemo is of the view that a new settlement is forming at the dessert mound. "I can see people coming [here] day and night," he said, adding that a new city was being established. "May be bigger than Umerkot city," he smiled.

'No government support'

The makeshift 'tent city' spreads across either side of the Umerkot-Mithi road, extending over an area of over five kilometres.

A medical camp set up by the Sindh government can be seen at the site with some police personnel deployed to oversee the law and order situation. There appears to be no other government intervention at the camp nor are there visible efforts from any non-governmental organisation (NGO). The people displaced by torrential rains appear to be fending for themselves.

Sanghari, a mother with four kids, says no one has visited them in the past one week. "I need nothing but food for my kids," she said, both hands extended in search for assistance.

No end in sight

"Roughly 70,000 families have reached Umerkot," confirmed Sardar Ali Shah - Sindh government's focal person for the region and provincial culture and tourism minister.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Shah said that all 8,000 tents he received have been distributed in different parts of the district. "The number of displaced people in Umerkot district is about 700,000," he added.

Commenting on the situation, the provincial minister said that he expected the displaced families who have sought refuge in Umerkot district to be there not for days but for months. "Going back to their homes seems a bit difficult as their houses are submerged in knee-deep water".

Twice displaced

The families in 'tent city' say this is the second time that mass migration has occurred in the region.

"We were badly hit by the floods and rains in 2011," said Gulab Odh. However, government intervention and support by NGOs was huge in 2011, according to Gulab, who believes the situation for those living in tents will only become even more critical in the coming days. "I don't see anything similar now," he said referring to the assistance received in 2011, even as everyone looks towards the government for support.

"At least we saved our kids and livestock," says Gulab. The main challenge for him and other families, as he sees, is to protect their children and animals. "They are what we have, and we have to protect them".
(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 09/09/2020)

Building collapses in Korangi

A four-storey residential building collapsed in Korangi's Allahwala Town on Thursday, killing at least one person and leaving several others wounded. More people are feared to be trapped in the rubble, with rescue efforts continuing late into the night.



As dust billowed in the air after the structure caved in, police, Rangers, local administration officials and rescue volunteers rushed to the spot. Personnel from the Pakistan Army also took part in the operation to find those buried in the debris.

Army personnel used thermal sensors and motion sensors to try to locate those buried in the rubble based on the direction from which their voices were coming, while rescuers carefully removed debris so as to avoid further injury to those trapped underneath.

The body of a child was retrieved from the rubble and shifted to Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, along with at least six injured residents. The deceased was identified as 15-year-old Waqas, while the injured included Ayub, his two teenaged daughters Nazish and Kiran, Rani Iqbal, her 14-year-old daughter Reema, and Nisha. Another injured teenager, Mehek, was also rushed to the Indus Hospital.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Waqas' father Muhammad Hanif said he had rented a shop on the building's ground floor, adding that the builder, Muhammad Ayub, also lived in a portion on the ground floor. "When it appeared the building was unstable after the rain, we wanted to leave, but the builder guaranteed it would not collapse," he lamented, adding that Ayub was constructing pillars in the structure.

Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput, who was present at the site, told The Express Tribune that army engineers were engaged in the efforts, while more rescue teams were also arriving. He stated that it was difficult to accurately estimate how many people were in the building at the time, but added that the local administration was trying to save as many lives as possible.

Meanwhile, a traffic police official told The Express Tribune that his wife and two children were trapped under the rubble. According to head constable Muhammad Zulfiqar, he was on duty at the time the building fell, but his wife Ayesha, 11-year-old daughter and nine-year-old son were at home.

He added that Ayub's wife and two daughters were stuck in the debris as well.

Rain damage

According to area residents, recent monsoon rains had led to the accumulation of rainwater in the area, standing stagnant for several days. This reportedly weakened the building's foundations and led to its tilting forward - and, ultimately, to its collapse. Residents had filed complaints about the weakened structure with the Korangi district municipal corporation as well as the Korangi deputy commissioner's (DC) office.

Prior to the incident, the DC, Sheheryar Memon, had visited the site and declared the building unfit. He ordered its evacuation and while some families had moved out of their apartments, a number of residents were still in the building when it collapsed.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Memon said he had given directives for the building to be evacuated two days prior to its caving in. "The building was weakened due to the recent rainfall," he said. "While most of its occupants had [temporarily] relocated after a contractor assured them it would be repaired, two families were still living there."

He went on to say that one of the neighbouring buildings was seriously damaged, with its foundations weakened due to the collapse, and had also been vacated, while another was partially damaged.

The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has also declared the structure as an illegal construction, with SBCA director-general Ashkar Dawar claiming it was built on a china cutting plot, without any building plans being approved by the relevant authorities.

Located near Rashidia Mosque, the building in question was built on an 80-yard plot, with two apartments on each of its four floors, while the ground floor had two shops and an apartment as well.

(By Munawar Khan The Express Tribune, 04, 11/09/2020)

Planning Karachi

A MAJOR flaw in the system exposed in the recent heavy monsoon rains in Karachi was that over a period of several decades, due to criminal neglect on the part of the authorities, sewage is disposed of in storm-water drains by both unofficial katchi abadis and formal sector schemes with official sanction. These drains have also been blocked by encroachments. All this resulted in the flooding and overflowing of sewage all over the place.



What Karachi needs immediately is a technical assessment of the urban flooding disaster carried out by experts, along with democratic consultation with the public and local stakeholders, before any drainage improvement and sewage disposal schemes are proposed. The objective should be to make this a part of proper town planning in order to create a master plan for Karachi. Otherwise, making a plan without coordination with the various stakeholders and departments would be tantamount to pouring more concrete and steel into the already heavily built-up metropolis, resulting in worse urban flooding in the future.

Briefly, the immediate need is: (i) The appointment of a panel of experts as a planning body; (ii) public consultations (conducted with the help of the panel); (iii) a city master plan and project designs based on research/technical assessment of urban flooding impacts and stakeholder consultations. Not following these guidelines would be like saying we can make a building more quickly if we skip laying the foundations.

The master plan should be implemented by one empowered municipal government, which is responsible for the planning and problems of all of Karachi and overlooks all areas, including the cantonments. This will do away with the confusion of having multiple and uncoordinated authorities. This was also agreed to in the Master Plan 2020 prepared for Karachi, but which was never implemented.

The city needs a technical assessment of urban flooding.

Any master planning done for the city must take sustainability, with its core concerns for environment, social equity and economics, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation, into account. This enables focus on aspects such as a zero-carbon economy, energy efficiency, water efficiency, rainwater harvesting, storm-water storage and groundwater recharge. Sustainable public transportation and green architecture and industry become essentials. Building by-laws would then also be revised keeping sustainability and climate change adaptation in mind.

Karachi has suffered from many extreme weather events — heatwaves, drought, urban flooding — which are expected to get worse with time — along with sea-level rise already being witnessed in the Indus Delta. This metropolis also serves as the hub for Pakistan's climate refugees from other regions.

Pakistan is a signatory to the UN Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs), and the Paris Climate Agreement, which are designed to address what our country is going through. The Pakistan Environment Protection Act, 1997, requires public consultations on large project planning. The national and provincial climate change action plans also commit to this way of thinking.

The Pakistan National Climate Change Policy, 2012, identifies both disaster preparedness and well-coordinated town planning as major areas for preparation for climate change (with Karachi and Lahore mentioned by name as the largest cities needing urgent and extensive planning) that can bring all challenges, including those of water and energy, together effectively.

This planning before development work would need to be paired with the revision of the city's building by-laws which would incorporate the revised drainage and sewage guidelines as well as what are referred to as 'green building norms' around the world (including our neighbouring countries which are just as poor). These norms address the environmental crisis and climate change adaptation agenda. At the moment, our buildings are unbearable with regard to heatwaves and other extreme weather events and are highly energy inefficient, further wasting our dwindling water and energy resources.

It is high time that we brought the discourse on SDGs and climate change adaptation into our local and national planning, as we have been promised by the highest quarters. Or are we, as technocrats and educated citizens, expected to believe that all these conventions we signed onto through our elected heads of state and the laws that were passed by our elected representatives, as well as all standard planning and building practices that we were taught as being essential from an ethical, legal, engineering, health and safety point of view, are only meant to look good on paper but are actually a farce? Can they be thrown out of the window whenever some lower, more selfish gains come to tempt us?

(By Sameeta Ahmed Dawn, 07, 11/09/2020)

Teenager dies, seven injured in Korangi building collapse

A teenage male died while at least seven other people were injured in the multistorey residential building that collapsed in Korangi on Thursday. The structure was allegedly built illegally on encroached land of an amenity plot spread over 80 square feet through 'china-cutting', said officials and witnesses.



Three family members of a policeman living in the building were still feared to be under the debris.

"Seven injured persons have been rescued so far while one body has been recovered," said Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput who visited the site.

"All available resources, including machinery and equipment, have been mobilised and search and rescue operation is going on under supervision of the deputy commissioner of Korangi," added the commissioner.

Another officer, Korangi SP Shahnawaz Chachar, said that the building was located near Rasheedia Masjid in Allahwala Town. The SP said he rushed to the spot along with four cranes, which removed debris and rescued the persons.

'There are so many other buildings in this area that have weak foundations'

Army's engineering corps, Rangers, and rescue services also rushed to the spot and launched the rescue operation.

The SP apprehended that around four to five persons were still under debris. Later on, the Karachi police spokesperson said that three family members of traffic police officer Zulfiqar — his wife Ms Ayesha and two children, Arsalan, 9, and Sana, 11 — were under the debris and efforts were under way to save them.

Mr Chachar recalled that the building was constructed by a private contractor/builder about four years ago.

He opined that after recent heavy rains, its condition deteriorated as reportedly its basement was filled with rainwater, which prompted the authorities to order the residents to get it vacated.

The Korangi SP estimated that earlier 40 to 50 people were residing in the building and a majority of them had vacated the building two days ago.

Only two families were still living there.

He suggested that the exact cause of collapse of the building may be known after a proper inquiry by experts.

“We received 15-year-old Waqas who was brought dead and seven injured persons,” said Dr Seemin Jamali, executive director of the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre. All injured persons were stable, added Dr Jamali.

The wounded persons were identified as Mohammed Ayub, 45, his two daughters Nazish, 17, and Kiran, 15, Ms Rani Iqbal, 40, and her two daughters, Reema, 14 and Mehak, 15 and Ms Nisha Fahim, 32.

Sindh Building Control Authority director for Korangi Asif Rizvi reportedly told media that the building was constructed “illegally”. “The building was built on china-cutting land, which had no map or approval,” added the officer.

Eyewitness accounts

Among the chaos, confusion and panic soon after the collapse of the five-storey KDA Heights on Street 12 in Sector 31-B of KDA Employees Society at around 2.15pm on Thursday, there was one voice that could be heard very clearly. It was the voice of a young boy coming from the rubble. He was crying for help. “Help me! Get me out! Can anyone hear me? I can’t move, there’s a pillar over me!”

The boy identified himself as Waqas. Waqas was minding his father’s kabarrhi (recycling goods) shop located on the ground floor of the building at the time while his father had stepped out for a bit to run some errands. The neighbourhood people tried their best to remove the rubble and pull out the injured boy but they couldn’t seem to get to him. And by the time more help appeared the cries for help had died down. Two hours later, they pulled out the body of 14-year-old Waqas.

By the time his father, Mohammad Hanif, reached the spot, the son’s remains had been moved to a morgue. “He was my only son, the only brother of my three daughters! What will I do? Oh God! Who do I blame for my son’s death? I wish I had died instead,” the grief-stricken father screamed. “I hold the building owner responsible for the murder of my child for this is no accident, this is murder!”

There were some five families residing in the building. There were police, army and other people trying to find the occupants of the building in the rubble. They were successful in pulling out three women and a man alive from the top floor, which they were able to get to first.

Nabikh Rashid said that they had pulled out his maternal uncle and his wife and two daughters alive. “My uncle, Ayub Siddiqui, is suffering from a head injury but my aunt and cousins have minor injuries. Please pray for my uncle,” he said.

Ejaz Alavi, an eyewitness, said that he was visiting a recently-completed building in the same street and was just getting off his motorcycle when he heard some strange sounds. “It sounded like the breaking of bamboo poles. Turning around, I saw it happen right before my very eyes. I saw huge cracks developing within a split second and those cracks opened up to give way to the collapsing roofs and walls. It was quick thinking on my part to immediately get back on my bike and get myself to a safe distance otherwise even I would have been buried under the rubble,” he said.

Sewage, rainwater flooding street

All streets leading to the building were flooded with sewage.

Amir, a resident of the area, said they have made several complaints about the gutter water flooding their area after the rains, but all have fallen on deaf ears. “It is this rainwater mixed with sewage that is going into the foundations of the buildings here. The steel bars used in the construction of these buildings have been rusting and swelling up to weaken the buildings,” he pointed out.

Talking specifically about the collapsed building, Amir said that when he had moved to the neighbourhood in 2011, it only had two storeys. “They gradually added floors to it. The fifth floor was added to KDA Heights this year only,” he said.

Main pillar collapsed three days ago

Ilyas Hussain, another neighbour, said that three days ago the main supporting pillar in KDA Heights had collapsed. “The building had started developing big cracks and was also shaking after that,” he said, adding that one of the building residents had called ‘15’ after that.

“The building was visited by police. They said they’ll be sending an expert to look into the structure but they did not return,” Ilyas said.

Nur Wahid added to what Ilyas said. “When something as important as a pillar collapses, the load of the structure then falls on the remaining pillars and walls. The building should have been evacuated immediately. This was a tragedy waiting to happen,” he said, shaking his head with regret.

He also added that now the neighbouring building and the one adjacent to KDA Heights had also been affected. “They have become dangerously weak also.”

Tooba Ahsan, a student, who had arrived at the scene with her mother from their place nearby, said that she thought that she had heard something but could not figure out what it could be exactly until she heard ambulance sirens. “What has happened is terrible.

But there are so many other buildings in this very area that have weak foundations and poor construction. I can show you another building right here, in Allahwala Town just behind KDA Employees Society, which doesn’t even have a deep foundation and its builders are adding extra floors to it,” she said.

Another area resident disclosed that the KDA Employees Society is not even legal. “This place where these buildings have come up is an amenity area reserved for a children’s park,” he informed.

(By Imtiaz Ali & Shazia Hasan 13, 11/09/2020)

Another building collapse

IN the third such incident of the year, Karachi witnessed another multistorey building collapse, this time in Korangi. Four people died while at least six were treated in hospital. Earlier in June, a five-storey building collapsed in the Lyari area claiming at least 22 lives. Similarly, at least 27 people died in March when another incident occurred in the city’s Gulbahar area. According to the Sindh Building Control Authority, the multistorey residential building was illegal and had been constructed on a plot carved out of an amenity plot, a practice known as china cutting. Though the building was built only four years ago, the recent rains had apparently weakened its foundations when water accumulated in the basement. However, when no lessons are learned, it becomes pointless to ask why the building authorities allowed the illegal allotment and selling of the land and the construction of a building on it in the first place. Numerous such structures exist and a large number of neighbourhoods in the city have been built on amenity plots. With poor-quality construction and frequent violation of building regulations, it is no surprise when such tragedies befall residents living in these death traps.

It is not enough to merely state that such construction is illegal and order an inquiry when buildings collapse. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court too took notice of the poor performance of the SBCA and ordered the Sindh government to overhaul the agency. But it is not the SBCA alone which can tackle the mammoth task of tidying up the numerous unregulated housing societies and structures in a city of 20m. Successive governments have neglected the city’s needs and failed to pay any attention to the grave housing crisis that is now imploding with the mushrooming of illegal structures. To prevent further tragedies of this kind, the authorities must set up an independent oversight body, as per the SBCA Ordinance, that monitors illegal structures and the quality of construction in buildings across the city.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 12/09/2020)

Building collapse death toll rises to four

The death toll of victims of the multistorey residential building collapse in Allahwala Town in Korangi on Friday rose to four as three more bodies of the same family were recovered from the debris, said officials.

The three bodies of the same family — a woman and her two children — were brought to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre on Friday morning, said Dr Seemin Jamali, executive director of the hospital. The victims were identified as Ayesha, 37, Arsalan, 9, and Ahen, 11.

The police said that the deceased were wife and children of traffic police officer Mohammed Zulfiqar, who was living in the building.

A teenage boy, Waqas, had died when he came under the debris on Thursday. The district administration and the Sindh Building Control Authority have launched an inquiry to ascertain possible causes of the collapse of and fix its responsibility.

Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput who visited the site on Thursday said he had ordered an inquiry into the incident and directed the administration to submit preliminary report urgently.

Separately, Karachi Administrator Iftikhar Ali Shallwani, who also visited the place on Thursday, said that inquiry would be held to ascertain the reason behind building collapse.

He said that three- to five-storey buildings had been built in many residential areas of Karachi where only ground-plus one was permissible.

“Action will be taken against [those] responsible for allowing such constructions as such buildings are dangerous for human lives.”

The deputy commissioner of Korangi said that another adjacent building was also adversely affected after the building collapse and it was in dangerous position too.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 12/09/2020)

Two die, 10 hurt as another building collapses in city



Two people were killed and 10 others injured when a two-storey building collapsed in Lyari’s Bihar Colony on Sunday morning, officials and witnesses said.

It was a second incident in the city in less than a week as on Thursday a multi-storey building collapsed in Korangi's Allah Wala Town resulting in death of four people.

Speaking to Dawn, City SSP Muqaddas Haider said that the building collapsed at around 10am. There were warehouses on the ground floor while some rooms were built on the upper floors where mostly labourers lived, he added.

Several people trapped under the rubble of the collapsed building and rescue services aided by law enforcement agencies launched an operation and saved 12 persons.

The rescued persons were shifted to the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi, where two of them were pronounced dead on arrival. The deceased were identified as Hayat Khan, 40, and Jan Mohammed, 30. They originally hailed from Bajaur.

Police say the building in Bihar Colony was illegally constructed; FIR lodged against four builders

The wounded were identified as Abdul Rehman, 30, Dawood, 25, Habib, 45, Umair Khan, 30, Sher Khan, 40, Samiullah, 25, Riaz, 18, Habib, 25, Umer Khan, 20, and Saeed Mohammed.

Chakiwara SHO Ayub Soomro told Dawn that condition of one of the injured was said to be critical.

Four builders booked in manslaughter case

SSP Haider said that it appeared that the structure of the collapsed building was faulty and it was further weakened due to construction of another building on an adjacent empty plot.

"It appears to be the criminal negligence of the owners of the both buildings," he said.

Later, the Chakiwara police registered a case against four owners/builders of the nearby plot and collapsed building — Ali Marjan, Farooq Baloch, Ramzan and Jan under Sections 288 (negligent conduct with respect to pulling down or repairing buildings), 322 (manslaughter), 337-H(i) (punishment for hurt by rash or negligent act), 427 (mischief causing damage to the amount of fifty rupees) and 34 (common intentions) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

The FIR said that suspects Marjan, Baloch and Ramzan used an excavator and created a ditch for constructing a building on an empty plot.

They were constructing the building illegally and without the approval of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA). Due to their alleged negligence, the structure of the nearby building was weakened.

The police said that the owner of the collapsed building had constructed his building with girders and without the approval of the SBCA and it collapsed because of his negligence.

Action against illegal buildings ordered

Karachi commissioner Sohail Rajput visited the site along with deputy commissioner-South Irshad Sodhar.

Speaking to Dawn, he said that the building was an old structure and it housed labourers from upcountry.

Mr Rajput said that several actions were being taken in the city to avoid such incidents in future.

The remaining structure of the collapsed building was demolished by the SBCA.

The commissioner said that all DCs had been directed to take legal action against all constructions in the city going on without obtaining approval from relevant agencies.

400 dilapidated buildings

City administrator Iftikhar Ali Shallwani also visited the site of the collapsed building and monitored the rescue work.

He said that more than 400 buildings were in a dilapidated condition in the city and notices were already issued to the residents for vacating their houses.

He appealed to citizens to cooperate with the authorities and vacate the dangerous buildings.

(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 14/09/2020)

Sindh govt vows to resist Islamabad's move to launch new city on two islands

Already strained relations between the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government at the centre and Sindh government of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) soured further on Monday when the provincial administration called Islamabad's move to launch new projects in islands neighbouring Karachi an attempt to "occupy" the provincial resources.

The PPP government vowed that it would not let the dream of the federal government come true and take every step to protect its natural assets in accordance with the Constitution.

“Bhandar [also known as Bundal Island] and Dangi Islands, where the federal government is planning to build new cities are in fact under the possession of Sindh,” said Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu in a statement, clarifying the position of the provincial government on the subject.

“The federation has not consulted Sindh to build a new city on Bhandar and Dangi Islands. The dream of the federation to build a new city on the coast of Sindh will never come true,” he said.

Minister Rahu says centre planning to ‘occupy’ Sindh’s islands by tabling Pakistan Islands Development Authority Act 2020

The Sindh government sounded aggressive against the proposed move of Islamabad, which came to light after President Arif Alvi held a meeting on Sunday with real estate tycoons and builders.

“Building the city on the beaches would destroy all aquatic life including fish and forests. General Musharraf’s attempts to build cities on Bhandar and Dangi Islands in the past also met with failure,” added Mr Rahu.

Bhandar, or Bundal Island, is located at the western end of the Sindh coastal zone bordering Korangi, Phitti and Jhari creeks. It is one of the biggest and highest of all the islands along the Sindh coast, with a length of about eight kilometres. The width of the island varies — it is about 4km wide in the north and 1km in the south. The island is the breeding ground of green turtles.

The sandy beaches — the east coast of Karachi — of these islands are the only areas where the endangered green turtles visit for breeding purposes. The area lies along the Indus Flyway and as such serves as an important breeding, roosting and feeding ground for migratory and resident bird species.

The migratory birds include pelicans, flamingos, cranes and resident species comprising herons, waders, terns, egrets, kites, etc.

President’s meeting sparks controversy

The fresh debate was triggered when President Alvi had on Sunday chaired a meeting at Governor House in Karachi to discuss the projects of Ravi City in Lahore and Bundal Island in Karachi with investors, real estate players and construction industry’s giants.

During the meeting, the investors had expressed their full satisfaction on the steps taken for the construction sector by Prime Minister Imran Khan. The president told the meeting that the Ravi City and Bundal Island projects were very much attractive for foreign investment and these projects would create various job opportunities.

However, the Sindh government is preparing itself to challenge the federal government’s move legally.

“The federal government is bringing Pakistan Islands Development Authority Act 2020 to occupy the coastal islands of Sindh and Balochistan, which is not acceptable,” said the Sindh minister.

“The federation could not amend Rule 27 (5) A and Rule 27 (8) 1973 for the authority without the permission of the provinces. Without the permission of the Sindh government, the federation could not build anything in any part of the province,” he said.

He said that according to the Constitution, up to 12 nautical miles of maritime boundaries fell within the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

“The federation will not be allowed to occupy the lands and resources of Sindh. The resources and natural assets of the province cannot be put at risk for such proposed developments,” he added.
(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 15/09/2020)

Civil society rejects plan to create new city on twin islands along Karachi coast

“It’s an attack on the rights of the province, it’s an attack on Sindhis, it’s an attack on the livelihood of fisherfolk, it will cause further destruction to the sea,” Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) chairman Mohammad Ali Shah commented on reports of construction of a new city on twin islands of Dangi and Bundal on Tuesday.

He did not mince any words when laying bare before the media his fears about how the construction of the new city on Dangi and Bundal islands on Karachi’s coast would affect the region as well as deprive thousands of local fishermen of their means of income. He was speaking at a press conference regarding the issue at the Karachi Press Club on Tuesday. It was organised by the PFF, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) and several representatives of civil society.

Move to create island authority slammed

Criticising the federal government’s proposal to create a Pakistan Islands Development Authority for the development of the two islands, Mr Shah said that there were around 300 big and small islands along Sindh’s coastal belt which were created over the years from silt from the River Indus.

He said that the creek areas leading to the sea around these islands were used by fishing boats and after the creation of the new city the poor fishermen would need to look for alternative routes.

‘You are not even able to manage your city and you want to build a new one?’

"This is not development. It is destruction," he said.

He also discussed Pakistan's 1,050-kilometre-long coastal belt where he feared all the islands would be taken into control by the federal government.

"A bill for the establishment of an authority has been prepared, reportedly. It would be presented in parliament for approval. But, the major reason behind the establishment of this authority is to take control of the twin islands and construct a new city there," he said.

Previous attempts by Musharraf, PPP govt

Mr Shah said that the Musharraf government had twice attempted, in 2000 and 2006, to develop the twin islands but the project failed due to various reasons. Later, in 2013, the PPP government had also tried to develop the islands through Malik Riaz but the Supreme Court put a ban on the construction.

"Moreover, besides the twin islands, a city called Waterfront Sugarland City, comprising an area of over 60,000 acres was also planned at Hawkesbay. The project with an estimated cost of Rs68 billion was also mentioned on the then city district government's website," he provided.

"The federal government has decided to construct the city on the twin islands without any consultation with the Sindh government, but the area falls under the provincial jurisdiction. The federal government's action is not only against the Constitution of Pakistan, it is also against international agreements and conventions in place to provide social, economic and cultural sovereignty to the indigenous people. Dingi and Bundal are in fact Sindh's islands. They are the property of the people of Sindh where the fishermen have traditional rights over them while the provincial government is the custodian of the land and forests," the PFF chief pointed out. He added that the islands also happen to be bordered by thousands of hectares of mangrove forests.

"These forests are fish and shrimp nurseries while these creeks from Karachi to Thatta serve as fishing grounds for the fishermen," he said.

Call to hold public hearing

PILER's Karamat Ali said that there should be a public hearing regarding the matter to at least hear out the stakeholders.

"Here you are not even able to manage your city and you want to build a new one?" He pointed out. "You cannot manage your solid waste. Besides the coming up of a new city will lead to environmental degradation and then there will be a chain reaction of further destruction. Out here some four million acres of land in Badin and Thatta are already under water due to inland sea movement," he added.

"Do you think your unscrupulous builders are even capable of building a new city? Do not burden Karachi any further," he said. Aurat Foundation director Mahnaz Rahman also said that Karachi was already in a mess with constructions on amenity plots and china-cutting. "We don't need any more mess thanks to more greed," she said.

Asad Iqbal Butt of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said that already marine life around Karachi was under stress. "We are diverting all untreated and industrial waste to our sea which is having very diverse affects on our marine life. The new city will add to it," he said.

Senior trade unionists Habibuddin Junaidi said that the move was a direct attack on the labour force. "Fishermen, too, are a part of our labour force," he said.

Saeed Baloch, PFF's general secretary, pointed out that if the fishermen can no longer use the creeks to get to the sea and have to look for alternative routes, it will lead to a rise in their fuel needs, which in turn will make fish more expensive. (By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 16/09/2020)

Constructions in Bahria Town without approved plan stopped

The Sindh High Court on Tuesday restrained Bahria Town Karachi from raising constructions in violation of the approved plan and building regulations.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Shafi Siddiqui issued notices to the provincial authorities, Bahria Town and other respondents as well as the advocate general with direction to file comments after four weeks.

However, the bench also questioned the petitioner, a regular litigant, for filing hundreds of cases under the garb of public interest litigation and asked the Sindh Bar Council (SBC) and Sindh High Court Bar Association (SHCBA) for assistance in this regard.

SHC questions locus standi of petitioner, calls bar associations for assistance

Mehmood Akhtar Naqvi filed two petitions against alleged illegal constructions in Bahria Town Karachi stating that such constructions were going on without any approval of the building plan and regulations as none of the authorities had accorded any approval.

The petitioner submitted that this matter came within the public interest litigation and hence he had a locus standi to file these petitions.

In the second petition, he submitted that he was also a resident of Bahria Town and challenged the construction being raised on its premises.

The bench said that the petitioner had not placed any title or approval of the premises where he himself was residing as he had to show equity to have equity.

The petitioner said that he would file the copy of the approval plan of the house/villa he had shown in the title of the petition before the next hearing.

The bench observed that the petitioner was filing such cases as pro bono under the garb of public interest, adding that no doubt such cases were being dealt with in view of the judgements of Supreme Court as public interest litigation. But, the petitioner was quite frequently filing these kinds of petitions under the garb of public interest as being a professional advocate, it added.

“Though we issue notices to the respondents as well as AG Sindh, however we also would like to hear petitioner as to whether he, by filing hundreds of cases could well be considered as pro bono and could permit petitioner to act like a professional advocate,” the bench in its order said.

The court also directed its office to provide the list of all the cases filed by the petitioner with details of their disposal and pendency as well as the nature of such petitions.

It also issued notices to the SBC and SHCBA to assist it on this issue.

“To come up after four weeks. In the meantime no construction be raised in violation of approved plan and/or regulations,” the bench ruled.

It also issued direction to club the identical petitions filed by the petitioners for joint hearing since a common question was involved in such petitions.

Meanwhile, the same bench on Tuesday issued similar directions for the petitioner in another petition filed against alleged encroachments around and upon the Malir River.

Mr Naqvi alleged that an MNA of PPP from Malir district by using his office had encroached upon a vast area of the Malir River and carved out plots/houses for further sale to the public.

The bench issued notices to the respondents and the advocate general, but also directed the petitioner to argue whether the matter be considered as pro bono and could permit him to act like a professional lawyer.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 16/09/2020)

No historical building of Karachi will be given to any institution, declares Shallwani

City Administrator Iftikhar Ali Shallwani on Wednesday said that historic buildings of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation would not be given to any other institution as these were assets of the citizens.

“Neither the structure of these buildings could be altered nor could they be given to any other institution,” he said, adding that if any memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed for handing over of any building to other institutions, it would be considered as cancelled in the light of Supreme Court’s directives.

He said that the law department of the city’s municipal administration was taking measures in this regard.

The administrator passed these remarks while visiting Khaliqdina Hall and Library here.

Mr Shallwani said that great nations always took care of their historic assets and preserved their establishments.

He said furniture and other necessities should be provided to the library so that readers could be facilitated. He also asked the Student Welfare Organisation of the Khaliqdina Hall and Library to play its role in making the library fully functional.

Says all MoUs for handing over city’s assets stand cancelled in pursuance of apex court’s directive

The administrator while reviewing the uplift work for the hall, directed the officials concerned to complete the work within six months. He also passed directives for planting trees and renovation of the park inside the hall so that the people could be given a healthy environment.

Mr Shallwani also visited office of the Students Welfare Organisation established in 1951 and appreciated it for assisting needy students for so long. He asked the body to continue this great work.

He also directed officials concerned to hold KMC events at Khaliqdina Hall, Markaz-i-Islami and other KMC structures instead of expensive five-star hotels.

"Organising KMC's cultural and educational events at these places would not only increase the importance of the places but also help the KMC in saving huge amount," he said.

Meets German envoy

German Consul General Holger Ziegeler on Wednesday called on Administrator Shallwani at his office and discussed matters of mutual interest.

The administrator received the counsel general upon his arrival and expressed gratitude for visiting the KMC building.

Mr Ziegeler wished him all the luck on taking charge as the city administrator and said that Germany was making investments in different sectors in Pakistan.

Mr Shallwani said that Pakistan was using heavy machinery and equipment made in Germany. "Germany is amongst the world's most developed countries and both the countries could learn from each other's experience," he added.

The administrator said that Karachi had unique importance in the region owing to its geographical situation and it was a gateway for the Middle East and Central Asia.

"There are two ports and an international airport in Karachi while different industrial zones are also contributing to the economy of Pakistan," he said.

Mr Shallwani said that keeping in view importance of the city, many uplift works were going to be initiated soon to develop its infrastructure. He said that after the development works, the city would continue playing its role as the backbone of the county's economy.

The German CG expressed best wishes for the projects and said that Karachi had unique importance as it was the biggest city of Pakistan.

He hoped that the city's people would get better facilities in future.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 17/09/2020)

One hurt as portion of garment factory collapses in SITE

A man was injured when a portion of a garment factory, whose structure got weakened after the recent heavy rains, collapsed in SITE on Monday afternoon, officials and rescuers said.

They added that a portion of the industrial unit, which spreads over an area of around 4,000 square yards, collapsed near Siemens Chowrangi. Reportedly, two labourers came under the debris as all other workers had gone for lunch and prayer when the incident took place.

Police, Rangers and rescue services rushed to the spot and launched rescue operation.

A man was recovered alive from the debris and sent to hospital for treatment.

Police Surgeon Qarar Ahmed Abbasi said that Mustaqeem Amir, 23, was brought to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for treatment.

Commissioner orders SITE chief to conduct survey of all 'dangerous' buildings

The factory administration told the media that the incident occurred at lunch/prayer time and only two workers were present. One of them suffered minor injuries and was sent home while another was sent to hospital for treatment and his condition was out of danger.

'Building portion collapsed within seconds'

Inside the factory premises, there were 20 to 25 ambulances parked to pull out the victims from underneath the portion that had collapsed.

The factory owners had latched the main gate from inside as police and Rangers personnel helped with the relief work. The first person that they were able to pull out from the wreckage was from one of the bathrooms.

The garment factory had an untidy facade. Somewhere the faded yellow building with peeling paint was two-storeys high and somewhere it was three storeys. At many places it had plain brick walls with no paint or plaster and blue cylindrical fibreglass water tanks placed on top of the overhanging eaves.

"It was a little after Zohr prayers. Having said my prayers I was going back to the factory to ask what my colleagues wanted for lunch from the little eatery next door when I saw a pillar break. There were steel bars protruding from it as it reduced to pieces before my very eyes," said Ahmed Raza, a worker at the partially collapsed garment factory.

"I shouted for everyone to come out immediately. I could see it was just a matter of seconds before the building portion collapsed, and it did before everyone escaped," he added.

The shock of what he had witnessed was making him speak very quickly as if the faster he spoke the faster they'll get those trapped underneath the rubble out.

Mr Raza said that the factory comprising various departments such as the design department, cutting and stitching department, modelling department, packaging department, etc.

He said that as far as he knew, the women workers, all assigned to the cutting and stitching department, which is intact, were safe and those trapped under the wreckage were all men. He said he was himself associated with the packaging department, which collapsed.

He also said that he had been working at the factory for three years now and earned around Rs17,000. He landed the job soon after coming to Karachi from Umerkot.

Local Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf leader Amjad Afridi was also one of the people standing outside the closed factory gates. "I have been informed by some factory workers here that they had been complaining for the past 20 days about the now-collapsed portion developing cracks and shaking floors," he said.

Survey of 'dangerous' buildings ordered

Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput, who visited the spot, told [Dawn](#) that the structure of the building got weakened due to recent rains.

He added that the "owners had not taken due care to protect their labourers".

He announced that legal action was being taken against the owners of the factory.

"The MD SITE has been directed to complete a survey of dangerous buildings in his jurisdiction and get them vacated," he said. Karachi Administrator Iftikhar Shallwani also visited the spot and said that the urban search and rescue team of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation took part in the rescue operation.

He said that there was no evidence that any other person was under the debris.

It would be ascertained as to whether the building was declared dangerous by the Sindh Building Control Authority, he said, adding that an FIR would be registered against the factory owners.

Area SHO Zawar Husain confirmed that only one person was rescued in an injured condition.
(By Imtiaz Ali & Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 22/09/2020)

CM orders builders to display SBCA barcodes on structures

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday ordered the Association of Builders & Developers (ABAD) to ensure display of Sindh Building Control Authority barcode-based approval board at their under-construction buildings so that the people and the government could differentiate between legal and illegal structures.

He took this decision in a meeting he held with a delegation of ABAD led by its chairman Mohsin Sheikhani here at CM House.

The chief minister said that a large number of illegal buildings had emerged in the city against which ABAD had to cooperate with the government because the provincial government was going to take strict action against them.

He decided that ABAD members would display a board of SBCA approval with barcodes on their under-construction buildings. "The people through their mobile applications will be able to scan the barcode and ascertain whether the building was legal or illegal," he said and added it would also be easy for the government to differentiate between the legal and illegal structures so that action could be taken accordingly.

Mr Shah directed the SBCA to issue barcodes to old buildings and they would have to display them on the buildings.

The builders told the chief minister that the approvals of their projects were pending with the SBCA from 2011.

At this, the chief minister directed SBCA to approve the layout plans if they meet their required formalities, otherwise return them to the builders/applicants concerned so that they could file their request afresh.

"What is the logic to keep the applications pending for a long time," he said.

The ABAD delegation told the chief minister that the transfer of title in Hawkesbay scheme was still pending with the Board of Revenue.

The chief minister directed the senior member Board of Revenue to address the grievances of the builders and get the titles transferred in time.

Low-cost housing projects

The ABAD team offered the Sindh government to work with them on public-private partnership mode to launch low-cost housing projects in the city.

The chief minister, accepting the offer, issued a directive to the local government department to float a summary for the cabinet and suggest ways and means so that low-cost housing projects could be initiated for poor and low-paid workers.

The ABAD delegation also took up the issue of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) clearances for their new projects for which the chief minister directed his Adviser on Environment Murtaza Wahab to sit with the ABAD delegation and resolve all their issues. He also asked him to simplify the EPA approval procedures.

The chief minister assured the ABAD delegation of his full support to redress all their grievances so that legal construction could be promoted in the city.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 26/09/2020)

Dingi and Bhandar – the disputed (is)lands off Karachi's shore

As the crew members clambered aboard the fishing boat, Raheem Jutt, 53, untied the rope mooring the vessel to the jetty and announced they would stop at Bhandar Island for a while to repair their fishing nets.

Another fisherman laughed, "Jitna rukna hai ruk jao. Baad mein ameer log ka colony bannay wala hai apna Bhandar! [Stop as you like, but soon our Bhandar will be settled by the elite]."

He was referring to the federal government's recent announcement of developing new cities on Bundal and Buddo Islands – also known as Bhandar and Dingi Islands in the local lingo – off Karachi's shore, leaving thousands in fishing communities worried.



"They may encroach upon the entire sea, but Allah is with us and will save our children from hunger," responded Jutt.

According to Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum's (PFF) Kamal Shah, this is the third time in the last two decades that the Centre has floated the idea of setting up a city on the twin Islands, which span over 12,000 acres – about the same area as Karachi's Defence Housing Authority.

But the project has given rise to an ownership tussle between the Sindh government and the Port Qasim Authority each time. Whether in 2006, 2013 or now, the provincial government has repeatedly argued that the islands belong to it.

Environmental worries

Another controversy lies in the fact that the islands are part of the Indus Delta – a protected site under the Ramsar Convention, to which Pakistan is a signatory.

"All Ramsar sites across the world are wetlands of international importance for migratory birds," explained ecologist Rafiul Haq. "Developing a city here will destroy the coastal ecosystem and affect the environment as well as Pakistan's fishing industry," he went on, pointing out that the islands were surrounded by mangroves, a breeding ground for marine life.



Plus, according to him, artificial changes to the Indus Delta that impacted the protective mangrove barrier would also expose Sindh's coast - including its financial hub of Karachi - to cyclones and tsunamis.

He cited the example of commercial development on Thailand's coastal areas leading to devastation from the 2004 tsunami, contrasting it with Myanmar which, surrounded by mangroves, saw far less destruction. "It's in our hands. We can protect ourselves or go ahead with steps that may lead us to destruction."

PFF chairperson Muhammad Ali Shah, meanwhile, said the organisation was gearing up for countrywide protests against development near the delta. "We have been successful in protecting Bundal and Dingi in the past and we are ready to fight again," he insisted. "What does the federal government want? Does it want three million people from the fishing community to die of hunger?"

He added that the Centre should first provide basic facilities to Baba and Bhit Islands, home to thousands of people. "They cannot manage Karachi and they're talking about new cities?"

According to him, Bundal and Buddo are the foundations of Pakistan's fishing industry. "The sector has been destroyed by industrial fishing. This new development will mean an end to the fishing industry," he asserted. "The sea is our life, our culture, everything we have. They can only build cities here over our dead bodies."

Who owns the islands?

Federal Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi has no qualms about the project. "The land belongs to Port Qasim, which is the decision-making authority. Yes, development is being planned here, but it will be a state-of-the-art project that will protect the environment, not destroy it," he insisted, speaking to *The Express Tribune*.

It's not like a housing project, he claimed, adding that they were aware of the resident communities' worries and thus would conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment and issue a request for proposal.

Besides, said Zaidi, they were planting more and more mangroves in the area and would soon double the mangrove cover.

The Sindh government, though, vehemently opposes the Centre's claims. Earlier this week, Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahoo insisted that the federal government's dream of building new cities on the province's coast would never materialise.

"According to the Constitution, maritime area up to 12 nautical miles of Sindh's coastline falls under our jurisdiction," he stated, adding that the federation would not be allowed to occupy the province's land and resources. Plus, he said, settling these cities on the islands would destroy marine life.

Meanwhile, Sindh government spokesperson Murtaza Wahab told *The Express Tribune* that the islands belonged to Sindh. "This is against Article 172 of the Constitution. They cannot do this without the provincial government's consent, and we will act in line with the people's best interests."

He added the Sindh government had not seen any proposal from the Centre.

'All we have'

As the boat chugged to a stop at Bundal, Jutt and his crew jumped into the waist-deep water, lugging torn nets on their shoulders.

The camels wandering around the island came as a surprise. A shrinking breed, these Kharai camels - meaning 'salty' - feed on the offshore mangroves and can swim for hours in the waves surrounding Bundal.

The earlier conversation was still weighing on Jutt's mind as he gazed past the camels. "This sea, these islands are all we have. I can imagine it becoming a relaxation spot for the elite even as our children die of hunger," he said. "This cannot happen. We may die, but we will die fighting for our rights."

(By Sheharyar Ali *The Express Tribune*, 04, 27/09/2020)

SHC seeks plan to avert civic infrastructure destruction in future downpours

The Sindh High Court on Wednesday directed the local government secretary to appear in court on October 28 along with viable proposals to handle a breakdown of civic infrastructure in future.

The court was seized with a petition seeking an inquiry into the collapse of Karachi's civic infrastructure due to recent torrential rains and compensation for affected people.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar also asked the additional relief commissioner to produce some working papers before it on the next hearing regarding a roadmap being made to combat such a situation in future by authorities concerned.

When the matter came up for hearing, lawyers for some respondents sought time to file comments and two respondents submitted their replies. The bench again issued notices to the some respondents.

The additional advocate general also requested time to file comments on behalf of provincial authorities, cited as respondents in the petition.

Plea against restriction on intercity transport operations disposed

Additional Relief Commissioner Shakeel Abro informed the bench that a roadmap was being made to battle with the situation caused due to the heavy rains in future.

The petitioners submitted that the unplanned growth of the city and large-scale encroachments particularly on drains, poorly designed roads and drainage system had caused flooding and unparalleled damage in the city and over 40 people lost their lives in rain-related incidents and due to electrocution.

They further submitted that the main entrances of three major hospitals were flooded, main thoroughfares submerged and various emergency telephone numbers went out of order during the rains.

Transporters' plea disposed of

The same bench disposed of a petition of transporters filed against the restrictions imposed on intercity transport operation during the lockdown after it was informed that the lockdown notification had already been withdrawn subject to implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs).

The transport secretary and other officials submitted that the owners of all intercity bus operations were required to implement the SOPs without fail.

The petition was filed by the Supreme Council of Pakistan Transporters and its lawyer pointed out during the hearing that various bus terminals had been closed in the city as well as out of the city and the bus owners having valid route permits also filed applications to the provincial transport authority for operating bus terminals at different places.

The secretary confirmed that some applications were pending in his office for orders and he undertook that all such applications would be decided within a period of two weeks and orders in writing communicated to the applicants.

The bench directed him to hear and decide these applications in accordance with the law after providing ample opportunity to the applicants and other stakeholders if any.

Warrant out for arrest of key witness in Intizar murder case

An antiterrorism court issued a warrant for the arrest of a key prosecution witness in a case pertaining to murder of a teenager in a fake encounter in Defence Housing Authority.

Eight Anti-Car Lifting Cell (ACLC) officials, including then SHO Tariq Mehmood, inspectors Azhar Ahsan and Tariq Raheem, head constable Shahid and constables Ghulam Abbas, Fawad Khan, Mohammad Daniyal and Bilal Rasheed have been charged with killing 19-year-old Intizar Ahmed on the night of Jan 13, 2018.

The matter came up before the ATC-XIII judge, who is conducting the trial inside the central prison, for recording testimonies of the key prosecution witness, Madiha Kiyani, and others.

However, Ms Kiyani failed to turn up to testify against the accused persons. The state prosecutor and the investigating officer informed the court that the female witness had not been turning up to record her statement in court despite issuance of repeated notices.

The court was informed that her statement was an important piece of evidence since she was present with the victim in his car when he was shot dead by accused persons.

Taking notice of her absence, the judge issued bailable arrest warrant for Ms Kiyani, directing the IO to ensure her presence in court on the next date to record her statement in the case.

The hearing was adjourned till Oct 8.

All undertrial policemen were indicted on May 15, 2018 for murdering the teenager, who was studying in Malaysia and visiting his family in DHA, Karachi.

Initially, the IO had named eight officials as accused persons in the investigation report. However, later he left out head constable Ghulam Abbas stating that he was not present at the time of the incident.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 01/10/2020)

Another heritage building bites the dust

One of the oldest colonial-era heritage buildings in Karachi, Bhatia Bhuwan, has largely been demolished, allegedly by its owner, with only the building's façade and peripheral structure remaining intact.

According to area residents, the demolition of the building's rooftop and internal structural framework had been underway for the last couple of weeks, with relevant authorities failing to notice the heritage's destruction.

As evidence of this claim, labourers could be seen tearing down whatever was left of the pillars inside the building on Thursday. Debris piled up, spilling outside the building, much to the chagrin of commuters and shopkeepers in the vicinity. The shopkeepers, in particular, are unhappy with the way the demolition was carried out.

"This is one of the oldest buildings I know of [in the city]," said one among them, standing by the site. "It was a three-storey building," he added, claiming that it had been razed by its owner and the demolition work was initiated few weeks ago. According to him, a new plaza was to be erected in place of the old, now almost-gone heritage building.

When the issue gained attention, a team comprising senior officials of the Sindh Archaeology and Antiquities Department and led by archaeology director Abdul Fatah Shaikh visited the site on Thursday.

Shaikh confirmed that it was the building's owner who had perpetrated the demolition of its inner structure and said his department had an FIR registered against those involved in the demolition.

He further assured that he had personally met police officials over the matter and the building's demolition had been halted. "It will not be demolished any further."

The official then produced a letter addressed to Arambagh Police Station SHO, a copy of which is available with The Express Tribune.

In the letter, Shaikh requested that an FIR be registered on priority basis against persons identified as Abdul Ghafoor, Rasheed and others for tearing down the building, under Section 18 of the Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act, 1994.

When The Express Tribune tried to talk to a man who identified himself as the contractor assigned the building's demolition, he avoided sharing any details.

"I cannot share anything," he said, maintaining that the building's owner had forbidden him from giving out any details. "I cannot even share any of the owner's details," he added before scurrying away, fear and anxiety evident in his demeanour.

Fading heritage

Bhatia Bhuwan was constructed in 1931 on what is today Prarthana Samaj Road, in Thattai compound opposite Dow Dental College. Like other colonial-era buildings in Karachi, it was being used for commercial purposes and was particularly famous for housing footwear shops.

According to architect Marvi Mazhar, at least three such buildings have been razed in Karachi in just a month.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, she claimed that the buildings' owners colluded with government officials to tear down the heritage structures, so that modern high-rises could be built in their place.

Criticising the Sindh government for failing to protect the city's historical buildings, she questioned that if relevant authorities couldn't prevent the structures' demolition, then "what is the point of listing them as heritage sites?"

"These buildings are [part of] the city's history, but we are losing them one by one," she lamented.

Earlier, in a letter to the archaeology and antiquities department, Mazhar had pointed out that Bhatia Bhuwan was of great cultural and historical importance.

It has a stone façade, wooden windows and doors and balconies, which are no more, once supported by stone corbels, she had written in the letter available with The Express Tribune. She requested the department to take urgent action against the building's "insensitive demolition" and preserve it.

The Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act, 1994, obliges relevant persons and authorities to protect the outer frame of a heritage building, allowing changes to its internal framework.

As many as 1,739 buildings had been declared heritage sites in Karachi. Unfortunately, it seems the department responsible for ensuring their preservation does not have a single official to monitor them.
(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 02/10/2020)

SHC issues notices to zoo authorities for keeping baby bear in poor condition

The Sindh High Court on Thursday issued notices to the zoological gardens as well as the local and provincial government authorities on a petition about a baby bear, allegedly separated from its parents, having been kept in an unnatural habitat at the zoo.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Shafi Siddiqui also directed zoo officials and other respondents to take prompt action to provide the baby bear an environment close to the natural habitat, considering it to be still a cub. The bench asked the senior director of the zoo and recreation to be in attendance along with a report about the health of the cub on Saturday (October 3).

It also directed the authorities responsible for the maintenance of the zoo to form a committee in this regard for timely action.

The bench observed that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) was under statutory duty in terms of the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013 to maintain the zoological gardens and to keep a natural habitat for animals.

While maintaining the facility and in performance of their duties to provide such environment, the KMC had employed different officials perhaps having appropriate experience and educational qualification and credential to perform their duties of protecting animals, including endangered species being kept in zoo, it added.

The bench further said that the petition pertained to baby bear (Syrian grown breed) which needed prompt attention for its survival as alleged in the petition, adding that the cub was alleged to be in the custody of the officials of Zoological Gardens Karachi and claimed to have been forcibly separated from its parents, which amounted to cruelty as the baby bear was still in its early age and could not survive without parents and that, too, in severe hot condition of the provincial metropolis which was far away from the required natural habitat for its growth.

It observed that if it is so, it amounted to cruelty being done by the officials concerned in terms of Section 3 of the Prevention of the Cruelty of Animals Act, 1890.

"The situation appears to be too pressing for any kind of delay. Let a notice in this regard be issued to the respondents and Advocate General Sindh for 03.10.2020", it added.

The bench said that keeping the urgency of the matter in view, the case was being fixed on Oct 3 for hearing.

Around 40 petitioners from various walks of life through their lawyer Barrister Mohsin Shahwani had moved the SHC and submitted that urgent attention was required to save the life of a cub, as well as the management of the zoological garden from the consequential effect.

Impleading the KMC administrator, senior director of zoo & recreation and the provincial secretary of local government as respondents, the petitioners contended that the baby bear 'Ranoo' was being kept at Karachi zoo in a small and ill-equipped enclosures and lonely away from its family in Skardu and without natural habitat that lacked proper food, water and medical treatment.

They further maintained that the condition of the zoo was alarming and the lives of captive living-beings were at high risk since the facility had never adopted minimum standards and guidelines.

They sought direction for respondents to immediately shift the cub to Skardu, where it could be reunited with her family, and proper maintenance of hygiene, living conditions and healthcare of all other animals be kept at the zoo.

The petitioners also prayed for the setting up of a committee comprising representatives of animal welfare community, experts and veterinarians to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of facilities at zoo and prepare a report in accordance with international zoo standards and SOPs.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 02/10/2020)

FIR registered for Bhatia Bhuwan's demolition

The Risala police have registered an FIR against the owner of Bhatia Bhuwan, a colonial-era building in Karachi, and builders accused of razing the heritage structure. The FIR was registered late Thursday night against a man identified as Rasheed and others.

It was registered after archaeology department officials submitted an application to the police, requesting that the persons responsible for demolishing the building located on Prathna Samaj Road in Thattai compound, opposite Dow Dental College, be booked.

"There should be zero tolerance for [such acts and] persons," antiquities and archaeology director Manzoor Ahmed Kanasro remarked, while speaking to The Express Tribune on the matter.

He further stated that after registering an FIR, the police had made no arrests yet, but his department would approach senior officials, asking them to nab the individuals who tore down the heritage building.

The official pointed out that he had another FIR registered over a similar incident on the premises of Karachi Gymkhana a few weeks ago, while another case of the same nature was registered in Hyderabad eight months back.

"We always have to seek the police's help as the department doesn't have a force of its own," he explained.

Confirming the registration of FIR for Bhatia Bhuwan's demolition, South deputy commissioner Irshad Sodhar assured that there would be no further demolition at the site and action would be taken against persons nominated in the FIR.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 03/10/2020)

Renovation of historic St Patrick's Cathedral in full swing

With the renovation work going on at the historic St Patrick's Cathedral, you see poles, steel bars, marble slabs, stone and other construction material outside the cathedral and monument. A banner in a corner says: 'Work in progress. No entry. Sorry for the inconvenience'.

There is a group of people, the men in fine suits and women in pretty nylon dresses, waiting under a tree near the monument. There is also a white car with rolled up dark windows parked nearby with its engine running, probably for the AC.

"They are a wedding party," explains Reverend Father Saleh Diego, the parish rector and also the vicar general for Karachi as he shows you around the cathedral grounds.

The renovation and repairs are being carried out by the Sindh Heritage Department.

Built some 176 years ago as a small chapel at first, the historic St Patrick's Cathedral has remained a testament of time. The last time it saw some repairs was around 20 to 25 years ago.

About the current work, Father Diego says that it has been going on since around Christmas last year. The coronavirus pandemic also caused intermittent breaks though the parish priests are quite satisfied with the work. "Whatever we bring to the knowledge of the engineers about the building, they understand well. They are working with passion, also studying old pics of the place while doing the restoration work. We are quite satisfied with their work as they are making plenty of sense," says Father Diego.

He says that after working on the roof of the cathedral and replacing some old stones in the walls that need to be replaced along with working on strengthening the foundations of the structures requiring a new drainage system to not allow groundwater to accumulate underneath, they are going to turn their attention towards the interiors. There are both white marble and beige marble slabs placed near the monument. "It is breathable marble, just plaster won't work here" the parish rector informs. "White is for the exterior of the monument and the beige for interior," he explains.

Inside the cathedral, one can see the damage done to the walls by the groundwater. To make matters worse a few years ago someone with good intentions but ignorance had ordered painting over the stone walls of the cathedral. It did more damage than good since stone needs to breathe. It is not meant to be plastered or painted over.

According to Father Diego, the engineers will be able to do very good renovation work for the St Patrick's Cathedral's structure but the beautiful antique stained-glass windows are a different story altogether. The glass is very expensive and not produced locally.

As one turns to leave, you can see from the side of the eye, the wedding party proceeding towards the cathedral's front doors. The white car with dark windows also crawls up to the cathedral entrance. Gingerly a bride steps out as two little flower girls take their position in front followed by the bridesmaids. Despite the 'sorry for inconvenience' sign, the cathedral has not closed its doors to anyone. Business is going on as usual inside.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 05/10/2020)

Bahria Town accused of trying to occupy land of Malir's goths

Residents of Karachi's oldest neighbourhoods and civil rights activists on Monday blamed the real estate giant Bahria Town for forcefully attempting to occupy land of goths in Malir district making indigenous residents of the remote areas homeless.

Addressing a press conference from the platform of Karachi Bachao Tehreek at the Karachi Press Club, Laila Raza and Abeera Ashfaq of the Awami Workers Party with local resident Hafeez Baloch said that on Oct 2 and 3, men who identified themselves as personnel from Bahria Town Karachi Limited (BTKL), accompanied by some police officers, forcefully entered Haji Ali Mohammad Goth in Deh Langeji, district Malir.

Equipped with heavy machinery, including excavators and bulldozers, they attempted to occupy and take over land that belongs to the residents of this village, they said and added that they had taken similar actions last month in other villages including Ali Dad Gabol Goth.

The rights activists suspected that since they entered without permission of the residents and without a court order, they had possibly committed several offences under the Pakistan Penal Code, including criminal trespass, assault, battery, criminal intimidation, dispossession and nuisance.

Rights activists allege some police officers are also complicit with the real estate giant

These villages, Haji Ali Mohammad Goth and Ali Dad Gabol goths, had been inhabited for over 70 years by indigenous citizens who had cultivated and made continuous productive use of the land, they said. Moreover, they added, the villagers' land ownership and use rights had been duly recognised, protected and notified in the Survey of Pakistan. Many goths in this area have also been regularised through the efforts of Perween Rahman and the Orangi Pilot Project.

The land surrounding the affected villages holds immense historical, social, cultural and economic significance because of the presence of multiple heritage sites and ancient graveyards, neighbouring Khirthar National Park, a legally protected entity, and five rivers that support their livelihoods, they maintained.

"This is not the first time that the BTKL has attempted to bulldoze and criminally dispossess the law-abiding residents of this and other villages," said Ms Raza. "In April 2019, the same parties had entered this village and marked three to four homes and threatened to build their own road there. During the same time period, they demolished two poultry farms, stole cattle and assaulted and intimidated residents defending their property."

In 2016, they said, BTKL officials made a road by destroying the goth's native graveyard, damaging its well and cutting its residents off from accessing water. This caused the residents severe hardship.

Moreover, the officials, assisted by scores of policemen, physically assaulted the villagers and filed false and fabricated criminal charges against them. They have shown absolutely no compassion or restraint when interacting with women of the village, they said.

"This is an ongoing crisis for the people of this village. BTKL, government officials, and industries and all those colluding in this illegal development project are violating multiple national and international laws protecting farming and grazing livelihoods, land, indigenous peoples' first right to determine land use, women's rights, environment, wildlife, and heritage and antiquities," said Ms Ashfaq.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 06/10/2020)

Who owns the islands?

Amid criticism from civil activists, environmentalists, rights groups and Sindhi nationalist parties, the turf war between the Pakistan Peoples Party-led Sindh government and the Centre over the twin islands of Bhandar and Dingi escalated on Tuesday with the Sindh cabinet rejecting the recently promulgated Pakistan Islands Development Authority Ordinance.

Given the growing calls for revocation of the presidential ordinance and PPP chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's announcement the day before, stating that the PPP would "oppose the illegal annexation of Sindh's Islands," the cabinet's decision was hardly surprising.

However, shortly afterwards, a federal minister claimed on Twitter that the Sindh government had already consented to Bhandar's development in July. A document shared by him purported that the island had been made 'available' to the Centre.

Unanimous rejection

A meeting of the Sindh cabinet convened on Tuesday, under Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, with a single-point agenda - to make a decision about the islands.

The cabinet was given a detailed briefing on the ordinance promulgated on August 31 by President Dr Arif Alvi.

The ordinance is against the Constitution of Pakistan, noted the cabinet members, according to the Chief Minister's House spokesperson. He quoted them as stating, "The Constitution establishes ownership of the provincial government on the lands, the islands and the land in the sea located within its territorial jurisdiction."

The ordinance has been promulgated in a manner as if the islands are the Centre's property, opined the cabinet members.

The provincial government has laid down some parameters for development of the islands, which includes them remaining the Sindh government's property. Besides, the terms and conditions of development projects were to be shared with the provincial government and the interests of the local population were to be safeguarded, according to the cabinet.

However, setting aside these conditions, the ordinance has declared islands in the territorial jurisdiction of Sindh and Balochistan as the property of the federal government, noted the cabinet.

The cabinet viewed the presidential ordinance as an attempt to trample on the rights of Sindh's people and resolved to write a letter to the Centre insisting on its immediate revocation as it unanimously rejected it.

Objections raised

Soon after, Federal Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi dubbed the PPP's protests as 'drama.' Taking to Twitter, he shared a letter purportedly by the Sindh land utilisation secretary, according to which the Sindh cabinet made Bhandar available to the Centre in July. The letter specifies that terms and conditions are to be agreed upon and the legitimate interests of the local fisherman and population are to be protected.

Objections were raised from several corners over the creation of cities on the twin islands soon after the controversial ordinance became public knowledge. Criticism had also been levied earlier when the premier suggested 'development' on the islands.

Dissenting voices invoked concerns for the local populace, the environment and provincial rights, among others.

Amid the backlash, the PPP also voiced objections.

"The Pakistan People's Party will oppose the illegal annexation of Sindh's Islands through Presidential ordinance by the PTI government. I ask how is this act any different to Modi's actions in occupied Kashmir? Move will be opposed in National, Provincial Assembly & the Senate," tweeted Bilawal on Monday.

Criticism was levied at the PPP and the Sindh government after Zaidi's tweet cast doubts on the party's sincerity towards efforts against the ordinance.

Sindhi nationalist parties, civil society and others had, however, already chalked out their own protest plans against the Centre's decision, voicing distrust in both the federal and provincial governments.

Sindh Taraqi Pasand party leader Dr Qadir Magsi said that there was anger in every corner of Sindh over the ordinance promulgated in connivance with the PPP government. "[PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali] Zardari has already sold Sindh's land and this decision to hand over the islands is a blot in the face of his party that claims to champion Sindh's rights."

A PPP government does not mean that Sindh's ruling party has ownership over the rights of Sindh's people, he censured, adding that such a decision was also made during former President Pervez Musharraf's rule too, but was revoked after people resisted the move.

"We will always stand and legally fight for the legitimate rights of the people living in Sindh," said Dr Magsi.

Meanwhile, writer Jami Chandio remarked it was good that the Sindh cabinet and Bilawal had opposed the ordinance following public pressure. "But the Sindh Assembly should [also] reject the ordinance and make its own law to protect the rights of indigenous people and preserve the environment and ecology."

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 07/10/2020)

Karachi Master Plan 2020 stumbles in implementation

Akin to the master plans of the past, the city administration has failed to implement the Karachi Master Plan 2020 in a timely fashion.

Just like previous years, unplanned expansions and resettlement of the city are being carried out haphazardly, resulting in water crisis, sewerage and storm drains issues, transport problems, concerns related to the industrial and commercial sectors, and other civic affairs which have been on the verge of destruction.

The recent rains have badly exposed the city's outdated and rotten drainage system, giving a clear warning that any development without a master plan will result in destruction and ruin.

Since the British rule, Karachi has been governed by the city administration and has seen the advent of six master plans. Not a single one of them, however, has been successfully implemented.

According to the information available with The Express Tribune, none of the projects of the Karachi Strategic Development Plan (KSDP) 2020 could be executed as per the recommendations.

The master plan has provisions for the K-IV bulk water supply project, the mega sewerage project S-III, and mega transportation projects, including the Green and Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems, all of which are under construction and have struggled with long delays.

While the relevant agencies are unable to say when these controversial projects will be completed, the costs of the S-III and K-IV projects have also skyrocketed over the years.

The tragedy is that the KSDP 2020 was never owned by the Sindh government in the true sense. Instead, following a Supreme Court order, the provincial government issued a gazette notification in 2019 for the master plan and received legal cover. The projects had to be halted because of the Covid-19 lockdown, and now, the term of the master plan is coming to an end.

An official of the master plan department, who asked not to be named, said that in the past, master plans had been drawn up for Karachi in 1923 and 1945 during the British rule and in 1951, 1974, 2000 and 2007, respectively after independence.

"The city's sixth master plan, namely the KSDP 2020, was formulated in 2007, during the tenure of then city nazim Mustafa Kamal. It was approved by the city council at the time. However, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government started ignoring Karachi as soon as its government took over in 2008," he said.

He added that in 2010, the city government was dissolved and legislation was introduced to implement the new local government system. In 2013, the provincial government passed the Sindh Local Government Act through which all the important civic powers were taken away from the local bodies and assigned to the Sindh government.

"Even the less important departments of the local bodies, including hygiene and cleanliness departments, were taken away and handed over to the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board," the official said. "Under such circumstances, the enforceability of the KSDP 2020 appears to be a great challenge, especially since the Sindh government has put the plan on the back burner," he added.

"Many institutions in Karachi have land ownership, including the Defense Housing Authority, cantonment boards, and other federal agencies. They do not follow any of the master plans of Karachi but stick to their own rules and regulations. The KSDP 2020, like other plans, was also formulated for all of Karachi but these institutions upheld their tradition of not implementing it in letter and spirit," the officer lamented.

Meanwhile, the master plan department's retired executive district officer, Iftikhar Qaimkhani, under whose supervision the KSDP 2020 was created, said that the plan's recommendations and data had benefited the relevant agencies to a great extent.

"The K-IV, S-III and BRT projects were part of the master plan. The government should enact legislation to extend the plan until 2023 and oblige the relevant agencies to implement development projects under this plan," he said. "At the same time, the government should start working on the master plan 2047, which will take three years to complete."

The Express Tribune tried to contact the Cantonment Board of Clifton for comment on the master plan, but received no response.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 07/10/2020)

Guardian board unhappy over Shallwani's decision to 'clean' Frere Hall

Without a shadow of doubt, Frere Hall is one of Karachi's remarkable works of architecture. It was constructed in colonial times, and it is certainly the most striking neo-Gothic structure in the city. Its imposing look, made of buff colour limestone and red sandstone, reminds us of the days when the pace at which life moved in the city was not cruelly rapid.

After independence, the one thing that added to its attraction, despite remaining unfinished, was the artwork that the renowned artist Sadequain was making on the ceiling of the main hall, a la the Sistine Chapel. His death didn't allow him to add another feather to his cap. And what a feather that would have been!

On Friday, Sept 25, art lovers, history buffs and admirers of classical architecture got to learn through social media that Karachi Administrator Iftikhar Shallwani had allowed all doors to the hall to be opened after removing the netting around it. Tongues also wagged about the wooden floor being scrapped by the thekedar's men. Hours later, the administrator tweeted, "Frere Hall mural is safe — nothing wrong and no damage — some vested interest who wanted to build a fencing/boundary around Frere Hall Garden to stop public entry have been stopped from doing so, hence the media campaign."

The administrator says doors were opened to clean the library which was closed for three years

The administrator went on with the drive, and the campaign still continues. Recently, he posted to his Twitter account a picture of the main entrance to the hall with a cleaner look. It did look in good nick, by the way. This was preceded by an image which suggested that the netting which was taken away was never part of the building's heritage stature.

It would be appropriate to recall here that in April 2018, then Karachi mayor Wasim Akhtar announced that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation was ready to hand over the management and maintenance of Frere Hall to an 18-member Guardian Board headed by Shahid Firoz for an extendible five-year period. In November, the City Council gave the building's control to the board.

Talking to Dawn, Mr Firoz, after giving a brief account of the kind of agreement that the board had entered into, said, "We've had a good relationship with the administrator [Karachi]. He was aware of what was going on. But without any discussion or engagement with us he went and started doing this. There are 55,000 books [in the library]. Opening the gallery and removing the netting have allowed birds to enter the premises ... nesting has also begun. I still don't understand the whole thing. If he had taken the guardians into confidence or had any dialogue with the guardians, things would have been different. He just went ahead. We [guardians] belong to the city. We don't have any agenda. We are a bunch of dedicated, compassionate people ... why all of this ... it's completely bewildering."

His statement representing the board has also been circulated on social media in which he lamented that "the actions being taken [by KMC] are in blatant violation of the restrictions of the Sindh Heritage Committee and the global practices for protection of heritage and art".

When Mr Shallwani's views were sought on the matter, he said, "I have a passion for libraries. This library was closed for three years gathering dust. We opened the doors to clean the library. Then there was katchra (garbage) in the backyard. It needed to be cleaned. So we started doing that and now it's much cleaner. We needed to do it ourselves because if we ask others to do it, you get tall claims and it never [practically] happens. As far as the netting is concerned, even when it was there, it didn't stop birds from flying in. The basic idea is to keep the area neat and clean."

Frere Hall was built in the mid-1860s in honour of Bartle Frere, commissioner of Sind from 1851 to 1859. It is believed he played a vital role in transforming the province from a traditional zone into a modern region. And what was the purpose of constructing the hall? Answer: to have concerts, stage productions and lectures.
(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 07/10/2020)

Centre rejects Sindh gov't's claims over twin islands

The [fresh dispute](#) between the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government at the Centre and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government in Sindh over Islamabad's move to take over twin islands of Bundal and Buddo through a presidential ordinance does not seem to be ending anytime soon as a key member of the federal cabinet on Wednesday accused the provincial administration of "playing politics" over the issue.

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Shibli Faraz vowed that Prime Minister Imran Khan would do everything that benefited the country and its economy and people.

Mr Faraz, who spent a busy day in Karachi meeting media persons and PTI leaders, brushed aside concerns raised by the Sindh government over what the latter termed Islamabad's "unconstitutional" move. He ruled out the possibility of any "unconstitutional" move from the federal government and came up with strong criticism of the PPP government.

In the first leg of his daylong engagements, the minister visited Quaid-i-Azam's mausoleum where he laid a wreath and offered Fateha before coming up for a brief question-and-answer session with the media.

Shibli predicts failure of opposition's movement

Without going into details, he categorically rejected the [Sindh government's claim](#) about the twin islands and predicted failure of the anti-government movement the newly-formed opposition alliance is going to launch this month.

"They are actually playing politics on this [twin islands] issue," he replied to a question about the Sindh government's claim over the islands off Karachi coast. "The PTI government never makes any unconstitutional move. Our maritime minister Ali Zaidi has already [explained](#) things clearly. The PM and his government want to bring economic prosperity in this country. Who would benefit if the economy reactivates due to this project? Of course, the people of Karachi and Sindh. Then why they [Sindh government] are

opposing it? It's all politics. But the [federal] government has resolved to initiate projects of economic and business development and it would pursue this policy."

He reiterated that the anti-government campaign of the opposition parties was an attempt to cover corruption of a few leaders and predicted that it would not meet with success as the people of Pakistan had tested the opposition parties multiple times and now they knew their hidden agenda well.

"The people have chosen the PTI to bring those who had plundered national wealth to justice," he replied to a question about government reaction to the opposition move. "The opposition parties have no moral ground to launch the anti-government movement. It's in fact aimed at saving their corrupt leadership from accountability. The main objective of the opposition leaders behind holding public gatherings is to secure their personal interests. The PPP and PML-N leaders are actually using different tactics to hide their corruption."

Meetings with media bodies

Later, the minister held back-to-back meetings with the office-bearers of the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) and Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA).

Talking to the APNS office-bearers, he said that this was on record that for the first time the government had given advertisements to newspapers through a transparent mechanism.

APNS president Hameed Haroon briefed the minister about the problems of print media, particularly the problems being faced by the Sindhi newspapers.

APNS secretary general Sarmad Ali and other office-bearers also spoke on the occasion.

Shibli Faraz said the journalist fraternity would have to remove non-journalists from their ranks. "Bona fide journalists are being affected due to such elements; therefore, we have to adopt an organised approach to protect the rights of genuine journalists," he added.

The minister pointed out that there were over 1,500 newspapers, including dummy newspapers, due to which questions were raised on the entire journalist fraternity.

Referring to his meetings with people belonging to the media fraternity, he said all problems pointed out by them could be resolved. "We intend to establish a system which provides a level-playing field to all. We have to restore the standard and position of journalist fraternity and cooperation of the fraternity in this regard is imperative," he said.

In the meeting with the PBA leaders, Mr Faraz highlighted the need for a coordinated mechanism to help address genuine grievances of the electronic media. He said regular contact and mutual cooperation could help in efficient handling of issues, ultimately paving the way for a proper solution.

Responding to a presentation by PBA president Shakil Masood, he said it had added to his understanding of the problems being faced by the PBA members and the underlying factors that ought to be mutually addressed.

The information minister reiterated that content being relayed or telecast must be in accordance with social and cultural norms as there would be no compromise in this regard.

He said the global economic situation and prevalent uncertainty had cast an impact on all countries of the world, including Pakistan. The intensity of the situation might differ but this economic meltdown had affected all countries of the world and the business sector was apparently the worst-hit.

He said assured the PBA members that the federal government would look into their genuine problems and come forward with doable interventions for promotion and strengthening of the media industry.

Shibli Faraz also visited the Karachi Press Club where he said the government was developing a mechanism to link the provision of advertisements to media houses with the payment of salaries to their employees.

"The government has paid over Rs1 billion to the media outlets to clear their outstanding dues and tried to ensure that the employees' salaries are paid from that amount," he said.

The information minister said that journalism was a noble profession and urged the media workers to get the black sheep out of their ranks.

He announced a donation of Rs2.5 million for the KPC.

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 03, 08/10/2020)

Are our cities backward compared to historic towns?

The Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (Szabist) on Wednesday held a webinar on 'Urbanisation: Past and Present'.

Giving a historical view of the subject, eminent historian Dr Mubarak Ali said cities symbolise civilisations. They represent the people who live there — their lifestyles, their approach to everyday goings-on. Some 5,000 years ago, the concept of city life or urbanisation began to take shape.

Dr Ali said in ancient Greece construction of imposing buildings, sculpture-making and creating art became part of cities. This can be seen while studying the city of Athens. The Acropolis was built there; outside it there was the statue of Athena which was thought to be a symbol of safety. A public space known as the Agora was where people used to meet and discuss day to day affairs. And this was the place that Socrates used to visit barefoot early in the morning and put questions to people about life. In the Agora, there was a court where trials would be held. All the laws were written on stone tablets outside the court so that the people could be made familiar with them.

The historian said in Rome (Roman era), Emperor Augustus made buildings with marble. These structures had temples, parks and tombs. Statues, too, adorned Rome. The marked feature of the city was a chowk-like place called the Forum. People would gather here to chitchat; there were shops; games would be played; and dramas were staged. There was a rostrum on a platform from where politicians addressed the public.

Webinar discusses evolution of urban areas

When Caesar was killed his dead body was brought to this very spot. Marc Antony's speech also took place here. Another special feature of Rome was its hammams. They were a spot for social gatherings. The third main aspect of the town was the Colosseum which was constructed for sporting events. It had eight gates and could accommodate 50,000 spectators.

Dr Ali said in the subcontinent, likewise, towns were built, such as Fatehpur Sikri by Emperor Akbar. But he had to leave it because of political reasons and because of the fact that there was no water supply system in place. Then Emperor Shahjahan built Shahjahanabad (old Delhi) with proper planning. It had the Lal Qila (for king), the Jamia Masjid, and Chandni Chowk. The latter was for the masses. Sir Syed in his book *Asar ul Sanadid* writes that around the qila there was a canal called the nehr-i-bahisht (stream of paradise). Chandni Chowk was known for artists as well who used to make portraits of the people. The affluent of Shahjahanabad constructed big palaces for themselves.

He said in 1911, the British developed New Delhi. They planted trees such as neem, peepal and jamun so that the environment remained fresh and beautiful. In 1920, cities such as Harappa were discovered; but Harappa wasn't a complete discovery. However, the discovery of Moenjodaro was amazing. It was a well worked out city. It had a water supply system, a sewerage system, rulers' tombs etc. Traders were an important segment of society.

When we compare those towns to the cities of Sindh today, the historian argued, such as Karachi, Hyderabad and Larkana, we realise that the latter weren't properly built. So the question is: are we backward (pasmandah) compared to the towns of the days gone by?

Former chief secretary Sindh Tasneem Siddiqui was the second speaker of the webinar. He pointed out that until some years after independence there were institutions (idarey) in the cities which did their job well. When Pakistan came into being, urban population of the country was 15 per cent and 53pc income came from the agriculture sector. The explosion of population that happened afterwards needs to be examined.

He said there was a historical reason for the population boom. When Pakistan was incepted, six to eight million people came into Sindh and Punjab. Subsequently, events such as the 1965 war, the East Pakistan issue and the Afghan war also caused the population to increase.

Dr Riaz Shaikh, dean Faculty of Social Science and Education, Szabist, introduced the speakers to the online participants.
(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 14, 09/10/2020)

SHC puts federal, provincial authorities on notice over Islands Development Authority ordinance

The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Thursday put the federal and provincial authorities on notice on a petition challenging the recently promulgated Pakistan Islands Development Authority (PIDA) Ordinance.

A two-judge bench led by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar issued notices to the federal ministry of law and justice secretary, Sindh chief secretary, attorney general Pakistan and Sindh advocate general for Oct 23.

Advocate Shahab Usto petitioned the SHC and submitted that object of the impugned ordinance, promulgated by the federal government, was reportedly to establish an authority for offshore islands of Sindh and Balochistan and particularly Bundal and Buddo islands along the Karachi coast.

The petitioner contended that the impugned ordinance had sabotaged the constitutional scheme by which the territorial integrity of the provinces had been guaranteed under articles 1, 152, 172, 173 and 239 of the Constitution.

Petitioner says ordinance has sabotaged the constitutional scheme

He also argued that it amounted to usurping the territories of Sindh and maintained that Article 172 (2) clearly barred the jurisdiction of the federal government within 12 nautical miles of the territorial waters of Pakistan.

The petitioner submitted that Bundal and Buddo islands were referred to in the first schedule of the impugned ordinance, but those areas were situated within less than three nautical miles off the Karachi coast and hence had always been part of Sindh and historically treated as "extensions" of the city.

He also contended that the federal government through a presidential ordinance had permanently taken over both provincial islands and altered the boundaries of Sindh in wilful violation of Article 239(4) of the Constitution that required not only the assent of two-thirds majority in both houses of the parliament, but also an approval of the Sindh Assembly by votes not less than two-thirds of its total strength.

The petitioner asserted that the Sindh government had shown no objection to the unconstitutional enforcement of the impugned ordinance and instead informed the federal government through a letter dated July 6 in pursuance of the request made by the federation that "The provincial cabinet has decided to make the said islands available to the federal government, as per law, for the purpose mentioned in the letter under reply in public interest, on such term and conditions as agreed upon".

He said that although it appeared that the ordinance had been enforced with the consent of the Sindh government, even then it was not sustainable on the touchstone of constitutional provisions.

He contended that the ordinance proclaimed that the authority would have jurisdiction not only on those two islands, but the entire range of maritime area covering both internal and territorial waters in complete and abject violation of Article 172 (2), depriving the province of its lawful and constitutional jurisdiction.

Advocate Usto argued that the authority had been established without ascertaining the environmental impact of the planned development of two islands on the marine life and ecology of the coastal belt of Karachi that had already seen enormous degradation over the years of neglect and violation of environmental laws.

He also raised a question that after the promulgation of the impugned ordinance, if the permanent residents of those islands had a right to knock the door of the SHC and if not, then where would they refer their matters since the Islamabad High Court's jurisdiction was also limited only to the federal capital territory as provided under Article 175 (1).

The petitioner pleaded to declare the impugned ordinance as being illegal, unconstitutional and of no legal effect and to restrain the federal government from taking over the two islands.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 09/10/2020)

PM Imran wants island issue sorted out with Sindh

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday directed Sindh Governor Imran Ismael to sort out the matters related to the Bundle Island project in consultations with the Sindh government.

The directive came as the provincial administration hardened its stance on the issue, calling Islamabad's move to launch new projects in islands neighbouring Karachi an attempt to "occupy" the provincial resources.

Bhandar, or Bundal Island, is located at the western end of the Sindh coastal zone bordering Korangi, Phitti and Jhari creeks.

It is one of the biggest and highest of all the islands along the Sindh coast, with a length of about eight kilometres. The width of the island varies — it is about 4km wide in the north and 1km in the south.

"The Bundle Island project will generate immense opportunities of investment and employment," said the prime minister while talking to the Sindh governor.

The governor gave a detailed briefing to the prime minister on the Karachi Transformation Plan.

Later addressing a news conference along with Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Ali Haider Zaidi, the governor said the Bundal Island project would enable investments and trade to the tune of several billion rupees in Pakistan, with the potential of creating 0.15 million new job opportunities.

"The mega project at the Arabian Sea will prove a milestone for the economic prosperity of Sindh and Pakistan."

He said there would be a transparent bidding process and all revenue would go to Sindh, adding Pakistani expatriates and local investors would be encouraged to invest in such projects, besides inviting foreign investors.

"Bundal Island will remain part of Sindh," said the minister, adding, "It is not a housing scheme, rather a plan to construct a new city just like Islamabad."

Ismail said the prime minister wanted to expedite the work on the Bundal project as early as possible. He said the project would attract up to five million tourists and the people had already started approaching for investment purposes in the project.

He said, "This is million dollars project and after operational, it will drastically change the economic situation of Sindh."

He added the project would address the grievances of the provincial government and its people as well.

He claimed that the Sindh government was already supporting the project and assured of sorting out the Bundal Island issues with mutual understanding as it was a major project for bringing economic stability in the province.

He said the local businessmen had expressed keen interest in two mega development projects - Urban Development and Bundal Island Project, Karachi and Ravi River Front Urban Development Project, Lahore.

Speaking on the occasion, Zaidi said those mega projects would not only encourage investment of billions of rupees but also promote other affiliated sectors and prove a milestone in strengthening the country's economy.

"This is a project of Sindh and for Sindh. Only the Sindh province will get benefit of this project."

He said the mega development project would change not only the fate of Karachiites but also the people living across the Sindh.

He urged avoiding politicising the project for political point-scoring and added there was a global trend of making new cities for prosperity and economic progress.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Imran Khan was informed on Thursday that the construction of just over 100,000 housing units will be completed by 2021 and the construction industry is expected to generate an economic activity of roughly Rs422 billion in Punjab alone in the same period.

Apart from total 101,479 housing units that are to be completed by the end of the next year, the prime minister was apprised that an additional 44,039 housing units will become a reality through the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) and Pakistan Housing Authority (PHA) Foundation schemes in the coming years.

The details emerged during the weekly meeting of the National Coordination Committee for Housing, Construction and Development, which was chaired by the prime minister and attended by the Ministry of Housing, New Pakistan Housing Authority chairman, provincial chief secretaries, officials of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and others.

Addressing the meeting, PM Imran said that the construction sector was of key importance in accelerating the economic process and reviving the COVID-affected economy.

He directed the Chairman New Pakistan Housing Authority, the provincial chief secretaries and all concerned to pay full attention to the development of the construction sector to avoid delay at any stage.

In the briefing, the Ministry of Housing officials gave a detailed briefing to PM Imran on the commencement of work on the stalled projects of the federal government agencies, the on-going units and the housing units to be built as a result of future projects and the total value of these projects.

The prime minister was informed that about 10 projects of the FGEHA were stalled for the past several years and work has recently been resumed on them.

The ministry officials said that the projects would result in construction of 38,667 housing units with an estimated cost of Rs120.21 billion.

Similarly, the ministry said, work began on three projects of PHA Foundation, which remained stalled for several years. These three projects, the officials said, will result in construction of 5,372 units at an estimated cost of Rs27.85 billion.

The official statement released after the meeting stated that total 26,625 housing units will be constructed at a cost of Rs213.4 billion as a result of ongoing projects this year, adding that new projects for the year 2020 will produce 25,017 units at an estimated cost of Rs112.03 billion. As a result of 2021 projects, the statement said, total 39,955 units will be constructed at a cost of Rs184 billion.

In addition, the meeting was informed that the construction of 5,882 houses was underway with the help of Rs3 billion provided by the government to AKHUWAT – which provides interest-free micro finance.

Meanwhile, Punjab chief secretary, while referring to a World Bank's estimate, said that one dollar invested in the construction sector generates five dollars of economic process.

Subsequently, the PM was briefed, the projects so far approved are expected to generate economic activities of Rs422.5 billion in Punjab and will not only provide job opportunities to youth but help boost various connected industries.

Lastly, the CDA chairman while explaining the difficulties faced by the citizens in the last five years in terms of road network, drainage and other civic amenities presented a plan to overcoming all these issues. He also spoke about the recently-assigned responsibilities of the Metropolitan Corporation to the CDA.
(By Rizwan Shehzad The Express Tribune, 01, 09/10/2020)

Judges, military officers not entitled to plots: Isa

Justice Qazi Faez Isa of the Supreme Court on Thursday observed that neither the Constitution nor any law entitled judges or senior members of the armed forces to receive plots or pieces of land.

"It is trite, but needs restating that judges are not empowered to make law; they simply interpret it and if a law offends the Constitution they must strike it down," observed Justice Isa in his additional note while setting aside the Sept 9, 2018 Islamabad High Court judgement which had scrapped the federal government's housing scheme in sectors F-14 and F-15 in Islamabad.

While scrapping the scheme, the high court had noted that the beneficiaries of these sectors were serving or retired officers and employees of federal ministries, divisions, attached departments, judges of the Supreme Court, all high courts, Azad Jammu and Kashmir Supreme Court and the Chief Court and Supreme Appellate Court of Gilgit-Baltistan, as well as the Federal Shariat Court.

The Supreme Court verdict announced in the open court on Thursday by a four-judge bench concerns a housing project launched by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Federal Government Employees Housing Foundation on the land acquired from the locals. The bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam held that the land was legally acquired by the foundation.

But Justice Isa in his additional note explained that the Constitution and the law (presidential orders) did not entitle chief justices and judges of the superior courts to receive plots or piece of land. Likewise, he highlighted, the manual of 'pay, pension' compiled the presidential orders, rules and notifications regarding the pay, pension and privileges of judges, but the manual also did not contain anything entitling chief justices and judges of the superior courts to plots of land.

"The independence of the judiciary is a necessary concomitant to ensure its respect and credibility in the eyes of the people, but the executive giving plots to judges constitutes a favour," he said.

Justice Isa observed that the Constitution determined the terms and conditions of service of superior court judges and nothing could be subtracted there from or added thereto, adding that since the stipulated terms and conditions did not entitle judges to receive plots, they were not entitled to receive plots from the foundation or out of any compulsorily acquired land.

Justice Isa explained that no one could be given, nor could they receive, more than a single plot, adding that the foundation, government or any organisation controlled by the government could not provide a second or additional plot. Moreover, he said, without specific legal sanction, no one, including the prime minister, had the discretion to grant land, a house or an apartment to anyone.

Justice Isa explained that different laws governed those employed in the armed forces and these laws also did not provide that they be given residential plots, commercial plots or agricultural land nor permitted them to receive the same.

"Nevertheless, senior members of the armed forces get plots and agricultural lands and continue to be given additional plots and agricultural lands as they rise up the ranks," he regretted and recalled that in his 655-page book, the brother of Gen Asif Nawaz brought privileged, personal and scholarly insight into the armed forces of Pakistan.

Justice Isa recalled how Gen Ayub Khan was preceded by two British officers as Pakistan's army chiefs and when Gen Gracey was commanding the Pakistan Army, Gen Ayub Khan approached him with a request for a plot but he was rebuffed by the then army chief; ironically a British officer preserved Pakistan's land from a son of the soil. The author mentioned the grant of subsidised plots and other benefits and stated that "gradually, the mores of the military changed to make all such 'sweetheart' deals acceptable". Likewise, Shuja Nawaz in his book under the chapter "United Pakistan: How to Break up a Country" wrote that the practice of multiple plots was to become common, giving rise to a new "Culture of Entitlement" that permeated both the military and civil bureaucracies and that would become embedded in Pakistani society.

Justice Isa observed that both civil service and armed forces personnel were in the service of Pakistan and the Constitution created no distinction between them. "The laws governing civil and armed forces personnel do not entitle them to receive residential plots, commercial plots or agricultural land. If lands are given to only one category like the members of the armed forces and the civilians in the service of Pakistan are disregarded, it constitutes discrimination and offends the fundamental right of equality," he emphasised.

Justice Isa observed that the amount to be spent in the financial year 2020-21 on pensions was Rs470 billion, of which Rs111bn would be spent on retired civilians and Rs359bn on retired personnel of the armed forces. The annual cost of pension payments is almost equal to the cost of 'running of civil government', which is Rs476bn and the people of Pakistan pay these pensions despite having very little themselves.

"In addition to receiving pensions, public lands are taken which is eminently unfair," Justice Isa regretted, adding that Pakistan was heavily indebted and the people paid astronomical amounts to service the accumulated debt.

"This financial year Rs2 trillion will be paid to service debt; this astronomical amount does not include the repayment of a single dollar, sterling, yen, euro or rupee. And, the government continues to take more loans; piling debt upon debt, and adding billions to debt servicing," Justice Isa regretted, adding that the elite capture created a "predatory state" in which the division between private and public interests was totally dismantled.

(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 01, 09/10/2020)

Fishermen reject construction of new city on twin islands in Karachi

Fisherfolk from the entire city as well several fishing villages from the rest of Sindh gathered at Ibrahim Hyderi on the call of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) on Friday to discuss the issue of the construction of a new city on the twin islands of Bundal and Dingi along Karachi's coast.

PFF chairman Mohammad Ali Shah said that there were over 300 fishing villages on the coast of Sindh, which happen to be owned by the fisherfolk who have been living there from even before the creation of Pakistan.

“But now the federal government is stepping on their toes with its plans of construction of a new city on Dingi and Bundal islands,” he said.

Mr Shah said that the federal government has had its eye on these islands for long.

“Plans for this were also announced in 2006, during the time of the former president of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf. But after much protest from the fisherfolk community, those plans were set aside,” he said.

“Now, once again the islands are being auctioned off and the step will rob the fisherfolk’s livelihood. In fact, it would affect the entire region with the kind of pollution it will generate. Therefore, not just us fisherfolk, every person from this province is against the construction of this so-called modern city,” he said.

MPA Mahmood Alam Jamote also backed the PFF chairman, saying the sale or auctioning off of the two islands was completely unacceptable.

“Selling the islands is out of the question. It is not to be allowed by the people of Sindh as it is an attack on their province,” he said.

“The delta, the creek areas, the mangrove forests around these islands are harvesting areas for marine life. They are also used by the fishing boats as a passageway to the deep sea. Besides, the islands are the property of Sindh and cannot be stolen so easily. The federal government has decided to construct the city on the twin islands without any consultation with the Sindh government, but the area falls under provincial jurisdiction,” he said.

He urged all the people at the gathering to stand up and raise their voice against the step taken by the federal government. (By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 10/10/2020)

Twin islands along Karachi’s coast are not viable for development

The twin islands of Bundal and Buddu, which have recently been taken over by the federal government through a presidential ordinance, are located at the mouth of Korangi Creek and spread over 10,000 acres.



The islands have escaped the onslaught of real estate developers twice over the past two decades, first in 2006 and then in 2013. They are in the limelight again when the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government unilaterally took control of the islands from the Sindh government, which vowed to resist the centre’s move alleging that it was against the Constitution.

No study, however, has recently been done to assess the ecology of the area where these islands exist.

A 2008 survey done by the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-P) had recorded 96 fish and 54 bird species along with three species of marine dolphins and turtles here. The mangrove cover was about 3,349 hectares.

“The fragile ecosystem of this area is already under pressure from growing pollution that will intensify in case of any [concrete] development. We should have an environmental audit of this place so that strategies could be developed for its protection. It has no potential for eco-tourism whatsoever,” said WWF-P’s regional director Tahir Rasheed.

The islands have no potential for eco-tourism as they are already under threat due to sea intrusion, mangrove deforestation, growing pollution

He also referred to Article 8 (A) of the Convention on Biological Diversity to which Pakistan is a signatory and required to respect and protect social, cultural stakes of indigenous people.

It may be mentioned here that Korangi Creek is considered to be one of the worst affected water bodies in terms of destruction caused by heavy discharge of hazardous effluent from Karachi’s industrial areas, including the export processing zone. The continuous flow of waste water from Cattle Colony has also contributed to pollution.

‘No-go areas’

Recently, a [Dawn](#) team, accompanied by some fishermen, visited the islands. As our boat chugged away from the jetty, the foul smell filling the air started losing its intensity, letting us notice a few seabirds among the crows dominating the skyline, the mangrove forests covering a sizable area and some mudflats. The water, too, changed its hues, indicating the ambient conditions in which it existed.

“These fertile channels are a source of livelihood for thousands of fishermen and serve as our fishing routes. We also use them as a stopover to relax,” explained Shafi, a fisherman.

He operates a wooden boat from Ibrahim Hyderi's Jamote jetty, one of the 16 jetties located in the area, which receives untreated waste in its channels from the city before it gets discharged into the sea.

Within half an hour or so, we reached Buddu island, also called Dingi in local parlance, where the team was welcomed by a pack of dogs, occasionally fed by fishermen. The land as one could see from one end of the muddy shoreline was covered with wild bushes and grass. Also visible was a recently built concrete watchtower.

"That specific point is now a no-go area for fishermen as guards stationed there don't let them cross over water from there," shared Kamal Shah, a local activist representing the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF).

"We remember how the community was barred from fishing along Karachi's coast, first in the Gizri Creek area and then along the Phutta island, the area where the Marina Club stands today.

"These kinds of restrictions are suffocating fishermen already facing hardships due to steep reduction in catch that they are forced to sell at low price, rising cost of living and operation of foreign trawlers," he said, worryingly.

Saint's annual urs on Bundal Island

Soon, the team left for the adjacent Bundal Island and reached there in an hour as the boat crew, better aware of wave conditions, took a long turn so that the vessel didn't get stuck in shallow water.

We had to jump into waist-deep water to get to the shore that had ample evidence of mangrove trees that once existed there. Three empty makeshift huts stood some distance away, apparently erected by fishermen for resting purposes. Cautiously walking up a small hill, soon we were standing in front of a shrine with 11 graves. Two smaller ones were, perhaps, of two children.

"This place has been known to us as the shrine of Hazrat Yousuf Shah for a long time. In the coming days, the whole place will come to life when fishermen will visit the place in large numbers and hold the annual urs here," said Mr Shah.

As far as one could look, the land was covered with grass and bushes. There was no soul, no sound except that of strong howling winds.

"These islands formed by the silt that freshwater brings into the sea are natural assets and should be preserved. They have been facing high degradation and erosion as discharge of freshwater downstream Kotri has almost stopped for many years. Factors like mangrove deforestation and growing pollution have contributed to the damage," said senior nature conservationist Jahangir Durrani, adding that islands were not viable for development.
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 11/10/2020)

KBA rejects Islands Authority Ordinance

The Karachi Bar Association has passed a resolution against the Pakistan Islands Development Authority Ordinance, 2020, issued by President Arif Alvi to create a land-owning agency covering islands around Sindh and Balochistan coastline.

An emergency meeting of the KBA managing committee took place at the City Courts on Friday, and was presided over by bar president Munir Ahmed Malik.

It expressed deep concern over the promulgation of the ordinance without the 'due process', said a statement issued by the bar.

"The ordinance has been promulgated without proper introduction of bill in the parliament in a hasty manner. Moreover, the said ordinance is in utter disregard of the Article 172 of Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 and particularly [against] the provincial autonomy in view of the 18th Amendment."

The KBA added that the ordinance was in disregard of the fact that the islands, namely Bundal and Buddo, had been part of Sindh since the British annexation of the subcontinent. It said that the islands had always remained under the control of the province with indigenous population being present and living mostly as fishermen there.

"Whereas, the ordinance takes away complete control from the provincial administration. The authority proposed to be created, has also been given power to reclaim, which shall deeply impact the only source of living of local indigenous population. Tax break of 10 years has also been given in the ordinance, which suggests capitalist ventures at the cost of culture and indigenous population."

The Karachi Bar Association also expressed concern on the letter issued by the Sindh land utilisation department, whereby change of land use has been permitted and land has been made available to the federal government for development.

"Such issue has also arisen due to absence of law minister in the province as well as absence of land utilisation experts, the KBA hereby calls upon the federal and provincial governments to immediately clarify and present the matter in the form of bill before the elected assembly and withdraw the P.I.D.A Ordinance."

The Karachi bar also requested the Supreme Court of Pakistan to take suo motu notice on the issue as being an issue of human rights on account of local population living on the island and provincial autonomy in view of the 18th Amendment. "The ordinance is patently illegal as housing, etc, is provincial subject and change of land use for commercial construction shall destroy local habitat and ecology."

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 11/10/2020)

A tale of two islands

ON Aug 31, 2020, the president of Pakistan promulgated the Pakistan Islands Development Authority Ordinance whereunder the two islands, the Bundal and Buddo islands (the "islands"), both in the coastal waters of Karachi, were placed under federal control and jurisdiction. The ordinance enables the establishment of the Pakistan Islands Development Authority by the federal government with its head office at Karachi (Section 4).



The prime minister is the patron of the authority and is empowered to give general policy directions to the authority (Section 6). A policy board of five to 11 members appointed by the federal government (Section 6[2]) shall, among its broad and wide powers, "establish and maintain strategic directions of the Authority" (Section 9[2][a]). All acts of the authority are

subject to the "control" of the federal government and the federal government may "revoke, suspend or modify" any acts or proceedings of the authority (Section 5[4]). A non obstante clause reaffirms the paramount supremacy of the authority and the ordinance: the provisions of the ordinance shall have "effect notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force" (Section 53).

The federal capture of the Bundal and Buddo islands is accomplished by providing a series of activities that can be undertaken by the federal government in "specified areas" which are explained to solely be the Bundal and Buddo islands (Section 2[s] read with the First Schedule). Section 3, importantly, lays down:

"(1) The specified areas shall vest in the Federal Government and the Authority shall, for and on behalf of the Federal Government, possess, control, manage and deal with the specified areas in accordance with the provisions of this Ordinance."

The Pakistan Islands Development Authority Ordinance goes against the spirit of the 18th Amendment.

Given broad powers, the authority and the policy board are tasked with the responsibility for the reclamation, master planning, urban planning, and spatial planning for the islands (Section 5[a] and Section 9). It is significant that the procurement and outsourcing for the development schemes of the islands is not subject to the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002, which provides important safeguards against corrupt practices (Section 19[3]).

It is the principal contention of these submissions that the ordinance is unconstitutional, ultra vires and particularly against the letter and spirit of the Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Amendment Act, 2010, which is anchored in the grant of maximum autonomy to the provinces.

Let us begin with the basic territorial provisions of this Constitution. Article 1(2) declares that: "The territories of Pakistan shall comprise:-

- (a) the Provinces of Balochistan, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Punjab and Sindh;
- (b) the Islamabad Capital Territory, hereinafter referred to as the Federal Capital; and
- (c) such States and territories as are or may be included in Pakistan, whether by accession or otherwise."

It does not require much analysis to conclude that the only territory of the federal government is the Islamabad Capital Territory and such "States and territories as are or may be included in Pakistan by accession or otherwise".

This would show that the islands, contiguous to the province of Sindh, are a part of Sindh. Old records would likely support this. It would be dangerous to contend that the islands are not a part of Sindh as this would open the suggestion that they are res nullius as not being a part of the territory of Pakistan.

Attention is, however, drawn to Article 172:

"(1) Any property which has no rightful owner shall, if located in a Province, vest in the Government of that Province, and in every other case, in the Federal Government."

If the islands vest in and are a part of Sindh under the Constitution, the federal government cannot, under the ordinance, vest them in the federal government as it has purportedly done under Section 3(1) of the ordinance. The federal government is also generally barred under Articles 97 and 142 to exercise its executive authority or legislate in respect of the islands:

"Article 97: Subject to the Constitution, the executive authority of the federation shall extend to the matters with respect to which Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) has power to make laws....

"Article 142: (a) Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) shall have exclusive power to make laws with respect to any matter in the Federal Legislative List;

... "(c) Subject to paragraph (b), a Provincial Assembly shall, and Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) shall not, have power to make laws with respect to any matter not enumerated in the Federal Legislative List;"

The abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List and a modest Federal Legislative List considerably reduced federal involvement in the affairs of the provinces after the 18th Amendment.

The Sindh government has also relied on Article 239(4) to object to the legitimacy of the ordinance. This article bars a constitutional amendment altering the limits of a province without the two-third consent of the total membership of its provincial assembly.

The economic and environmental considerations for the development of the islands were well highlighted by an editorial in this paper:

“Real estate developers and their cronies among the ruling elite have long had an eye on the two islands in question. The area is an ecologically important site: it is part of the Indus delta where the mangrove forest cover is a breeding ground for shrimp and other shellfish. Thousands of fisherfolk depend on these islands for various fishing-related activities that make up their livelihood.

However, for those holding the reins of power, the prospect of multibillion-rupee fortunes clearly trumps these ‘trivial’ human and ecological concerns.”

Prima facie, the ordinance is void ab initio and a brazen usurpation of the constitutional rights and patrimony of Sindh to the islands. Its “in stealth” promulgation without a prior discussion in the national parliament or in the national constitutional consultative and coordination bodies also arguably points to the mala fides of the federal government. The ordinance should forthwith be withdrawn/repealed to avoid any further misunderstandings between the federal government and the Sindh government.

(By Pervez Hassan Dawn, 06, 14/10/2020)

Protest against twin islands' takeover extended to many areas in Sindh

Activists of political parties, which were components of Sindh Action Committee, took out rallies in several Sindh towns on Saturday as part of their ongoing protest against promulgation of presidential ordinance on islands and demanded immediate withdrawal of the ordinance.

In Hyderabad, Sindh United Party (STP) secretary general Roshan Buriro, who led a rally, said that if Pakistan Peoples Party's Sindh government had not issued a no-objection certificate the federal government would not have the temerity to issue this ordinance.

Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM) leader Dr Niaz Kalani said that Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari did not utter even a word on islands' issue in Gujranwala public meeting where it mattered.

Sindh Taraqqi-pasand Party's (STP) Hoat Khan Gadhi said that PPP despite being largest parliamentary group in Sindh Assembly and ruling party was still making useless noises. PPP had not even been able to table a resolution in Sindh Assembly on this burning issue, he said.

Awami Tehreek leader Dawood Dahiri and PML-N's Qamarzaman Rajput said that people of Sindh would not allow handover of their land to “outsiders” and announced struggle would be launched for protecting natural resources of Sindh.

SUKKUR: A protest was staged under the aegis of Sindh Action Committee outside local press club against the presidential ordinance.

The protesters' leaders said the federal government wanted to occupy islands of Sindh and Balochistan through the “illegal” ordinance but people would never hand over their land to the centre.

In Jacobabad, activists of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl, STP, PPP-Shaheed Bhutto, National Party (NP) and others took out a rally and held a sit-in.

The rally reached the press club after passing through different roads where participants held a sit-in and leaders made speeches. The leaders said they would bury the ordinance like they had done with the issue of Kalabagh dam and demanded its immediate withdrawal.

DADU: A large number of activists of various parties and civil society took out a protest rally which began from Allama I.I. Qazi Library and terminated at local press club.

The protesters' leaders demanded the federal government withdraw the ordinance and abolish Pakistan Islands Development Authority. If the ordinance was not abrogated, they would continue their protest, they warned.

STP president and convenor of the committee Syed Jalal Mehmood Shah told journalists in Jamshoro that federal government had no ethical and legal right to “occupy” the islands. Meanwhile, a big rally was taken out from Mehar to Dadu.

MITHI: Workers of several parties staged a demonstration against the presidential ordinance on islands.

The protesters' leaders said people of Sindh would never allow anybody to occupy their land and sea. The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government's act was tantamount to committing “robbery” on islands and other resources of Sindh, they said.

They vowed to resist all attempts to grab their islands and continue their protest till the ordinance was withdrawn or repealed by parliament.

MIRPURKHAS: Workers of STP, AT, JSQM, Jeay Sindh Hari Tehreek took out a rally against the ordinance which terminated at local press club.

The protesters' leaders rejected the ordinance on islands and said that it was part of a conspiracy to occupy Sindh's land sea.

They demanded the federal government withdraw the ordinance and urged the Sindh government to take a firm and clear stand on the issue.

NAWABSHAH: Activists of nationalist parties took out a rally and staged a demonstration against the presidential ordinance.

The rally started from New Naka and after passing through roads ended outside local press club.

The protesters said that they would not accept the ordinance and continue to safeguard resources and interests of Sindh.

They demanded immediate withdrawal of the ordinance and warned the protest would continue if the ordinance was not withdrawn immediately.

NAUSHAHRO FEROZE: Workers of STP and PPP-SB along with activists of various other nationalist parties staged a demonstration against the ordinance at local press club on Saturday.

The protesters demanded PPP members pass a resolution against the ordinance in Sindh Assembly or tender resignation if they did not have courage to do so. They would launch agitation across Sindh if the resolution was not passed, they said.

SHIKARPUR: Activists of nationalist parties and JUI-F took out a rally in protest against the presidential ordinance.

The protesters' leaders condemned the ordinance and claimed the federal government wanted to change demography of the province by occupying its islands but people of Sindh would never allow it to happen.

(By Dawn Reporter 15, 18/10/2020)

Who owns the islands?

A presidential ordinance was promulgated on August 31, 2020 to establish the Pakistan Islands Development Authority (PIDA).

The federal government has planned to build and develop two main islands, Bundal and Bundo, near Karachi's coast. The Sindh and federal governments are already at loggerheads, and this development has further intensified the battle.



Yet again, the Centre kept the parliament out of the loop. Without a parliamentary debate, rifts between Sindh and the federal government are inevitable. During a petition being heard on the matter in the Sindh High Court (SHC), Advocate Shahab Usto argued that the 18th Amendment provides the province jurisdiction over water within 12 nautical miles. It was argued that such amendments should not be made through an ordinance, but passed by a two-thirds majority in the national and provincial assemblies.

The PPP vowed to take the matters to the Senate, National Assembly, and provincial assemblies. While this is the right step forward, we must understand the issue is much bigger than the rift between the Centre and provinces. The ecological consequences of such an initiative will affect the whole country and people from all walks of life.

A mixed message is being sent out; the debate should not be about who owns which island. These are Pakistan's islands — crucial for the sustainability of our ecosystem. They are home to mangroves which mitigate the effects of global warming and help marine life thrive.

A research by the Mesoamerican Reef concluded that there are "25 times more fish close to mangrove areas than in areas where mangroves have been cut down". This makes mangrove forests critically important to coral reefs and commercial fisheries. Nearly 25% of the ocean's fish rely on healthy coral reefs. Today, however, due to accelerated climate change and global warming, more than 50% reefs have disappeared.

Without the protective role of mangroves, some small countries such as Maldives, Kiribati, and Marshall Islands, would simply not exist. Karachi's land, especially in the south, isn't safe from natural disasters either.

In Karachi, the coastal belt is home to mangroves which provide a substantial ecosystem to our marine life. The area is also home to local fishermen, who burn the midnight oil to feed their families. Amid the Covid-19 crisis — where livelihoods have been affected — we simply cannot abandon the fishermen community. That is the last thing any government should be doing.

A prominent environmentalist from Lahore, Dawar Butt, has highlighted how rising sea levels pose a grave threat to DHA Karachi residents and those close to the coastline. As global warming gains momentum, rising sea levels will bring destruction of unprecedented scale and nature.

Countries have already started investing in disaster risk management initiatives near coastal cities. When will Karachi take action? As a nation, we only take action at times of a natural disaster, when the damage has been already done. Once the threat is dealt with, we again forget about disaster risk management. This must change.

Special attention should be given to the sewage waste being dumped directly into the ocean. It's alarming that 400 million gallons of untreated sewage is dumped into the sea daily — a silent killer for marine life. According to the Adviser to CM on Environment, Murtaza Wahab, the coastline is controlled and supervised by the federal government and CBC. We must keep politics aside and urgently reverse marine life's misery here.

The federal government must not indulge in projects which could cause unrest. Let's not forget the people of Karachi, the daily-wage workers, are still trying to recover from the torrential rains which destroyed their livelihoods. Instead of facilitating Karachiites, this will destroy the livelihoods of the fishermen community.

Instead of constant daggers drawn on who owns which island, the Centre and provincial government must not forget how 'development' here would impact the area's biodiversity.

We all must be on the same page in reversing accelerated climate change and preventing irreparable damage to the planet and its inhabitants.

(By Eric Shahzar The Express Tribune, 14, 21/10/2020)

Warrant reissued for arrest of builder in Bahria Town land case

An accountability court on Wednesday reissued non-bailable warrant for the arrest of absconding builder Zain Malik through the Pakistani authorities in the United Kingdom (UK) in a case pertaining to alleged illegal amalgamation of commercial land for a multistorey building of Bahria Town in Karachi.

Former Karachi mayor and Pak Sarzameen Party chairman Syed Mustafa Kamal; Zain Malik, son-in-law of real estate tycoon Malik Riaz; former Karachi district coordination officer Fazlur Rehman; former executive district officer Iftikhar Kaimkhani and others are facing trial in the case.

On Wednesday, the matter came up before Accountability Court-III judge Dr Sher Bano Karim when Mustafa Kamal and other suspects appeared before the court on bail while Fazlur Rehman was produced from the District Jail Malir.

The investigating officer of the case, Abdul Fateh, filed a compliance report regarding execution of non-bailable warrant issued by the court on the last date for the arrest of Zain Malik, who is allegedly absconding in the case.

The report filed through special public prosecutor Shahbaz Sahotra stated that the non-bailable arrest warrant issued by the court for suspect Malik had been sent to the International Coordination Wing (ICW) of the National Accountability Bureau's Headquarters in Islamabad.

It further stated that the ICW had approached the authorities concerned at the Pakistan High Commission in the UK to contact Mr Malik and execute the arrest warrant on him and send a compliance report in this regard to NAB headquarters.

However, the prosecutor said, a response was yet to be received from the ICW authorities and requested for more time to enable them to execute the warrant.

The judge allowed more time till Nov 4 and reissued non-bailable warrant for Mr Malik.

Warrant reissued in foreigner's \$121.6m graft case

An accountability court on Wednesday repeated a non-bailable warrant for the arrest of a foreigner in a case involving alleged corruption of \$121.6 million in Pakistan Petroleum Ltd (PPL) through acquisition of assets of a UK-based oil and gas exploration company.

NAB had filed a reference nominating former managing director/chief executive officer of PPL Asim Murtaza Khan, general manager Abdul Wahid, deputy MD Moin Raza Khan, chief economist Rahat Hussain, financial adviser Khaqan Saadullah and Pavel Marek as suspects.

On Wednesday the matter came up before Accountability Court-IV judge Suresh Kumar when IO Abdul Fateh submitted a compliance report regarding execution of non-bailable warrant issued by the court on the last date for arrest of Mr Marek, director/owner of M/s Moravske Naftove Doly (MND) and a Czech national.

The IO mentioned that the warrant could not be served on the suspect and requested for more time to do so.

Allowing the request, the judge granted time till Nov 7. The judge told the IO to ensure arrest of the suspect and ensure his presence before the court on the next hearing.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 22/10/2020)

SSGC rejects gas leakage theory in building blast

As the death toll in Wednesday's blast in a multistorey building in Gulshan-i-Iqbal rose to six on Friday, the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) raised a serious objection to the police probe which claimed gas leakage as the reason behind the deadly explosion. However, the police investigators insisted on their findings and asserted that they had "enough reasons and evidence" to stick to their version of events.

The SSGC in a statement described the "gas leakage" as "wrongful attribution" for the explosion and shared details of its own findings from the site of the incident claiming that its supply was intact with no history of any complaint from any consumer.

"The reason for the blast was wrongfully attributed to the leakage of natural gas," said the SSGC statement.

"However, there is ample evidence to suggest that this was not the case, in light of the below mentioned facts. As an established protocol, SSGC's emergency teams rushed to the blast site and as a precautionary safety measure, instantly switched off main gas supply to the building. The teams found out that there was no damage to any service line, valve and gas meter at the site of the blast," the statement said.

It added that all gas pipelines and all domestic gas meters along with three commercial meters installed at the blast site also remained undamaged.

It said that of late neither the SSGC helpline nor the company's social media pages received any gas-related complaint from residents of the said apartment.

Police stand by their claim

"It is also important to point out that the commercial bank below the building did not have a SSGC gas connection," it said. "As television reports showed, residents and eye witnesses categorically dispelled any sign of gas leak since no one sensed a pungent smell of a leak. CCTV footage clearly showed a powerful explosion that had no trappings of blasts, usually associated with gas leakage. In fact, if it was the case of a leakage, there would have been a massive fire following the blast, as well. However, all one saw was the crumbling debris and [shards] of glass and no blackened and burnt out infrastructure."

Police unconvinced

However, the police authorities remained unconvinced by the gas company's argument.

The investigators while referring to a final report of the detailed examination of the blast site by the bomb disposal unit found another key lead to strengthen their findings. The police officials said that heirs of one of the deceased persons had submitted a separate application before the police for registering an FIR against the bank management as their alleged negligence caused the explosion.

"The widow of a man, who died in the blast and lived just over the floor of the mezzanine floor of the building where the bank branch had its kitchen, has formally submitted the application," said SSP East Sajid Sadozai. "The woman has clearly mentioned that her family had more than once in a month asked the bank management to check their gas connection in the kitchen because they could notice smell constantly coming to their apartment. There might be no problem in main line connection, but it's fact that the people in that particular part of the building were complaining of the gas smell for a month."

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 24/10/202)

No land for (sports)women

The struggle for women's right to public space, for simple freedoms, appears to be never ending in our country. And yet, the more our socio-political order shrinks women's access to public space, the more ways women find to resist the patriarchal order.

The Lyari Girl Cafe (LGC), a prominent non-profit organisation, made waves when it was first founded. The LGC focuses primarily on women's access to public space and battling all odds it has managed to create space for itself in sporting activities for women.

Despite doing plenty to improve Lyari's image in the public eye and opening new avenues for cycling and other sports in the city, especially for females, a new wave of obstacles has hit them.

Even as Karachi Administrator Iftikhar Shalwani and other prominent officials of the city government advocate for the benefits of sports and healthy physical activities for citizens, members of the LGC are being denied access to football and boxing grounds in some government schools located in the area.

"We have been practicing in schools since 2017," shares Zulekha Dawood, a senior member of the LGC. "[But] on Thursday evening when they went for their regular practice, the school door was shut for our girls."

When the LGC contacted the school management in Bihar Colony, they were told to get permission from the office of Lyari zone's deputy director education.

When they reached the office they were told to collect cancellation orders by Monday. "The permission has been cancelled without any solid reasons given," said LGC head Sultan Adam.

"This is not the first time our girls have been denied access to the grounds," informed Adam, adding that the education department officials were under pressure from certain groups who have objected to girls cycling in the past.

"People object over dress and even shoes," commented a young footballer, Ayesha. "I bring my dress and shoes in a bag and change at the club." This was her way of avoiding further comments and objections from disapproving and/or leering eyes.

Ayesha draws courage from her family's support. "My family supports me and that's why I don't care about the [disapproving] people."

Her coach, Javed Arab, laments that people have begun commenting and objecting to the girls playing sports. "They say their girls will be ruined seeing your [LGC's] players." Given the objections he had restricted the girls' practice sessions within a boundary. "The propaganda continues [but] so does our practice."

Arab allowed in female players in his club in 2016. But the barriers to women's participation are set up in several ways. "People come on bikes to disturb us. Some even make videos of practicing girls," he says giving an example of the kind of tactics employed to harass the sportswomen.

The bodies of women are sexualised in our society at an early age. The way they speak, dress, move, or occupy space in any manner - whether in the public or private sphere - is heavily scrutinised. It is no wonder then that we rank abysmally on any index of gender equality or gender safety for many in our society cannot get past policing women's bodies for the mindset that emerges subsequently, is one that centres its efforts on controlling and policing women's bodies. There is enough data and research, locally and globally, which connects these attitudes to violence against women and children - crimes which are devastatingly frequent in our society.

"I do not comment on the issue of cancellation of the permission," said Lyari Zone Deputy Director Asma Ayaz initially. "But I received complaints against the girls. I am not responsible for allocating an alternate place," she added.

Meanwhile, South Deputy Commissioner and Administrator Irshad Ahmed Sodhar maintained that his office has always encouraged all kinds of sports, especially for girls. "We support females coming out and participating in healthy activities. I will probe the matter."

Another girls' football coach, Zubair Baloch, from Singo Lane said there was one objection that he did agree with. Referring to the football kit, he said, "I think that's a right objection because it is against our religion."

Commenting on the situation, sociologist Dr Nida Kirmani opined that this was the natural response of right-wing parties.

Kirmani, who has been researching on Lyari for years now, said that young girls have come out in larger numbers since the 2013 general elections. And since the 2018 polls, she added, the mobilisation of religious parties has increased. "Both trends [of the youngsters and the right-based parties] are growing [in Lyari]," she observed.

Social and political activists believe that most people who object to girls' participation in different activities use various social media platforms to target and pressurise proponents of women's participation in the public sphere, she elaborated.

"I have been under pressure after I participated in a few protests," shared a girl from Lyari, B*. "I have limited myself to my home as my family cannot afford social pressure."

"[Efforts to resist restrictive norms] are unaffordable if your family is not with you," elaborated Dawood, who knows many young girls who participated in bicycle races a couple of years ago but were forced to quit after social media campaigns were launched against them. "There is a kind of competition between these narrow minded people and young girls."

Despite the obstacles, the young women remain undeterred. The irony is that it is these very women who when they succeed, do wonders for the soft image of our country that we so desperately wish to see improving.
(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 25/10/2020)

No space to play

AFTER the development of Jahangir Park in Karachi, the physical and social environment of Saddar improved. A survey by the Urban Resource Centre shows that the residents of Saddar are happy. However, a majority of residents interviewed feel that some part of the park should have been left open so that children could play football and cricket which they now do on the streets.



Unlike the conservation architects who are critical of the design, the residents are not too interested in the heritage aspects of the park. Maybe if the architects and residents had been consulted, their concerns could have been addressed in the design.

The same applies to the People's Square designed under the World Bank Neighbourhood Improvement Project, which is surrounded by four academic institutions and the National Museum — an ideal location for a civic space.

Here, before the implementation of the design, neighbourhood children used to play cricket on weekends and holidays and at night in Ramazan. Meanwhile, within this space pigeons were regularly fed by neighbourhood residents. None of these social functions were integrated into the plan. The same children now play cricket on the narrow streets where matches cannot be held and where

the police pester them. To play a match the children now go to open areas near Hawksbay and this is worrisome for their parents for security reasons.

We are rapidly depriving our younger generation of spaces to play. First, we drove them out of Polo Ground where about 40 teams played cricket over the weekend. We have driven them out of Arambagh, Old Clifton, from near the Jinnah Courts building, and from the 150-acre Bagh Ibn-i Qasim, out of which 50 acres could easily have been made available for sports. In the neighbourhood of this empty park, children also play in the streets. In addition, in most neighbourhood parks built in the last decade, sports are not permitted and in some not even a ball.

The children now play cricket on narrow streets.

It is important to understand that once in use, parks learn. For instance, Hill Park, where I have walked for 34 years, had over time divided itself into different zones. Children and families gathered around the lake, the older generation in the formal gardens to the north, the youth and couples towards the hill, and the open car parking space to the west, when not in use, is used for sports or for driving lessons. At the northeast end, a cricket ground had developed where young men held matches. A café, called the Three Coins, developed out of necessity at the southeastern corner of the park. People, after exercising or a visit, frequented it. It was removed as a result of a Supreme Court order to remove all unauthorised construction in the city. As a result, social relationships and those of different functions collapsed and the park is now trying to learn all over again.

The problem here is that the architect designs on the basis of his own understanding of what the needs of the people are. There is very little relationship between architects and people in Pakistan, and for this reason it is very important that all designs for public spaces should be exhibited at a central place where people can record their observations and make suggestions. If this could be done systematically, design would be more people-friendly and it would create a relationship of trust between people, the city and the government.

The examples given here are those of spaces that have already been lost to us. However, there are two public spaces that are in the process of development. One of these is Empress Market, and we do not know what its future is going to be. It and the area around it are an important part of Karachi's social and physical fabric. Therefore, it is essential that what has been proposed for it is exhibited for all Karachiites to see and comment on.

The other development that is taking place is in Frere Hall. Recently, I received a copy of an email sent by residents of the area to the administrator Karachi expressing serious concerns about the developments taking place. The issues they have raised relate to the library, the replacement of soft landscape by enicrete paving, removal of seating for visitors, and the constricting of space and timings for the weekly book fair. It is essential that the residents and the detractors of the plan are made a party to the final design, the process of its implementation, and the future activities of Frere Hall.

The importance of playgrounds is well understood by the residents of Karachi. When supervising an Orangi Pilot Project sanitation scheme in 1994, I was told by an old resident "sewage is important but more important is space to play. Without it we will have a generation of heroinchis". History, unfortunately, is proving him right.
(By Arif Hasan Dawn, 07, 25/10/2020)

Sindh asked to revisit Zulfiqarabad project

The Sindh government has been asked to revisit the Zulfiqarabad modern city project by the authority originally tasked with developing it, The Express Tribune has learned.

The project, which envisioned building a state-of-the-art city over several talukas of Thatta and Sujawal districts, has been on ice since September 2013, due to a Sindh High Court stay order. Other developments since then have also reinforced the impression that it may no longer be possible to allot much of the land the city was supposed to be built over.

However, the discovery of gas reserves in Sujawal district's Jati taluka and progress of the Sindh Barrage project in Ghorabari taluka of Thatta appears to have reignited the Zulfiqarabad Development Authority's interest in the project. Land from the Ghorabari taluka was also originally earmarked for Zulfiqarabad, sources said.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, ZDA managing director Ali Mumtaz Shah said he had sent the provincial chief minister a letter recommending that the Zulfiqarabad project be revisited in light of developments in the Water and Power Development Authority's (Wapda) Sindh Barrage project.

"Wapda has been able get the construction of a bridge in Ghorabari taluka approved recently. The bridge is to be constructed on the same spot where part of the Zulfiqarabad project was supposed to built upon," Shah revealed. "Wapda is also using the same design for the construction of an expressway in Ghorabari," he said. "The discovery of gas reserves in Jati has also resulted in the grant of passage through an area that was also allotted for Zulfiqarabad," he added.

According to Zaidi, ZDA is currently carrying out a study of other areas allotted for Zulfiqarabad. "We want to determine if the land is still suitable or not for the project due to floods in the past," he said.
(By Razzak Abro The Express Tribune, 05, 27/10/2020)

Fishermen fear losing livelihoods — and home

Sindh's fishermen survive on little, but they are happy. They have much other than money to hold on to - their roots, history, culture, islands, the shores that they call home and the sea.

As Shahid Mahmudani voiced these thoughts, fixing a broken fishing net along with his brother and cousins, he was morose.

"The development on the twin islands [of Dingi and Bhandar] will push us to abject hunger and displacement," he said. Displacement will mean a large fishing community being uprooted from what has been their home for decades.

According to Mahmudani, fishermen from Thatta, Sujawal and Badin have been migrating Ibrahim Hyderi and Rehri Goth, in the suburbs of Karachi, expanding these fishermen's settlements over time so that they are now two of the largest ones in Pakistan.

Currently, around 150,000 fishermen live in Ibrahim Hyderi alone, relying solely on the fishing industry to make ends meet.

Mahmudani fears that development on the islands will block their routes to the deep sea and fishing creeks, depriving them of their livelihoods and, eventually, displacing them.

The worry that Mahmudani has been fighting off for weeks has been keeping numerous other fishermen up all night.

"You [the government] would not be developing anything for us but only blocking our way to the sea," said another disgruntled fisherman, Abdullah.

According to him, fishermen are no longer allowed to venture near Port Qasim and fishing spots near Clifton and Karachi Port Trust.

"And when the government occupies our islands, we will be left with only a narrow strip of water to take us into deep sea for fishing," he decried.

According to a survey conducted by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), there were roughly 300 islands between Karachi and Sujawal from 2000 to 2006. PFF president Muhammad Ali Shah believes that all these islands, and not just Dingi and Bhandar, will be "developed" by the government.

"The government does not want just the two islands, but all our fishing grounds and mangroves," he opined.

So, the development on Dingi and Bhandar islands is likely to have a direct impact on approximately 800,000 fishermen, of 2.5 million residing along the Sindh's coastal belt, Shah estimated. Others, he said, will suffer indirect effects.

According to the fishermen of Ibrahim Hyderi and Rehri Goth, those displaced from Indus Delta and settled in the suburbs of Karachi, in the face of the Indus River drying up, are already living in abject poverty. Being forced to move again would spell certain doom for them, they worried.

"The fishermen's displacement will be a catastrophe," remarked Shah. "Our culture, history and profession are at risk."

According to him, "Constructing huge buildings and roads will not lead to human development. It is destruction. It will destroy the entire ecosystem in the region."

He said the fishermen of the Indus Delta were prosperous till the 1960s. "They relied on agriculture, livestock and fishing [for survival]," he recalled. "But agriculture and livestock gradually disappeared after the construction of dams. And now, our sole remaining source of earning a living is also under threat."

The sentiment is shared by the rest of the fishing community.

"We are the people who built this place [Karachi]," said a fisherman, Muhammad Ibrahim. "We are being pushed into a corner and where will you [the government] provide us accommodation if we are displaced?" he questioned.

He said fishing was a dying profession since the Indus Delta was drying up and complained that neither the government nor any other organisation had extended support to the fishermen during these challenging times.

Abdullah said that even after working 12 hours a day, they could hardly earn up to Rs15,000 a month.

As a consequence, several young men and women from the community are now looking for other options for earning.

"Many have started working in factories and the community's women have started working as housemaids," explained another fisherman, Abdul Karim. "We are neglected, ignored and helpless," he added. "Just look at our condition. We don't have access to potable water and other basic necessities. This is the ugliest place in the city."

So, when the government develops the islands, "it will be depriving us of whatever few rights we have," remarked Abdullah.

As per World Wildlife Fund-Pakistan regional head in Sindh and Balochistan Dr Tahir Rasheed, developing the islands will also cause significant damage to mangroves.

"At least 99 species of fish breed around these islands and so far, over 50 species of birds have been recorded there. The development would affect all of them," he explained.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 08/11/2020)

Sufi saint's Urs at Bhandar Island comes to a close

As Ibrahim Mirbahar prepared for the annual Bhandar Jo Melo this November, he wondered whether he'd be able visit Bhandar Island next year. He knows Bhandar is one of the twin islands off Karachi's shore where the federal government plans to construct new cities.

As every year, he'd packed his tents for the three-day Urs of Syed Yousuf Shah and looked forward to enjoying the festivities with his wife and two kids.

The annual rituals for the Sufi saint usually begin in the first week of November, with the onset of winter, and Mirbahar's family arrived to the familiar carnivalesque atmosphere.

A small market was set up and scores of other fishermen had set up makeshift tents with yet others arriving with families in tow, carrying solar systems, tape recorders and the like, ready to set up camp. Many carried long chaddars to place around the graves of Syed Yousuf Shah and others. Most sported colourful flags and buntings - some to adorn graves, others signifying their boats.

Mirbahar felt at ease among the festivities. "The only prayer for me this year is [that I can] come here next year without any trouble," he said, speaking to The Express Tribune. "We are unable to go to Dingi Island anymore. I don't think we will be able to come here next year."

The small dargah of the saint is located at a mound just near the shore. Fishermen from Ibrahim Hyderi, Rehri Goth and other settlements make their way to the island annually to offer prayers and spend time with their families.

"Most visitors pray for the prosperity of their fishing profession," said Rafique, a resident of Ibrahim Hyderi. "They make special arrangements and invite relatives and friends to visit the shrines."

The small settlement on the island meets them jubilantly as rituals begin.

"This is the most important event of the year for these fishing communities," says Muhammad Ali Shah, the president of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF).

The three-day mela this year began on Friday and culminated on Sunday (yesterday) with more and more devotees arriving each day. Thousands of fishermen visit the shrine on the last day, claimed Kamal Shah, another resident of Ibrahim Hyderi.

The route from Ibrahim Hyderi to Bundal Island takes 30 minutes by boat - and one may only reach the island by water. "Those who have boats facilitate common visitors and help them get here too," explains Muhammad Ali Shah.

As the fisherfolk prayed for better fishing seasons and the prosperity of their profession and community, others, like Mirbahar, also made prayers for their traditions to continue and for them to be able to visit the small shrine again next year.

"People are culturally attached to these islands and want to remain with them forever," said the PFF chief.

There used to be another annual celebration for the Urs of Bab Haider Shah near the beach, Kamal shares. But the rituals for that have been restricted for the past 20 years, according to him. "This is the only place that fishermen from nearby areas visit. They pay tribute to the Sufi saint [Syed Yousuf Shah] and spend nights on the island."

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 09/11/2020)

Housing project for rain-affected families

A contingent of Rotary Club Karachi New Central executive members and representatives of GEAR (Generating Employment Alternatives for Self Reliance) gathered at Juma Goth village in Ibrahim Hyderi recently to mark the successful completion of the housing project for rain-affected families of the village, says a press release.

Gathering at a local community hall, club president Alia Hasan spoke about the plight of the residents of the area who had suddenly found themselves without a roof over their heads. "After an initial survey by us, our club decided that funds would be raised to rehabilitate these families, and I am proud to say we did it through our own resources. The completion of 25 homes within a month of the survey, however, could not have been possible without the untiring and selfless efforts of the GEAR team," she said.

Farooq and Zameer Hussain from GEAR also shed light on the ongoing need for support and relief work, as did the community leader of the area.

(From The Newspaper Dawn, 14, 21/11/2020)

Govt plans unbundling of several public entities

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms Dr Ishrat Husain has announced unbundling of several state-owned enterprises, including Pakistan Railways, PIA and Pakistan Steel Mills, and involving the private sector to run these entities.



Addressing a news conference with Information Minister Shibli Faraz here on Friday, Dr Husain also highlighted the reforms undertaken in the federal tax collecting body. Acknowledging mismanagement and corruption in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the adviser said the best way to eradicate all such misdoings was to minimise human interaction.

“If we are able to harness the true potential of tax collection, the government will not require borrowing and the national debt will reduce,” he said, adding that a UK-based Pakistani had been hired as the chief information officer at the FBR and under the new system, payment of sales tax refunds was going on smoothly.

“Now the claimants do not need to meet any official to receive the cheques for refunds; the amount is directly transferred to the bank account of the company. We have cleared refunds of up to Rs250 billion and soon this system will be implemented for income tax refunds, too,” he said.

PM's aide says Rs250bn sales tax refunds cleared

Dr Husain said out of around 2.7 million income tax filers, one million showed a negligible income and the FBR had started gathering information about these people from the National Database and Registration Authority, Civil Aviation, etc.

“Due to this integration of database the FBR will know the lifestyle of such persons; it will expand the tax base and eventually lead to lowering the tax rate. All such measures will also help improve the FBR performance,” he added.

The PM's aide said the restructuring plan of Pakistan Railways (PR) had been approved by the federal cabinet and the organisation would be divided into five entities — a regulatory body on safety and accidents; a separate company for ML-1 for fast-track train from Karachi to Peshawar; a government company to manage the existing tracks and other infrastructure; a freight company as currently only four per cent national freight is being handled by PR and this needed to be enhanced; and a passenger company where the private sector will be allowed to operate trains by giving charges to the track and infrastructure company.

Dr Husain also announced division of Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) land into two parts as well as a scheme to lay off its existing employees by offering them salaries for two-three years.

“The PSM has been non-functional since 2015, but salaries and other packages are being paid by the government,” he said, adding: “We will establish a company to run the Steel Mills with private sector and 1,200 acres of its land will remain under the administrative control of PSM. We expect that the operating capacity of Steel Mills will enhance up to three million tonnes per annum against one million tonnes.”

He said that 19,000 acres of other purpose land of the PSM would remain under the government control.

The PM's adviser also announced the unbundling plan of PIA as the accumulated losses of the national flag carrier over the past 10 years stood at Rs450bn. It was a heavily indebted entity making it impossible to achieve any growth path, he said.

“The financial restructuring plan has been finalised; a fresh fleet would be provided to the national flag carrier, but it would be rightsized to 7,000 employees from its existing strength of 14,000,” he added.

Dr Husain said an attractive voluntary separation scheme would be offered to around 3,500 employees, while 3,500 affiliated with non-core business like catering, etc, would be outsourced. “The ratio will be reduced from 500 persons per plane to 250, but that too is higher than that of Emirates or Qatar Airways, to reduce losses and turn the airline around,” he added.

Dr Husain said that out of 65m workforce in the country, only 4m were employed in the public sector and the government had to strengthen the private sector as the driving force for the economy. He said there were more than 100 rules and regulations for the investors to fulfil for setting up an industry in Pakistan and the government was working to reduce the number of such requirements.

He said weakening any institution was easy and faster compared to strengthening the institutions. “That is why it was the vision of the prime minister to appoint only professional and able persons as heads of the institutions, including the chief executives, managing directors and senior managers,” he said.

Dr Husain said the current selection process involved several competent authorities, adding that earlier the hiring of senior managements in state-owned enterprises and other institutions was discretionary of the prime minister. He said that about 50 senior managers had been hired through this process and none of the appointments had been challenged.

Many competent overseas Pakistanis have been hired through this process, he said, adding that the new promotion policy of the government was not based merely on seniority, but also on competency and hard work.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 01, 21/11/2020)

NAB, builders get three more months to refund full amount in Fazaia scam case

The Sindh High Court on Monday directed the National Accountability Bureau and M/s Maxim Builders to pay out in full all the affectees of Fazaia Housing Scheme till Feb 25, 2021.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice K.K. Agha observed that despite the passage of six months, no compliance report was placed on record by NAB.

However, it said the prosecutor and investigating officer informed the bench that around 4,100 people had so far submitted applications and pay orders had been issued to 3,963 of them.

The bench observed that in order to ensure that no affectee was missed out and deprived, another advertisement be circulated in prominent English, Urdu and Sindhi language newspapers within a week under the supervision of NAB asking further affectees to come forward.

SHC is informed 3,963 of total 4,100 people have been given pay orders

The counsel for the builders informed the bench that they were paying out the affectees once NAB verified their genuineness. The counsel said that their bank accounts were frozen, which was making the situation difficult, and they need money in those accounts to pay the affectees.

The counsel pleaded to defreeze all their bank accounts.

“For the time being we consider it appropriate that if there is a certified approval from the NAB for a certain amount of money to be withdrawn from the frozen accounts to pay the affectees this amount can only be withdrawn from the frozen bank accounts which otherwise will remain frozen. Once every affectee has been paid in full this court shall revisit the situation regarding de-freezing of the accounts,” the bench ruled.

While adjourning the matter till Feb 25, it directed that all affectees would be paid out in full and both NAB and Maxim builders would have to file their affidavits to this effect and that they had fully complied with an earlier order of SHC.

On May 19, the bench had allowed the Directorate of Estate Projects, PAF and the builders to settle all the liabilities of the Fazaia Housing Scheme and refund the amounts of the allottees within six months.

While releasing the builders, the bench had also directed the chairman of the NAB to suspend the investigation into this matter and supervise and facilitate both sides to fulfil their agreements and ensure that all the affected people were repaid in full within shortest period of time.

It had also directed NAB to continue its process of inviting claims and verifying the same, but restrained that no money would be released till the next hearing from the attached accounts.

M/s Maxim had entered into a joint venture agreement with the Directorate of Estate Projects, PAF, in 2015 in order to create the “Fazaia Housing Scheme Karachi” and public were given an opportunity to apply for plots.

A large number of people paid substantial amounts of money in respect of such plots. However, in January this year, NAB had arrested the builders for allegedly depriving the public of around Rs13 billion through investments in the scheme.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 24/11/2020)

Housing project threatens mangroves on island near Karachi

A short boat ride from the shores of Karachi, mangrove trees sprout along the quiet inlets of an uninhabited island that environmentalists say provides vital coastal protection to the largest city of the country.

But the calm of Bundle Island, home to a few camels, is at risk, with Prime Minister Imran Khan determined to turn it into an enormous real-estate project to ease pressure on the expanding megacity home to 20 million people.

The \$50 billion housing development has pitted regional leaders against the federal government, with local activists and lawmakers accusing the prime minister of renegeing on pro-environment promises.

“Let nature restore itself and (do) not dream of these big, grand cities,” said Mahera Omar, an environmental film-maker from Karachi who enjoys kayaking around Bundle and meandering through the island’s mangroves.

“We are all very tired of our concrete jungle. We all want to get away, out into the open,” she added.

Coastal mangroves act as a natural barrier, soaking up wave energy and limiting the extent of flooding.

Environmentalists say mangroves on Bundle Island provide coastal protection to megacity

"These islands form a barrier against storm surges and tsunamis. Their preservation is vital for the preservation of Karachi," Arif Belgaumi, an architect and town planner, told AFP.

The city is already prone to inundation and suffered catastrophic flooding during this year's record monsoon when filthy, chest-deep water filled the streets.

Bundle Island floods during particularly high tides, so any construction would also require environmentally damaging reclamation work that could have knock-on effects for Karachi, Belgaumi added.

But Khan's administration says the project would create thousands of local jobs and bring much-needed relief to chaotically expanding Karachi — not to mention new tax revenue for the country's cash-strapped coffers.

A draft law — immediately challenged by the provincial government of Sindh — would turn Bundle and neighbouring Buddo Island into federal territories.

'It will bring devastation'

Critics say the plan runs counter to green pledges by Khan, who has spoken out about the perils of climate change and frozen construction of several coal-fired power stations in favour of renewable-energy projects, mainly hydroelectric dams.

The government has also unveiled a nationwide effort to plant 10 billion new trees by 2023.

"He takes pride in recognising that global warming is the reality... (But) when it comes to the province of Sindh, the people of Sindh, his point of view changes," Sindh government spokesman Murtaza Wahab said.

Khan's top adviser on climate change, Malik Amin Aslam, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Bundle Island, located in the Arabian Sea, is uninhabited except for a few camels and other creatures.

It nonetheless has been whacked by urbanisation — the sandy beach facing Karachi is strewn with plastic rubbish and medical waste that washes ashore from the megalopolis.

The mangroves are considered an important component of Karachi's environment, which has suffered decades of high pollution and neglect, with the trees acting as natural filters that clean water and protect baby fish.

"The people of Karachi actually relate to mangroves as... a natural part of their lives," Wahab said.

"That is why we are so territorial about it. That is why we feel so passionate about these mangroves."

The redevelopment proposal has faced years of opposition from critics who say it would be too costly and complicated to redevelop Bundle Island.

A group of Karachi fishermen, who cast nets from the island's comparatively cleaner waters, have also filed a lawsuit against the project.

"We will become jobless," said Kamal Shah, a spokesman for the fishermen.

"They are saying the construction of a city will bring development. It will bring devastation." The waters here are already suffering, he said, with Karachi's dilapidated drains spewing untreated wastewater into the sea.

Rab Nawaz, a senior programme director at the World Wildlife Fund, said the development of Bundle Island would trigger an "environmental disaster".

"Bundle is a nesting ground for turtles, dolphins. There (are) mangroves which are protected forests in Pakistan," he said.

"Building a huge infrastructure on it is going to destroy all that."

(By AFP Dawn, 03, 24/11/2020)

High-rises near airports

Allowing construction of tall buildings in the vicinity of airports would not be a good decision. Media reports, however, suggest that the government is about to abolish the condition of acquiring a no-objection certificate for the construction of high-rise and multistory buildings within 15.24km radius of an airport to accelerate construction activities in the country. At present NOC has to be obtained from the Civil Aviation Authority and the Pakistan Air Force for construction of multistory buildings near airports. This condition is applicable in Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Multan. The Naya Pakistan Housing and Development Authority has moved a summary with the federal cabinet seeking removal of the NOC condition. It maintains that the progress made in aircraft and flying technologies has rendered the old rules obsolete.

However, current rules governing construction of multistory buildings in advanced countries like the United States and Britain prohibit such constructions in the vicinity of airports. Our own experience in the PIA plane crash of May this year establishes that the presence of tall buildings near airports is inadvisable. In this air crash, 97 passengers, including the aircraft's crew members,

died. Only two passengers survived. After the pilot lost control of the aircraft, it dashed against residential buildings and in the process eight people were injured on the ground. One of the injured, a girl house help, later died in hospital.

Construction of high-rise in the vicinity of airports is discouraged because they obstruct flights and radar operations as well as pose dangers to those living in buildings close to airports. This is why even in most developed countries multistory buildings are not allowed within 20kms radius of airports. In Pakistan, however, things are moving in the opposite direction. Multistory, single-story residential buildings, restaurants and wedding halls abound very close to airports. At least this is so in Karachi. Birds flock near restaurants and marriage halls and they interfere with flights. Despite innumerable warnings by the relevant authorities, such restaurants and marriage halls remain in place. The presence of birds close to the airport continues to pose hazards to flights.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 04, 03/12/2020)

SBCA told to consult chief fire officer on bylaws

The Sindh High Court directed the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) on Tuesday to consult the chief fire officer on building by-laws and sought arguments from the petitioner on a report submitted by the SBCA.

A bench, headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, issued the directives during the hearing of a plea pertaining to fire emergency regulations.

At the hearing, the government lawyer told the court that fire helpline 16 had been made functional.

The court, however, asked the lawyer why did faults in cables, which disrupted the helpline, occur in the first place and why did it take so long to repair the cables. "The faults were fixed only after we ordered. Why did you wait for the court to issue orders [to repair the cables]?" remarked Justice Mazhar.

Besides, the court enquired about the progress on repair of fire tenders.

The municipal commissioner informed the court that out of order vehicles were being repaired and some new ones would soon be added to the fire department's fleet. He said that just 14 fire tenders, belonging to the fire department, were operational in Karachi and remaining 30 were being repaired.

It is expected that they will be repaired within a month, while 48 more vehicles would be provided by the federal government, he said.

Further enquiring about the progress on building by-laws, the court remarked, "Who approves building plans that don't have emergency exits?"

Following this, the SBCA submitted a report on building by-laws to the court and an SBCA representative informed the court that his department was waiting for the cabinet to approve the fire safety code. He further assured the court that the SBCA would approve only those plans that had emergency exits.

Stating that all approved building plans must have fire exits, the court directed the SBCA to consult the chief fire officer on building by-laws. It further sought arguments from the petitioner in light of the report submitted by the SBCA and adjourned the hearing until January 14.

Counter reply sought

The same bench also sought a counter reply from the petitioner, who had filed a plea pertaining to the crises of wheat, sugar and other essential items in the country, after the Bureau of Supply and Price Control director submitted a report to the court.

According to the plea, the penalty for hoarding has been defined under the Hoarding and Black Market Act, 1948, while the Karachi Essential Articles Processing (Profiteering and Hoarding) Act, 1953, though enacted, has never been implemented.

The Bureau of Supply and Price Control director submitted an implementation report on the plea, according to which Sindh government had authorised all commissioners and deputy commissioners to take action against hoarders and profiteers. The report further states that warehouses across Sindh have been registered and details of stocks housed in each of them have been recorded.

As per the report, there are 3,603 warehouses across 29 districts of Sindh and sessions judges had nominated civil judges for taking action against profiteers and hoarders. It states that the Bureau of Supply and Price Control receives reports regarding this daily and so far, 115 complaints of hoarding and profiteering from across had been addressed.

Following the submission of the report, the court directed the petitioner to submit a counter reply on the report by January 19.

Illegal appointments

Meanwhile, a two-member bench, headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar and comprising Justice Adnanul Karim Memon, dismissed the request to hear a plea challenging over 3,000 appointments, allegedly made illegally, in the provincial local government department on priority basis.

The petitioner cited a report published in a newspaper and said that over 3,000 appointments were made in the local government department during 2012 and 2103.

"How can the court issue a notice on the basis of a report published in a newspaper?" remarked Justice Akhtar.

Besides, Justice Memon stated that the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) was also investigating illegal appointments in Sindh.

The petitioner, however, contended that the NAB was probing into illegal appointments in the provincial local government department.

At this, the court stated that it could not issue notices to anyone until relevant material was attached to the plea and rejected the petitioner's request to hear his plea on priority basis.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 09/12/2020)

A city is a living thing; it makes its own way

A city is not a dead thing; it is a living thing. And so, if you do not provide it what it needs to continue its life, it gets this on its own, one way or another.

So said renowned architect Arif Hasan, giving the keynote address on what he has learned in 45 years of urban planning, at the Karachi Conference on Thursday. The event was organised online this year.

The seasoned town planner and urbanisation expert noted that Karachi has been developing without proper planning since Partition. It has run on ad hoc measures and jugaar [quick improvisations] since 1947, observed Hasan.

Immediately after Partition, the city, which at the time comprised of 400,000 people, had to suddenly respond to emerging needs with migrants coming in and its population growing to over 600,000, said Hasan. Naturally, accommodating the influx was beyond the city's capacity then, but over time, this became the port city's culture- it always needed houses to accommodate more people, he added.

Thus, he elaborated, the focus remained on housing, especially for the elite, and comprehensive urban planning was ignored. The only thing done in the name of planning was providing people with lodging, he noted.

"In the absence of proper planning and development, the people of Karachi, and businesses, have found their own ways to solve their problems," he pointed out, adding that wrong decisions were made for many aspects of life in the city.

He touched upon the location of the port city's cargo terminals, heritage buildings being turned into markets and warehouses, or transporters deciding to set up stops and terminals on their own without any guidance from planners, among other things.

The many improvisations over the years have resulted in what we see in Karachi today, according to Hasan. But, unfortunately, the courts do not understand this and hence they directed that whatever is built without planning in the city should be demolished, he observed. This meant demolishing the entire city, he pointed out, but this could not be done, and by demolishing only poor areas, it was felt that at least some work was done.

Prior to Hasan's address, Karachi Conference president Dr Asma Ibrahim introduced him as having served the city with his wisdom and having stood by it during all its difficult times.

(By Arshad Shaheen The Express Tribune, 04,, 11/12/2020)

SC rejects Bahria Town's plea seeking delay in payment of land price

The Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected an application of Bahria Town (Pvt) Ltd Karachi (BTLK) seeking a three-year delay in the payments of the total Rs460 billion that it had agreed to pay for purchasing prime land in Karachi.

In its plea filed on Tuesday, BTLK had sought freezing of the payment plan issued by the SC in view of pandemic-related recession, requesting that the payment of Rs2.5bn monthly instalments be deferred for three years — till September 2023.

A three-judge bench headed by Justice Ijazul Ahsan heard the application filed by senior counsel Syed Ali Zafar on behalf of the BTLK and its owner Malik Riaz Hussain.

The BTLK counsel argued in the court today that businesses the world over had been devastated due to the coronavirus pandemic and according to economic reports, hundreds of thousands of people had been rendered jobless.

Justice Munib Akhtar asked the lawyer to explain what losses Bahria Town, and not other businesses, had suffered due to the pandemic.

Justice Ahsan too made a similar direction, telling the counsel: "The government is saying that the economy has come back on track. Bahria Town should show its own figures, not of the world."

The judge noted that Bahria Town had already sold off its Karachi project.

The counsel suggested that BTLK's operations had been badly harmed by the economic downturn as well. But the bench remained unconvinced, with Justice Akhtar remarking that the "Supreme Court is not a bank where concession can be obtained through negotiations."

The court subsequently rejected BTLK's application through a short order, saying the detailed verdict on the plea will be issued later. The BTLK is supposed to furnish before the Supreme Court Rs2.5bn by the seventh of every month.

On March 21, 2019, the SC had accepted an offer made by real estate tycoon Hussain to pay Rs460bn for the purchase of 16,896 acres of land from the Malir Development Authority (MDA).

The court had accepted the offer to implement its May 4, 2018, judgement which held that the land granted to the MDA by the Sindh government and its exchange with the land of private land developers Bahria Town was illegal.

BTLK's application detailed the Covid-19 pandemic's major impact in Pakistan and on multinationals across the world.

It said that in compliance with the earlier court order, Bahria Town had already furnished Rs57bn, excluding Rs1.2bn mark-up earned on the advance amount deposited on a decreasing balance basis which was available for adjustment.

According to the application, to pay a monthly instalment of Rs2.5bn, the BTLK had to earn Rs100 million per day, based on an average 25 working days per month. Even in normal circumstances, this was a huge task and the BTLK was accomplishing the task. However, the business operations being run by the applicant had suffered due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which had taken and continued to take a heavy toll on Pakistan's economy, including the real estate sector, due to associated shutdown of economic activity resulting in negative growth shock causing an unprecedented deep recession.

The application explained that the BTLK with about 600,000 members and 53,000 employees had also suffered in view of the massive drop in sale and price of plots/houses, elimination of purchasing power generally and halting of construction activities and related industries.

The developer, the application said, had to spend more than Rs1bn every month by making payments to the third parties, members, suppliers or contractors and employees of the BTLK as the upkeep and maintenance of these housing societies required fixed and variable expenditures.

Such payment also included expenses of utilities and site operational expenses, costs of oil, maintenance of a clean and hygienic environment in the residential project, provisions of security and development and welfare expenses.

In the interest of doing complete justice, more time (at least three years) be given to the developer to repay the instalments to enable it to get on its feet and not default, the application pleaded, adding that the developer was committed to pay the amount of Rs460bn.

(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 01, 17/12/2020)

SHC links salaries of KDA officers with pensioners' dues settlement

The Sindh High Court on Friday ruled that the salaries of senior officers of the Karachi Development Authority would be stopped from Jan 1, 2021 if the dues of its retired employees were not settled by Dec 31.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar also expressed serious resentment over the KDA for not properly managing its financial affairs after it was informed that the KDA's revenue had decreased by 38 per cent in the past three years.

The provincial local government and finance secretaries in their report further informed the bench that 19 out of 31 development projects of the KDA had zero financial/physical progress and the remaining were in the process of completion.

The bench also dismissed a KDA request seeking a six-month extension in the Dec 31 deadline to clear the dues of pensioners. It issued directive for liquidating all the investments made by KDA in the National Investment Trust (NIT) and National Savings Schemes as well as sale of its properties to settle the liability.

It also directed the provincial authorities to consider the proposal of KDA for a monthly grant, waiver or grant-in-aid and submit a report on Jan 19.

When the bench took up a set of petitions of former KDA employees for their post-retirement dues, both the LG and finance secretaries submitted a compliance report stating that they conducted a meeting on Dec 15 with the serving director general and two former DGs of KDA.

Rejects plea to extend Dec 31 deadline; bars transfer/posting of all employees without its permission

Out of total pension payment/other arrears of Rs2.496 billion, the Sindh government had provided Rs500 million and for utilisation of this amount it was recommended that the KDA might pay remittance category fully and other arrears, it added.

The report highlighted flaws in the financial affairs of KDA and said that it had kept receipts estimations in eight different heads in the last three years and not received any amount other than two heads while the pension payment increased by 59pc in the same period.

It recommended that KDA may be directed to stop all new development projects and only spend Rs100m to Rs150m in its annual development programme subject to the approval of competent authority and the saving of around Rs300m may be used to finance pension arrears, commutation and final payment.

The report further said that KDA may also be advised to pay fund liabilities arrears for Rs249.931m through pre-retirement of investment funds amounting to around Rs822m.

The financial assistance for Rs23.67m may only be provided if KDA can finance it through own sources after clearing all the pension-related liabilities and the provincial government would review the progress in May 2021 and then might consider an additional tranche up to Rs500m to clear all the liabilities before June 30, 2021.

The bench was informed that the official assignee had tested positive for Covid-19. It directed the member inspection team (MIT-II) of the SHC to continue this exercise in the absence of the official assignee till resumption of his duties.

It directed the MIT-II to liquidate all the attached investment of KDA amounting to around Rs822m and adjust it towards the subject liability of pensioners.

It further ruled that the sale/auction of KDA properties would now be conducted under the supervision of the official assignee or MIT-II.

The bench directed the official assignee/MIT-II to take over the salary accounts of KDA from Jan 1 and ensure that the amounts in such accounts be used only to settle the subject liability.

It ruled that the salaries of KDA officers in grade-17 and above would be stopped with effect from Jan 1, 2021 if the post-retirement benefit of retired employees were not settled by Dec 31.

The court said no posting or transfer of any officer/employees would be made by KDA without the permission of the bench.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 19/12/2020)

Prosecution witness testifies in Bahria Town land scam case

An accountability court on Wednesday recorded the statement of a prosecution witness and summoned two others to testify on the next date of hearing in a case pertaining to alleged illegal amalgamation of commercial land to Bahria Town for a multistorey building in Karachi.

Then mayor Mustafa Kamal, then district coordination officer Fazlur Rehman, then executive district officer Iftikhar Qaimkhani, then district officer Mumtaz Haider, then additional DO Syed Nishat Ali and then sub-registrar-II, Clifton, Nazir Zardari have been charged with corruption of around Rs2 billion in the case.

Four builders — Mohammad Dawood, Mohammad Yaqoob, Mohammad Irfan and Mohammad Rafiq — associated with DJ Builders and Developers, have also been indicted in the same case.

On Wednesday, the matter came up before Accountability Court-III judge Dr Sher Bano Karim, when special public prosecutor Zahid Hussain Baladi produced a prosecution witness for recording his statement.

The witness, Munawar Hasan Siddiqui, a government officer, recorded his statement and also submitted the relevant documents.
Two builders' application for plea bargain with NAB disposed of

After recording his testimony, the judge summoned two other witnesses to record their statements on next date of hearing, and adjourned the hearing till Jan 23.

According to NAB, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation in 1982 created 198 stalls/shops on two amenity plots adjacent to the Kothari Parade for dislocated hawkers while four commercial plots, each measuring 255.55 square yards, were also created in the locality.

It alleged that DJ Builders purchased four commercial plots and 198 stalls of the hawkers. However, the two amenity plots were never transferred in the builder's name.

NAB further alleged that Zain Malik and others associated with DJ Builders in connivance with the then Karachi mayor, the then DCO and others unlawfully got transferred 102 stalls in favour of Bahria Town Private Limited through a conveyance deed without obtaining permission from the Karachi Development Authority.

The reference claimed that the price of these stalls was shown in the registration deed as only Rs260 million whereas the market value was assessed at Rs2.155bn and forced sale value was adjudged at Rs1.724bn.

It claimed Zain Malik was the subsequent beneficiary of the amalgamated plot, which was illegally transferred in the name of Bahria Town with active connivance of the main beneficiary (DJ Builders and Developers) and the sub-registrar-II, Clifton.

Plea bargain of builders

Meanwhile, administrative judge of the accountability courts Abdul Ghani Soomro on Wednesday disposed of an application filed by two builders pleading to accept their plea bargain with NAB in a case pertaining to cheating the public at large and "for not fulfilling basic requirements".

NAB booked and detained Haji Adam Jokhio and Lal Mohammad for defrauding around 1,100 allottees of a commercial project launched in 1992 and resold in 2013. The land in question is estimated to be valued at Rs3.5bn, it added.

In February, investigating officer of the case Khalid Khan had filed an application under Section 25(b) of the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999, submitting that the NAB director general had accepted the plea bargain of the accused persons, therefore, the court was asked to approve the same.

On Wednesday, taking up the matter the administrative judge noted that a similar application of plea bargain was earlier filed by then IO of the case Sarwar Ahmed Khan, but the court had on Dec 11, 2019 dismissed the plea bargain application of Lal Mohammad with an application seeking release of co-accused Adam Khan since the NAB authorities had not worked out the 'loss'.

He added that the court had referred the matter to the then NAB chairman to constitute a committee to conduct an inquiry against IO Khan for acts of his malpractice and compromises with the accused persons in addition to directing the NAB chief to change the IO of the case.

The judge noted that the court had on March 11 directed the accused persons that all the claimants/allottees be taken on board and terms of the plea bargain be mutually settled between them; the mode and rate of the refund payment wherever be worked out and the surety or guarantee be obtained from the accused persons as a joint affidavit filed by the two accused had no legal value. But the judge noted that its direction had not been complied with in letter and spirit.

He further noted that a fresh no-objection certificate from the Sindh Building Control Authority was also yet to be obtained by the accused and the development work too remained to be completed. Besides, there was unwillingness of a majority of the claimants/allottees to accept plot(s) in the Gulshan-i-Elahi project, as offered by the accused, since the said project was already under a separate investigation, the judge added.

The judge observed that in such circumstances the claimants/allottees, who had been waiting since 1992, could justifiably ask for full compliance of the stipulations of the plea bargain first. He added that the contention of the counsel for the accused persons that the timeline for allotment of the plots to the claimants shall take effect after approval of the plea bargain, does not carry substance, as it was not mentioned in the affidavit filed by the accused or in the plea bargain application.

The judge noted that the record showed that accused Adam Jokhio was old with feeble health while Lal Mohammad was in jail owing to conviction in a case of a similar nature, which not only makes one cautious to effectively secure and safeguard interests of the claimants/allottees but to ensure that the claimants/allottees were not again left at the mercy of the accused or kept wandering after the accused.

Therefore, the judge noted that "in view of the above factors, I find it difficult to approve plea bargain without first sorting out all the above issues and fully complying with the directions of this court issued on March 11".

The judge disposed of the application saying that the accused would be at liberty to file a fresh plea bargain after all the issues highlighted above were adequately sorted out taking all the claimants/allottees on board and making the requisite compliance.

NAB alleged that the accused persons had launched the project on 70 acres and collected millions of rupees from hundreds of allottees in 1992, adding that later they split the same piece of land on which another builder launched a separate project.
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 24/12/2020)

LEAs told to assist KDA in action against land grabbers

The Sindh High Court directed the Sindh Rangers and police on Thursday to provide assistance to the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) for a large-scale operation against land grabbers and those involved in China cutting in Gulistan-e-Jauhar.

During the hearing of a plea pertaining to land grabbing and China cutting - a term that refers to the slicing of plots from parks and land earmarked for public amenities, and turning them into residential and commercial properties to be sold off for a huge profit - in Gulistan-e-Jauhar, the counsel for the petitioner accused Karachi Metropolitan Corporation officials and KDA officials of patronising elements involvement in the illegal occupation of land.

"And so, they continue to occupy lands despite court orders [to end the occupation]," he said.

In his defence, the KDA director told the court that whenever his department had attempted to take action against the nefarious elements, they had been attacked.

The court, however, directed the KDA to launch a large-scale operation to end the illegal occupation of lands in Gulistan-e-Johar and raze encroachments in the area, as directed by the Supreme Court (SC). Then, directing the Rangers director general (DG)

and East District DIG to cooperate with the KDA for the purpose, it remarked, "SC orders should be carried out in letter and spirit."

Ordering the Rangers and police to provide assistance to the KDA for the operation, the court adjourned the hearing until February 16.

Appointment of CM aides, advisers

At another hearing, a two-member bench of the SHC, comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Arshad Hussain Khan, gave three weeks to the Sindh government to submit a reply on a plea pertaining to the appointment of special assistants and advisers, including Murtaza Wahab, to the Sindh chief minister.

The court gave the three-week deadline to the provincial government after the additional advocate general insisted that a reply be submitted on the plea by the next hearing.

According to the plea, advisers and special assistants to the Sindh CM have been attending the cabinet meetings, which is illegal.

Deeming that CM aides attending the meetings was in violation of Articles 6 and 7 of the Sindh Government Rules of Business, 1986, Articles 130 and 132 of the Constitution and the Official Secrets Act, 1923, it moves the court to declare the appoints special assistants and advisers to the CM unconstitutional.

The plea further states that advisers and special assistants to the CM are using powers meant for elected representatives while also managing portfolios and drawing emoluments meant for ministers.

Resultantly, a loss of billion is caused to the national exchequer, it contends, pleading to the court to take back all government-provided perks, including government vehicles, from them.

Assets beyond means case

Meanwhile, a bench headed by Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro directed the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Sukkur to complete the inquiry initiated against former provincial law minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar on accusation of owning assets beyond known sources of income.

At the hearing of the bail pleas of Lanjar and others accused in the case, the NAB investigation officer (IO) told the court that the inquiry against the former law minister had been completed and sent to the NAB headquarters for approval.

However, an objection was raised on the inquiry when it was revealed that Lanjar owned properties besides those included in the probe, the IO said, adding that the anti-graft watchdog was currently carrying out an inquiry in connection with 260 acres of land owned by Lanjar.

Irrked at the delay in the completion of the inquiry, the court remarked, "It has been long [since the probe was launched] and yet, the inquiry hasn't been completed."

At this, the IO requested the court to give the NAB another four weeks to complete the inquiry.

Directing the NAB, Sukkur to soon complete the inquiry, the court extended the interim bail of Lanjar and adjourned the hearing until February 3.

Illegal allotment of land

Separately, the NAB prosecutor informed the court that the inquiry against provincial minister Sohail Anwar Siyal and others accused of corruption and the illegal allotment of land had been completed.

At the hearing of the accused's bail pleas, the prosecutor said the inquiry had been referred to the NAB headquarters for approval and after the approval, its status would be changed to investigation.

The court sought a progress report on the matter from the NAB and extended the bails of the accused Sohail, Zafar Siyal and Jameel Soomro, adjourning the hearing until February 10.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 25/12/2020)

Two shelter homes being built to accommodate 400 street children, SHC told

The Sindh High Court was informed that two shelter homes were being constructed in Korangi and Malir to accommodate around 400 street children.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar directed the police to come up with a progress report on Jan 27 about the investigation of cases lodged against a mafia involved in child beggary.

When a petition seeking implementation of the Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, 2011 came up for hearing, authority director general Azeem-ur-Rehman Meo submitted that a shelter home for street children was being constructed on an area of 10 acres in Korangi, where at least 300 kids would be accommodated while another building was also being constructed in Malir to house around 100 children.

He submitted that three similar facilities were already running in Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur.

Answering a court query, the DG said that the building in Malir had almost been completed while the work on the shelter home in Korangi would be completed in June 2021.

Court asks police to file a report about action to curb child beggary

The bench recalled that in the last hearing it had directed a DSP to submit a progress report as to what action had been taken against the mafia involved in child beggary after the SCPA chief submitted that at least 92 complaints had been forwarded to police, but no progress was made.

At the outset, SSP-South Zubair Nazeer along with other police officers submitted that an investigation was being carried out in many such cases and a progress report would be submitted on the next date of hearing.

The bench directed the police officers to file a report highlighting that in how many cases investigations had been completed and charge sheets filed and how many persons were arrested in such FIRs.

The petition was filed for implementation of the SCPA Act 2011 in the province to protect the rights of children and to save them from domestic violence and abuse.

The petitioner submitted that thousands of street children were roaming in the city and several were being used in criminal activities, begging and other anti-social activities.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 26/12/2020)

CBC told to devise plan for DHA

The Supreme Court directed the Cantonment Board Clifton (CBC) on Wednesday to coordinate with the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and devise a mechanism for addressing the water shortage in Defence Housing Authority (DHA).

At the hearing, CBC officials informed an apex court bench, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed, that the board wasn't being supplied the required amount of water by the KWSB.

The CJP observed that two lines had been laid down to supply water to DHA.

While water is supplied through one of them, the other remains dry, he stated, adding that there should be equal distribution of water.

Then, directing the CBC to devise a mechanism in consultation with the KWSB for supplying water to DHA, the court sought a report on the matter within two weeks.

Of mangroves and defunct scheme

The SC directed the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) chairperson to immediately plant mangroves on a land previously reserved for a KPT housing scheme and submit a report to the court within two weeks.

It was hearing a case pertaining to the allotment of land for the housing society and restoration of environment in coastal areas.

When the court issued orders for immediate plantation of mangroves, the counsel for the KPT requested for more time.

The CJP, however, shot back, "Carry out the plantation at the same pace at which you sold the plots."

At this, the counsel for the KPT presented a report to the court, informing it that a board had been set up for the purpose and it had begun to implement the apex court's orders.

"The [new] KPT chairperson, though, recently assumed the charge and needs some time [to carry out the court's directives]," he added.

Following that, the CJP issued directives for the immediate plantation of mangroves on KPT land and removal of encroachments along the coastal belt, besides taking measures for its beautification.

Besides, the counsel for persons who had been allotted plots as part of the defunct housing scheme contended that the allottees be given compensation.

At this, the court stated that the allottees could approach the relevant platform to get compensations.

Railway employees dismissal

At another hearing, the court issued notices to the railway authorities on a plea seeking the reinstatement of a dismissed employee, Khan Bahadur.

Bahadur had been fired on charges made in connection with selling train tickets in black and committing financial irregularities.

Observing that Bahadur had been accused of selling tickets collectively worth Rs1.95 million, the CJP said it was brought to the court's notice that he sold a ticket for travelling from Karachi to Khanpur twice.

Bahadur, however, maintained that he wasn't posted in the railways department when the financial irregularities were said to have taken place.

"I am not guilty of anything," he stated.

At this, the court issued notices to the railway authorities.

Separately, the court dismissed the plea seeking reinstatement of another railways employee, Hado Bakhsh, who was sacked in connection with illegal occupation of the railway land.

The petitioner, Hado Bakhsh, maintained that it was not him, but his brother who had occupied the land.

At this, the court remarked that he had been accused of occupying the land along with his brother.

"You didn't comply with the laws pertaining to making an appeal in the service tribunal," the court stated, and dismissed the plea.

ANF official's dismissal

Besides, the court rejected a plea seeking the restoration of an Anti-Narcotics Force official, who was terminated from service after hashish was found in his possession.

The CJP stated that 300 kilogrammes of hashish was found in the petitioner, Mairaj Ali Qureshi's possession.

Qureshi's lawyer, however, contended that his client had been acquitted for lack of evidence.

"This means that he is not guilty," the lawyer insisted.

But Qureshi confessed to the offence during an inquiry, the CJP pointed out.

At this, the counsel for Qureshi claimed that high officials had given drugs to Qureshi, instructing him to dispose them of.

Observing that the story narrated by Qureshi didn't correspond with facts, the court rejected his plea.

Demolition of wedding halls

Moreover, the court issued notices to the Sindh Building Control Authority and other parties, seeking their replies on a plea pertaining to the demolition of wedding halls in Korangi within a month.

At the hearing, the CJP remarked, "We don't need these many wedding halls. How can houses be converted into wedding halls?"

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 31/12/2020)

SC berates CBC officials for leasing out land to build high-rises

The Supreme Court on Wednesday came down hard on Cantonment Board Clifton (CBC) authorities for leasing out its land to private persons to build high-rises and failing to remove encroachments and issued notice to the top law officer of the federal government.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed and comprising Justice Sajjad Ali Shah and Justice Qazi Mohammad Amin Ahmed observed that the cantonment land could not be used to raise private buildings and there was categorization of such land, which needed to be examined.

It asked the attorney general to assist it.

The chief justice said that no progress had been made to comply with its earlier order to remove encroachments from the land owned by the federal authorities and rather more high-rise buildings were being constructed on such land.

Some land in PNT Colony had been given to the Pakistan Navy, but it is being leased out to private persons and they are constructing multistorey buildings on it, the CJP deplored.

The bench expressed serious resentment over the encroachments and high-rise buildings in PNT Colony, which was meant for accommodation of the employees of postal services and telecommunication, and other cantonment land.

Sindh govt ordered to remove encroachments from parks, green belts as well as land of irrigation, forest depts.

It directed the federal authorities and CBC to remove the encroachments and file a report in one month.

The chief justice expressed displeasure over the officials of the CBC for not complying with its earlier orders to remove encroachments and unauthorised buildings from PNT Colony and other areas and rather allowed more constructions by private individuals in these areas.

He asked them that under what law they had permitted private persons to carry out construction of multistorey buildings.

245,000 fake entries in Sindh land record

The bench directed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan governments to file reports regarding computerization of revenue record in a month as the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) submitted its report.

When the bench inquired about the report of the KP authorities, an additional attorney general informed it that the first phase of computerization of KP's revenue record would be completed in February 2021.

In compliance with an order of the apex court passed in 2014 to computerize the land record, SRB's senior member Qazi Shahid Pervez submitted that the record had been computerized and around 70 million documents were available in the database while every document had its tracking code.

He further submitted that the database could track the record back to 1985.

However, an applicant from district Thatta informed the bench that the record of his land was not available online. Mr Pervez admitted that around 245,000 fake entries had been identified in Sindh's revenue record.

As far as the record of district Thatta was concerned, he said that the record was scrutinised and also reviewed by the deputy commissioner while around 1,100 entries were under judicial review.

When the chief justice asked him about encroachments and illegal constructions on government land, he replied that they had been launching anti-encroachments drive and so far recovered 1,000 acres of land while action was being taken against 11 officials of the SRB for allowing such encroachments.

While taking the SRB report on record, the bench directed him to ensure that the encroachments on government land including parks, green belts, amenity land and other public spaces as well as the land of irrigation and forest departments must be removed and restore the same to its original position.

It also directed Mr Pervez to supervise the anti-encroachment drive and ask all the commissioners and deputy commissioners as well as the irrigation and forest departments for removal of such encroachments.

The bench asked him to cancel all the fake documents and sought a compliance report in a month.

24 houses built in Kidney Hill Park not demolished

The bench expressed resentment over local administration for filing a faulty report about clearing all the encroachments from the Kidney Hill Park and warned to initiate contempt proceedings against them as an area of 7.3 acres was still encroached upon.

The bench directed the Karachi commissioner to remove the remaining encroachments and houses and submit a compliance report within two weeks.

Amber Alibhai of Shehri-Citizens for a Better Environment informed the bench that 24 houses on the premises of the park, leased by the Faran Cooperative Society, had not been demolished yet while four plots were carved out by the Overseas Society, adjacent to the park, after excavation of hill.

The bench also issued notices to the president and secretary of the Faran Cooperative Society and ordered to issue eviction notices to the occupants of houses and plots. It observed that these allotments and constructions were illegal and the land had to be recovered after demolition.

During an earlier hearing, in compliance with several orders of the bench the commissioner and other officials had filed a report and claimed that all the encroachments had been removed and it was being developed as a model park.

KPT told to restore mangrove park

The bench directed the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) to convert its land near Mai Kolachi Road into a mangroves park and restore the flow of seawater within two weeks.

In February, the SC had declared the allotment of land on both sides of Mai Kolachi Road for the KPT Cooperative Housing Society as illegal and directed KPT chairman to ensure plantation of mangroves and restore the flow of seawater up to Bath Island.

When the matter came up for hearing on Wednesday, the lawyer for KPT filed a report and argued that the federal government was in the process of appointing a board of trustees for the KPT.

The bench deplored that despite the passage of reasonable time, the KPT did not comply with its order. Since the KPT chairman had been appointed and he also assumed office he was directed to comply with the order, it added.

The bench allowed applications of some purchasers of the plots seeking remedy from relevant department for compensation.

Water supply to DHA

The bench directed the CBC and the Defence Housing Authority to work out a mechanism and ensure supply of water to DHA residents. It asked them to file a report in two weeks.

The CBC and DHA filed reports regarding the issues being faced to provide water to the residents stating that the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board was not properly supplying water.

The chief justice said that some people in the area were getting water through dedicated pipelines. The officials admitted that there were some dedicated lines.

Royal Park demolition under way

The bench directed the SRB and the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) to provide assistance to the Karachi commissioner to remove the structure of a partly demolished building adjacent to an amusement park in Gulshan-i-Iqbal.

Earlier, the SC bench had declared the lease of a two-acre plot located on Rashid Minhas Road illegal and directed the authorities to demolish the under-construction residential-cum-commercial Royal Park building.

On Wednesday, the commissioner informed the bench that three towers had been demolished and work on remaining two was under way.

The bench directed him to complete the demolition work and remove debris within one month and convert the land into a park.

The commissioner requested the bench to issue direction to the SRB and SBCA to provide assistance in order to complete the demolition of the structure without further delay.

The bench directed the SBCA and SBR to provide maximum assistance to the commissioner in terms of staff as well as machinery. Meanwhile, the bench directed the commissioner to attach an under-construction building, owned by the owners of Royal Park building in order to recover the amount of affected persons.

The lawyer for allottees argued that both the owners of Royal Park building fled the country and the allottees had been unable to make recovery of their amount, adding that another building, owned by these owners, was being built in DHA Phase VIII and it might be attached to the extent of recovery of the amount in question as none of its units had so far been sold.

Wedding halls in Korangi

The bench issued notices to the SBCA and advocate general on an application filed against the demolition of marriage halls at Korangi Road near Korangi Crossing.

Earlier, the chief justice through an administrative order had ordered the demolition of wedding halls since the land was meant for residential purposes.

The lawyer for the applicant contended that the conversion of the land in question was made from residential to commercial well before the order of the apex court about the ban on such conversion.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 31/12/2020)