

PARKS & TREES



CBF workers cut down several trees in Gulistan-e-Jauhar

The residents of Gulistan-e-Jauhar Block 12 woke up to the sound of chainsaw and heavy machinery Sunday morning, as more than 40 trees were trimmed while several were completely chopped off, claimed a resident, Azeem Qadir.

“As I looked out from my window, I saw men perched on neem trees, chopping its branches,” added Qadir. The trees were cut by the workers of Cantonment Board Faisal (CBF) on the dual carriageway between Gulistan-e-Jauhar Blocks 12 and 13, leading towards Pehlwan Goth from Rado Bakery.

Seven ‘new’ billboards installed despite SC orders



The artery is considered to be one of the well-maintained roads in Gulistan-e-Jauhar. Residents claimed that this road has more greenery as compared to other arteries in the area. They alleged that other than cutting many trees from the top, the CBF workers chopped off several trees from the root.

Another resident, Muhammad Fahim, told The Express Tribune that they have no idea as to why these trees were chopped off.

However, he added that K-Electric had some issues because the electricity wires used to get entangled in the tree branches. It seems like the CBF workers, taking it as an opportunity, chopped off as many trees as they could in order to obtain wood to sell it, he said. Fahim added that few of these trees have been chopped off from the root and they will never grow back again. The trees included neem and Conocarpus, he said.



Several coaching centres are located on the artery along which the trees were planted. A van driver said that when he came to the area to drop off students to a coaching centre on Sunday, the road was blocked as huge piles of trimmed branches were strewn on the road. He added that these trees used to provide shade to many people like him, including rickshaw drivers.

According to Zahid Farooq of Urban Resource Centre, which is a non-profit organisation, cutting down trees is one of the evil plans of timber mafia. He added that the timber mafia has contacts with people working in local bodies’ institutions, who are asked to get them as much wood as they can. For instance, if the workers are asked to chop down five trees, they take it as an opportunity and cut down 50 trees instead in order to earn more money, he claimed, adding that this is a violation of law.

Hush up and move on: Damaged building’s residents, owner reach settlement

Urging the civic institutions to plant more trees and to make it their priority, he said that neem, which has many benefits and cures for various infections, is one of the trees that is getting extinct in the city. He added that the city needs more neem trees, while we are only left with Conocarpus trees that are of no use and consume more water from the ground.

Meanwhile, CBF vice-chairperson Shahadatullah told The Express Tribune that their workers are not involved in any such activity and they are directed to cut down trees only when it is required and necessary. He added that it is possible that during such operations, individuals take it as an opportunity to cut down trees for wood. Shahadatullah added that he will visit the area to personally witness the condition.

(The Express Tribune 14, 03/01/2017)

Ongoing food festival: KMC, Sindh govt at odds over use of Frere Hall

The ongoing Karachi Eat Festival 2017 may have fulfilled hunger pangs of residents but the choice of venue seems to have caused a stir between the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and the Sindh government.



Frere Hall gardens, which fall under the administrative control of the KMC, are hosting the city's annual food festival but it appears that the permission granted to the organisers may be illegal.

According to a notification from the Sindh government's services and general administration department issued on November 23, 1998, there is a ban on the use of public parks and gardens falling within the administrative control of the KMC or the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) for private events.

"It has come to the knowledge of the officials that parks and gardens falling within the administrative control of the KMC and KDA or any other civic body are being hired and used for weddings and other events in spite of the ban," read the notification. It added that under no circumstances will permission to use public parks and gardens be granted for private functions.

However, KMC's senior director of sports, culture and recreation, Saif Abbas, insisted the notification has no legal standing now as the KMC's city council had passed a resolution later that allowed Frere Hall gardens to be used for such festivals.

This is not the first time a festival is taking place at Frere Hall. "It has become a routine for the Frere Hall management to hold such festivals in the interest of the public," he said. From the three-day Karachi Eat Festival, he said that the already cash-starved KMC has earned Rs1.5 million and it is good to see people arriving at the festival in hoards.

For the beauty and greenery of Frere Hall, he said that the management of the festival, as well as the KMC will protect it.

Meanwhile, a senior KMC official, who requested anonymity, claimed that KMC's city council resolution has no legal value in front of the government notification. Even for the resolution, the official said that it is clearly mentioned that only the paved portion of Frere Hall and a very small portion of the lawn can be used for commercial purposes, and that too for rent worth Rs0.5 million per day to the KMC.

"The way Frere Hall is being used for the Karachi Eat Festival is a sheer violation of the notification and even the KMC's resolution," said the official.

On the other hand, Karachi Eat Festival's public relations company, Latitude CRS's publicist, Ali Chaudhry denied reports of obtaining permission from KMC illegally. "The Karachi commissioner and KMC are very much our partners in this event," he said.

Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar himself came to inaugurate the festival, he added.

However, Akhtar admitted to television media that there was some negligence on part of the KMC when it granted permission for this festival to go beyond the pavement portion.

(By Oonib Azam The Express Tribune 13, 22/01/2017)

Frere Hall park left in dismal condition post-Karachi Eat

A truck ruthlessly plies on the dull green grass of Bagh-e-Jinnah surrounding Frere Hall. It halts at one corner and a few men start loading it with piles of wood. While others try to move away the garbage bags and remove the stalls set up almost two weeks back for



the Karachi Eat Festival 2017, the daily evening visitors of the park anxiously try to find a green spot in the park.

After the successful conclusion of the annual food festival Sunday night, the park lacked its usual greenery and colours on Monday evening. An old-timer, Muhammad Dewan, who regularly comes to Bagh-e-Jinnah for a walk, told The Express Tribune that the condition of the Frere Hall gardens was already not praiseworthy.

“After the festival, I am trying to find if any green patch inside the park was left,” he said.

Plan to set up a stall at Karachi Eat next year? Here are some tips for success

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There were very small patches of lush green grass left in some areas of the garden. “Luckily, these green patches have survived the festival,” commented another regular visitor to the park, Muhammad Aslam.



At one corner of the park, broken poles were lying and the very evident tyre-prints of trucks on the grass showed the apathy of the parks' management towards the condition of the park.

A Sindh government's services and general administration department notification, issued on November 23, 1998, bans the use of public parks and gardens falling within the administrative control of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) or the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) for private events. A KMC city council resolution also mentions that only the paved portion of Frere Hall and a very small portion of the lawn can be used for commercial purposes, and that too for rent worth Rs0.5 million per day to KMC.

When KMC parks and horticulture department's director-general Abdullah Mushtaque was contacted over the matter, he said that he was recently transferred from his post. However, for the trucks being plied on the grass of the Bagh-e-Jinnah, he said that, according to the law, the misuse of grass in any form is strictly prohibited.

Meanwhile, a senior official of the KMC, on the condition of anonymity, said that KMC's culture sports and recreation (CSR) department is responsible for any kind of damage to the garden. “The management of the Karachi Eat Festival was only allowed to use the pavement portion of the park by the CSR department,” the official said, adding that for the last two weeks, the stalls and stages for the food festival remained installed inside the premises of Bagh-e-Jinnah due to which the grass had been completely destroyed.

Such activities, according to the official, cannot take place inside government parks.

'Karachi will be the cleanest city in Asia'

Meanwhile, KMC's CSR department director Saif Abbas said that the organisers of the Karachi Eat Festival has already started repairs. “We have Rs1.5 million as a deposit with us,” said Abbas, adding that if the management did not repair the damages, they will not pay that amount back.

On the trucks being plied on the grass, Abbas said that the parks and horticulture department must not allow that. “This is the fourth year that this festival has taken place at Frere Hall and for the first time KMC is charging the festival management to use its premises,” he said, adding that earlier, the KMC directors used to fill their pockets when such festivals took place.

Karachi Eat Festival's public relations company, Latitude CRS's publicist, Ali Chaudhry, also assured that they will plant new grass in the entire area of Bagh-e-Jinnah.

(By Oonib Azam The Express Tribune 15, 24/01/2017)

City zoo to be made ‘most beautiful place for kids to visit’

On a visit after over four decades, CM Murad pets a python,

feeds an elephant and takes photos of an excited monkey

Sindh’s chief minister has vowed that his provincial government would turn the Karachi Zoological Garden into the “most beautiful place for children to visit”.

During a visit to the zoo after more than four decades, CM Murad Ali Shah told the media on Wednesday that the conditions at the country’s largest zoo were unsatisfactory, but “I have included the upgrading of the zoo in the scheme launched under the Karachi package”.

He added that Architect Samar Ali Khan and some other friends were working with the Sindh administration to make the Karachi zoo the “most beautiful place for children to visit and enjoy its atmosphere”.

Accompanied by Local Government Minister Jam Khan Shoro, the chief executive was received by Karachi Mayor Waseem Akhtar and senior officers of the provincial government and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation.

Recalling his childhood, CM Shah said he and his siblings used to visit the zoo with their father. “This is a very good place for children to refresh themselves by interacting with the birds and animals.”

He said he had received a lot of complaints against the zoo, which included lack of facilities for the visitors, encroachments around the garden and the poor conditions in which the animals were kept.

The CM said he was against the tradition of keeping animals in cages. “I have a plan under which the birds and animals would be kept in open surroundings so they could enjoy life and their behaviour could be observed in a more natural setting.”

Muhammad Waseem, additional chief secretary (development) of the planning & development department, informed Shah that a scheme of around Rs300 million was being launched to upgrade and reconstruct the zoo, for which the finance department had already released Rs150 million.

The chief executive said the plan presented by MPA Samar Ali Khan for the reconstruction of the Karachi zoo was one the best architectural works.

Shah was given a tour of the entire zoological garden. He went from cage to cage to observe the conditions in which the animals were housed as well as the open spaces and the canteen.

He petted a python that was brought out of its cage to show it to him, fed a piece of roti to an elephant and also took photographs with his mobile phone of an excited monkey.

At the conclusion of his visit, he said he enjoyed the outing and ordered the project director of the Karachi package to submit a detailed report on the upgrading, reconstruction and beautification plan of the zoo. (The News 14, 02/02/2017)

Karachi: 47,000 trees sacrificed in five years for city’s mega projects

Karachi has been deprived of some 47,000 fully grown trees in the past five years owing to construction of different ill-planned civic projects, while the relevant government agencies contradicting their commitment have not conducted any plantation drive to mitigate the resultant alarming situation.



The lessening greenery in the city has gravely endangered the ecological balance as well as increased environmental pollution, caused harmful variations in the climatic conditions and contributed to the gradual rise in the mercury level.

The state of environment in the city has been turning from bad to worse due to the constant felling of trees, said National Forum for Environment & Health (NFEH) President Muhammad Naeem Qureshi in a statement issued on Wednesday.

He said the NFEH had conducted an informal survey to estimate the number of uprooted trees due to construction of major development projects in the city.

According to this survey, the 26km portion from Surjani Town to Gurumandir was deprived of 17,000 trees in the past one year due to construction of the Green Line section of the Karachi Metrobus rapid transit network.

Similarly, the area between Hassan Square and Safoora Chowrangi was deprived of 12,000 trees due to the project for expansion and rebuilding of University Road.

Some 4,000 more trees were sacrificed to the projects for expansion of Super Highway and National Highway, while 1,200 trees were also cut down to expand the makeshift market for sacrificial animals near Super Highway.

Some 13,000 trees were chopped down due to different civic projects in the past five years in the areas of Manghopir, North Nazimabad, Federal B Area, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Shaheed-e-Millat Road, Clifton, Tariq Road, DHA, Bahadurabad, PECHS, Surjani Town, Scheme-33, Gulistan-e-Jauhar, Gulshan-e-Hadeed and other major residential areas.

The NFEH president said staff of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, district municipal corporations and cantonment boards had brazenly participated in the unchecked and constant tree cutting drives but they never faced any penal action as prescribed under the relevant laws.

The trees uprooted during the recent development drives across the city included that of Neem, Peepal, Tamarind, Gulmohar, Amaltas, Moringa and other important species of flowering, fruit and other beneficial trees.

He recalled the explicit directives issued in the recent past by the Karachi commissioner that cutting down trees was a cognisable offence, as wherever such an action became inevitable, the relevant civic agencies or construction companies were bound under the law to plant the uprooted trees again at the nearest feasible location.

He said the survey conducted by the NFEH had revealed that the uprooted fully grown trees could easily be planted at any nearby site but it could not be done apparently due to lack of planning and indifference of the relevant government agencies.

He added that executioners of major civic transportation schemes such as the Green Line and Orange Line sections did not come up with any plan to conduct mandatory plantation drives to mitigate the compromised environmental conditions caused due to construction of such projects.

Neither did the executing agencies of the mass transit schemes provide any detailed plans to conduct the required plantation drive despite repeatedly being contacted by the relevant civil society organisations, including the NFEH.

Qureshi said the previous plantation drive conducted by the civic agencies did not promote plantation of locally available and environmental friendly species of plants that could also complement the campaign to beautify the city.

Instead, anti-environment plants such as *Conocarpus erectus*, commonly called buttonwood or button mangrove, were planted, which contributed to aggravating allergies in several ailing citizens and did not help lessen the harsh weather conditions prevailing in summers, he added.

He said it was a pitiful situation that no space was reserved for tree plantations where new mega construction projects were being built in the city.

The parks built and plantation drives conducted during the previous regimes of the city district government in Karachi had also been ruined due to neglect of the authorities concerned, he added.
(The News 19, 02/03/2017)

Green Line BRT fails to keep promise of transplanting 800 trees

If you happen to drive through Nagan Chowrangi towards Sakhi Hassan, you will come across a deserted concrete central median, which once used to be lush green.



Thanks to the construction of the Green Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), the concrete structure will be running over the corpses of as many as 7,321 trees.

The contractors of the project were supposed to replant over 800 of these trees last year in the month of July in the premises of Mazar-e-Quaid. They were able to transplant only 12 in a football ground near Mazar-e-Quaid, said a civil engineer at Quaid-e-Azam Mazar Management Board, Jawad Mughal.

Out of those 12, he pointed out, hardly four survived. The transplantation activity, he said, occurred last year in the month of August and the authorities dedicated not more than two days for the care of the trees.

Fate of almost 12,000 trees uncertain

“The contractors had assured that for two years, they would be taking care of the trees,” said Mughal. “However, no one turned up the third day after transplantation.”

He added there was already water shortage in the area and no one was there to water the transplanted trees, which was why only four survived. He believes the survival of even these four trees is no less than a miracle.

The Green Line BRT will run on segregated lanes from Surjani Town to Saddar. For a city severely lacking mass transit, the Green Line offers a much-needed respite. However, it comes at the cost of nearly all the greenbelts in District Central.

From Nagan Chowrangi onwards, the Green Line will run on the median – the central greenbelt of the road — once lined with thousands of trees. Even at Gurumandir, the Green Line has trampled over some trees that date back to before Partition.

Out of the 7,321 trees that have been removed for the construction of the Green Line, 6,321 are *Conocarpus* and *Eucalyptus*, according to the Landscape Architecture Studio’s principal landscape architect, Komal Parvez.

She added that these trees have already been banned by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) as they harmed invasive plant species.

Tree cutting: Mourning the loss of the young Neems

The Studio, which numbered the trees to be chopped down, has been hired as consultants by the Karachi Infrastructure Development Company Limited (KIDCL), which is managing the Green Line’s construction.

According to the Studio's survey conducted around two years back, there were 23 chandi, 51 neem, 33 ficus, 18 date palm, 33 burna, 300 bhindi and 318 lignum trees on the Green Line BRT's track.

However, the track from Karachi Development Authority (KDA) Chowrangi till Board Office Chowrangi and the one from Nazimabad till Lasbela had 400 and 600 trees, respectively. Species of these are not available.

Former KIDCL chief financial officer Bilal Memon had told The Express Tribune earlier that apart from the transplanted, the Green Line contractors plan to plant 19,500 new trees, estimated to cost Rs88 million.

Urban heat island

The timing of the plantation of new trees and transplanted of the older ones does not sit well with environmentalist Dr Zafar Iqbal Shams. The identified trees, he said, should have been transplanted before commencing the project.

He pointed out that in order to pave way for the Green Line BRT, thousands of small and huge trees have already been chopped off without planting new ones. With summer round the corner, this, he said, will result in much harsher weather conditions than before.

Green Line bus to make Karachi less green

"Every tree counts," said horticulturist Tofiq Pasha. "For the Green Line BRT, it is a matter of thousands of trees. Imagine what impact it will create on the environment."

According to Shams, the jungle of concrete buildings absorbs the heat from sun and enhances the temperature by at least five to seven degrees when they release that heat. The process is known as 'urban heat island'.

In such a case, he explained, the trees in the surroundings keep the concrete structures cooler and reduce the effects of urban heat island. Now, he said, with thousands of trees completely uprooted, this urban heat island phenomenon can be far deadlier than that of the heat wave – a natural process that struck the port city two years back.

However, according to architect Pervez, the heat island effect has been in the city much before work on the Green Line BRT kicked off. She said they kept the number of trees to be transplanted at 800 but if some of those trees are not obstructing construction work, they will not be removed.

Meanwhile, KIDCL's chief engineer pointed out that apart from Mazar-e-Quaid, 77 trees were transplanted in a school near Anda Mor in North Karachi. Responding to the situation, District Municipal Corporation Central chairman Rehan Hashmi said he will pursue litigation against the KIDCL's environmental plunder.

In their Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, he pointed out, the KIDCL had promised to plant 17,000 new trees, for which Rs150 million were allocated.

They also promised to look after the trees for two years, he added. "Now they are reluctant to do their job and their consultants for the transplanted have also gone."

(By Oonib Azam The Express Tribune 13, 03/03/2017)

Karachi zoo authorities unhappy with public for littering animals' cages

Being one of the most popular recreational spots in the city, the Karachi Zoological Gardens entertain a large number of people on a daily basis. However, the animals do not get the treatment they deserve from the visitors as people continue to litter their cages and the zoo premises.



The zoo, which is more than 100 years old, is covered by hundreds of trees that help in providing a cleaner environment for not just the animals but also for the visitors.

One gets to see more than 900 animals at the zoo, just by paying Rs20 as entry fee. However, despite this, the visitors keep the zoo sweepers busy cleaning the garbage thrown by them on the grass, tracks and even inside the cages of the animals.

Sindh CM visits Karachi zoo after 42 years

Saqib Meekael, a sweeper at the zoo, said they start sweeping the zoo from 7am and it continues till the evening. "Other than leaves, there is a lot of garbage thrown by the visitors even though dustbins are installed in every corner of the zoo," he added.

Pointing at a gunny sack next to him, Meekael said this is for collecting plastic shopper bags that people usually throw in the zoo or inside the cages. The zoo has a total of around 10 sweepers.

The children, who hang on to the grills of the cages to watch their favourite animals, end up littering the surroundings of the cages, intentionally or unintentionally. Juice boxes or wrappers can usually be seen inside the cages, which are thrown at the animals by the people to get their attention.

Another sweeper, Sanjesh Kumar, said they even have to go inside the cages of the wild animals to remove the wrappers or any garbage. "Frequently going into the cages irritates the animals," he said.

Zoo Director Fahim Khan claimed that he takes several rounds of the zoo in the day to keep a check on the waste disposal work. He added he has directed the sweepers to always keep collecting garbage from inside the cages.

He added that on weekends and on days when the zoo is only for women and children, more than 1,500 people visit it. They bring along food and snacks with them but they throw the garbage on the grass or on tracks instead of throwing them in the dustbins, he claimed. "The zoo has numerous dustbins and enough sweepers," Khan said. "However, despite this, the lack of cooperation from the visitors is creating a problem of sanitation for the zoo administration."

He added that the zoo administration does not require any heavy amount of budget from the government to keep the zoo clean because these sweepers and dustbins are enough for this. However, he added, the problem is with the people who are not responsible citizens. The public litter the same place that entertains them at a low price, he added.

Khan said if the plastic bags or wrappers that are thrown inside the cages are consumed by the animals, it can cause great problems for them. Talking about the issue, Rashid Pirzada, who is a veterinary doctor, said that minor things can pass through the animal's intestines but the plastic bags or wrappers can get stuck, which can then lead to surgery for the removal.

Karachi Zoo welcomes new pair of bears

Dr Pirzada believes that there is a lack of awareness among the people. He added that throwing things at the animals can change their psychological behaviour because most of the animals prefer living in isolation. This can make them sick or the animals can also stop eating for several days because they get irritated by such behaviour and they are not made for such a lifestyle, Dr Pirzada added.

When The Express Tribune approached many families, they refused to comment when they were asked about the poor waste disposal done by the public. However, Aneela Majid, an elderly woman who had come along her sisters and their children, said that the visitors try not to litter the zoo but children sometimes throw away garbage wherever they feel like.

Majid added that it is the responsibility of citizens to keep the place clean, instead of blaming it on others. "We must become more responsible and that is the only way forward," she said, adding that the zoo administration should, however, increase the number of sweepers to keep the zoo clean.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Urban Resource Centre director Zahid Farooq asked how eight to 10 sweepers could be enough for such a huge zoo. He added that although it is the responsibility of the

citizens but the zoo authority has to manage such problems on their own instead of relying on people's cooperation. He added that these sweepers should also be given self-defence training because they have to go inside the cages to clean them.

(By SHEHARYAR ALI The Express Tribune 14, 30/03/2017)

Bagh Ibne Qasim controversy dominates assembly session

The controversy surrounding the Bagh Ibne Qasim handed over to a real estate developer dominated the Sindh Assembly session on Friday.



According to a notification issued Thursday night, the local government department took over the 130-acre iconic park from the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and handed it over to Bahria Town.

During the session, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) protested against the decision and to challenge it in court. The ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and MQM lawmakers blamed each other for encroaching upon government land, including amenity plots, and misusing government resources.

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Malik Riaz clarifies Bahria Town stake in Karachi's Bagh Ibne Qasim

As the session started with Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani in chair, MQM parliamentary leader Syed Sardar Ahmed attempted to speak on a point of order. "Under Rule 232, I can speak on a public interest issue," he said, adding that assembly rules are being bulldozed and members are not allowed to move their motions.

"Today, I submitted an adjournment [motion] on [the] government's decision to hand over Bin Qasim Park to Bahria Town but you bluntly rejected [it] in your chamber," he said. "The park has been handed over to the builder for commercial purposes, violating the local government law, but we are not allowed to discuss this issue on the floor of [the] assembly."

Speaker Durrani said the adjournment motion was rejected because it was not moved in accordance with the rules.

After the speaker's remarks, MQM lawmakers rose from their seats and protested against the decision. Faisal Subzwari, who is the deputy parliamentary leader of the party, said they would not allow anyone to ruin Karachi further. "We are not living in a monarchy and such decisions will not be tolerated," he said, adding that the notification of the park was issued late night and the city mayor had no idea about it.

A green paradise lost

Subzwari said that the MQM would not allow any to impose the 'law of the jungle' for vested interests. "With this decision, the performance of local government minister has become questionable," he said, adding that government jobs and precious land is being sold to appease some people.

During his speech, anti-government slogans such as 'No, no', 'Go, go' and 'Shame, shame' echoed in the house.

In the noisy session, Local Government Minister Jam Khan Shoro refuted MQM members' claims that the park was being given for commercial purpose. "More than 300 parks were occupied by MQM in Karachi where they had built their offices," he said, adding that the government with the help of law enforcement agencies has demolished these offices and is trying to revive them. "We want to restore these parks in their original condition," he said.

According to him, Bagh Ibne Qasim was given to Bahria Town just to provide a platform to citizens for recreational activities free of charge. "It is not commercial," he said. "It is a public park where entry will be free. The government, with the help of NGOs and philanthropists, wants to revive its past glory."

Bus Rapid Transport: Bahria Town, Chinese group ink Karachi transport deal

Shoro said that the mayor has not visited the park even once. "This shows his seriousness and competency," he said. He added that since the KMC has failed to maintain the park, the provincial government has decided to update it. "This is very unfortunate," he remarked. "We want to render free of [charge] services but the mayor and MQM lawmakers sitting here are protesting."

He went on to say that the MQM should also tell people about who owns most of the wedding halls built on amenity plots in Karachi.

"Can anyone tell me who has built wedding halls on the land of Safari Park in Karachi?" he said. "Why are you mum on it? We will not succumb to pressure and will revive all the parks in Karachi, including Jahangir Park in Saddar, where work has already been started."

Earlier, Sabir Qaimkhani of MQM had moved his call attention notice and asked the local government minister about why salaries of Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa) employees in Hyderabad had been stopped for the last six months. "Employees are protesting but no one [pays] heed to their problems," he said.

Bahria Town in deal to build Hyatt hotels

Responding to him, Shoro said that MQM's zonal office was built inside the Wasa office in Hyderabad and a majority of ghost employees appointed during the MQM tenure were getting the salaries and running the affairs of the sanitation agency. "We have only stopped the salaries of ghost employees," he said, adding the government will retain the jobs of genuine employees and fire the others.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MPA Khurram Sher Zaman raised the issue of water crises in Karachi. Responding to him, Shoro acknowledged the water crises and said the government is trying to implement the Supreme Court's decision on it.

Former minister of information Sharjeel Inam Memon also attended the assembly session.

Malik Riaz speaks of 'positive intentions'

A day after the Sindh government handed over Karachi's iconic beachside park, Bagh Ibne Qasim, to Bahria Town for adoption, Bahria Town CEO Malik Riaz clarified that his company would not be taking over the park until all the stakeholders, including Karachi's mayor, were on board.

Riaz also tweeted the agreement signed between the Sindh government and Bahria Town.

He further clarified that Bahria Town would not be buying the park and funds used for beautification and maintenance of the park would come only from Bahria Town itself. "We have no commercial interests ... it is really disappointing that positive intentions are being opposed," he added.

Developed under the supervision of the then city nazim, Mustafa Kamal, and inaugurated by former military ruler Pervez Musharraf in 2007, the park, spanning over 130 acres, gained massive publicity at the time.

However, despite Rs600 million spent on it, the park has been neglected for quite some time.
(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune 13, 01/04/2017)

SHC halts handing over of Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim

Sindh High Court (SHC) suspended on Monday the operation of the provincial government's notification handing over Karachi's largest public park – Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim – to Bahria Town.

A two-judge bench, headed by Justice Junaid Ghaffar, passed this order on a petition filed by Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar and Deputy Mayor Arshad Vohra, challenging the local government secretary's notification to hand over the public park to the real estate giant for a period of 10 years.

An application was also filed requesting for an urgent hearing on the plea.

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The mayor challenged the notification dated March 30, read with the agreement of the same date, between the local government department secretary and Bahria Town, through which the mayor was directed to hand over possession of Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim along with an aquarium situated in Clifton to the private real estate developer.

Akhtar contended that the park is the property of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, but the local government secretary had unilaterally and without taking him into confidence issued the subject notification and letter, including the agreement.

He argued that the subject notification refers to an earlier notification, dated November 21, 2016.

However, the judges found that the petitioner did not have that notification available for the court's perusal.

'How can the Sindh govt handover the park without involving the mayor?'

Notwithstanding this, the petitioner's lawyer, Sameer Ghazanfar, also referred to Section 74 of the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013, arguing that only an institution or service maintained by the council can be transferred to the government. Whereas, the public park in question falls within the definition of neither an institution nor a service, he added.

Referring to the Part-I of the Schedule-II of the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013, the petitioner's lawyer argued it is the responsibility of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation to transfer the functions of controlling the land owned by it.

Further referring to the Part-II in the Schedule-II of the Act (Item No 52), he contended that insofar as the parks and gardens were concerned, such powers are exclusively vested in the metropolitan corporation to maintain and create any recreation for the convenience of the general public.

He argued that the agreement signed between the LG secretary and Bahria Town is a commercial arrangement, whereby they have settled certain terms and conditions. Though the management of the park is being handed over to the private builder, the government will still be paying salary of staff and allocating budgets.

The mayor also relied on a judgment passed by the Supreme Court in a case relating to a portion of Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim, wherein commercial activity was initiated and the apex court had concluded that 'no commercial activity could be carried on, on an amenity plot'.

Social responsibility: Beautify your city, says Aziz

Therefore, the court was pleaded to suspend the operation of the March 30 notification to hand over the public park to the private real estate giant. A restraining order against such arrangement was also sought till the final disposal of the matter.

After hearing initial arguments the judges issued notices to the respondents as well as the Sindh advocate-general for April 18.

"Till the next date of the hearing, the portion of the impugned notification dated March 30, 2017 whereby the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation has been directed to hand over the possession of the park to the respondent 4 (Bahria Town) shall remain suspended," the judges ordered.

The top provincial government law officer, Bahria Town and other respondents were directed to file their comments by the next date of hearing.

(The Express Tribune 13, 04/04/2017)

SHC seeks details of Bagh Ibne Qasim agreement

The Sindh High Court (SHC) directed on Friday the law officers for the provincial government and Bahria Town to submit details of the agreement signed between them regarding 'adoption' of the city's iconic Bagh Ibne Qasim to the real estate firm for 10 years.



A two-judge bench, headed by Justice Muhammad Junaid Ghaffar, sought such agreement by Tuesday on a petition filed by a citizen, Ahmed Zameer.

The bench was hearing a second petition challenging the handing over of the city's iconic public park to the private real estate firm for 10 years.

Advertisement

Bagh Ibne Qasim controversy dominates assembly session

The same bench had, on April 4, suspended the notification of handing over the public to Bahria Town on a petition filed by the MQM-Pakistan leader and mayor of Karachi, Wasim Akhtar, which got the Pakistan Peoples Party-led provincial government's move temporarily blocked.

The petitioner, Ahmed Zameer, argued that the local government secretary had signed an agreement dated March 30 with Bahria Town, handing over the public park to it for a period of 10 years. He argued that the agreement in question was a violation of the Article 140-A of the Constitution.

Therefore, he pleaded that the court direct the official and private respondents to produce the agreement in the court for the judges' perusal. He also pleaded that the agreement in question be declared a violation of Article 140-A and, therefore, suspend the same.

SHC halts handing over of Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim

After hearing the initial arguments, the bench issued notices to the local government secretary, chief secretary, Bahria Town and others. It also directed the lawyers representing the provincial government and Bahria Town to submit the details of the agreement in question. The matter was adjourned for two weeks.

In his plea, Mayor Akhtar had argued that it is the responsibility of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation to transfer the functions of controlling the land owned by it, according to Part-I of Schedule-II of the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013.

Further referring to Part-II in Schedule-II of the Act (Item No 52), he contended that insofar as the parks and gardens were concerned, such powers are exclusively vested in the metropolitan corporation to maintain and create any recreation for the convenience of the general public.

'How can the Sindh govt handover the park without involving the mayor?'

According to the mayor, the agreement was a 'commercial' arrangement, whereby they have settled certain terms and conditions.

Though the management of the park is being handed over to the private builder, the government will still be allocating budgets while paying the salaries of staff.

He had also referred to a judgment passed by the Supreme Court in a case relating to a portion of Bagh Ibne Qasim, wherein commercial activity was initiated and the apex court had concluded that 'no commercial activity could be carried [out] on an amenity plot'.

Suspending the operation of the notification till April 18, the SHC bench sought comments from the official and private respondents.

(By Naeem Sahoutara The Express Tribune 13, 15/04/2017)

Public parks for sale

On Friday afternoon, a black 15-seater helicopter, with a gold Bahria Town emblem on the side glinting in the sunlight, approached Bagh Ibne Qasim, the city's largest public park. Huge clouds of dust billowed upwards as it descended towards the barren ground. Out emerged Malik Riaz, once contractor for the Military Engineering Services, now CEO of Bahria Town, the real estate behemoth. Accompanying him were his son, son-in-law and a few senior Bahria employees.

To greet Mr Riaz, MQM-P leaders Farooq Sattar and Mayor Waseem Akhtar were at hand. A meeting was to take place in connection with a petition filed against the recent handing over of this public park to Bahria private limited.

The 130-acre Bagh Ibne Qasim today is a shadow of its former glory. The queues of public buses — between 60 and 100 every day — which brought thousands of people from all over Karachi to the gates of the park in Clifton have disappeared. The grass that once carpeted the park's expanse is long dead.

Even until four years ago, the Bagh Ibne Qasim — maintained by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) — with its velvety grass, well-manicured flowerbeds and stone benches, would be thronged with families in the evenings. Its fortunes began to change when the PPP government, through amendments to the Sindh Local Government Act, 2013, took over many of the local government's powers and deprived KMC of most of its fund-raising sources.

“The Sindh government created the conditions whereby the party leadership and its close business associates could make tons of money, all at the cost of the city,” said a former KMC official. “For instance, it's well known that before 2016 the contract for maintaining Bagh Ibne Qasim was with a front company owned by a PPP MNA from Lyari. You can see what has become of it.”

Through a notification dated March 30, the PPP government in Sindh “handed over” Bagh Ibne Qasim “for adoption” to Bahria Town. According to the contract, Bahria undertook to “renovate, landscape, improve, reconstruct, rehabilitate and maintain the said project for a period of 10 years on its own expense”.

On April 3, the Sindh High Court suspended the government's notification after Mayor Waseem Akhtar filed a petition against it. The court directed both parties to submit their replies by today.

The MQM-P leaders' public outrage is a smokescreen. Far from resisting the provincial government, evidence shows that the KMC, under the control of MQM-P since January 2016, actually colluded to hand over the park to the powerful developer.

Mayor Waseem Akhtar has also claimed that KMC was not taken into confidence by the Sindh government when the agreement was signed between Bahria Town and Secretary, SLGD Muhammad Ramzan Awan. However, the document bears the signature of Afaq Mirza — a known confidante of Mr Sattar — currently director general (DG), Parks & Horticulture Department, KMC, as a witness.

Also, more than a year ago, on March 16, 2016, KMC, led by MQM's deputy mayor Arshad Vohra, gave a one-year, Rs1,73,25,000 (Rs 17.3 million) contract for Bagh Ibne Qasim's maintenance to Bahria Town. The letter awarding the contract was signed by then DG Parks, KMC, Asadullah Shah.

Google Earth satellite images in its ‘historical imagery’ link are very instructive in assessing how much maintenance Bahria Town carried out in the park during the year ending March 16, 2017. They show that, if anything, Bagh Ibne Qasim is in an even more shambolic state than it was when the maintenance contract was awarded to the private developer. Not only that, but Bahria Town — in order to benefit its Icon Tower which occupies the land adjacent to the park — used the contract to lay 1,000-metre pipelines across Bagh Ibne Qasim for the disposal of sewage and storm water.

Why then has the park been “handed over for adoption” to a company that has clearly not honoured its obligations under a contract which had ended a mere fortnight before? Could an entity that had not met the terms of a one-year contract, for which it was to be paid Rs1,73,25,000, conceivably carry out its stipulated responsibilities for 10 years, that too for free?

When former DG Parks Asadullah Shah, under whom the earlier maintenance contract had been signed, was asked the questions above, he replied with an embarrassed laugh: “I am a government servant and can’t say anything on this. It’s a policy matter. You are the best judge.”

ZulfikarAli Bhutto’s legacy

Bagh Ibne Qasim, located in KDA Scheme 5, is a legacy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s expansive vision for Pakistan’s largest city. The founder of the PPP imagined it as an area dotted with generously laid out parks and green spaces for the people of Karachi.

According to a former director of land, Karachi Development Authority (KDA), Mr Bhutto returned the initial draft layout drawn up by Karachi’s renowned Cornell-trained town planner Ali Ahmed with an observation that it did not adequately meet his requirement for parks in the area.

In 1996, then Sindh chief minister Abdullah Shah, father of the present chief minister, transferred all parks and playgrounds in KDA Scheme 5 to KMC because during Benazir Bhutto’s government the latter had far more financial resources to maintain these green spaces.

However, over the last four years or so, slowly but surely, the park fell into disrepair. An area resident, Farah Hassan, said: “My son used to play football there every day. But what was once a family park has become a hangout for shady individuals, and I no longer let him go there.”

According to a former senior KMC official, there are a number of problematic issues in the attempted “handing over” of Bagh Ibne Qasim to Bahria Town.

First, neither the Sindh government nor KMC has any claim to the ownership of the park. When a land authority develops a housing scheme, it recovers its costs from the sale of plots through occupancy value and development charges.

The park thus belongs to the residents of KDA Scheme 5 where it is located, with KMC responsible for its maintenance and further development.

Second, while Section 74 of Sindh Local Government Act 2013 allows for the government to “take over the management and control of any institution or service maintained by a Council” — in this case KMC — it only allows transfer of such management and control to another council, not to a private party.

The ruling PPP clearly attaches no significance to what are not only legal niceties but also its moral obligation to the people of the city. Nor, apparently, does the local government, notwithstanding its recent show of protest. Both are complicit in the ongoing commercialisation of the city’s major parks.

This is being facilitated by a thus far little-known Sindh government notification dated Nov 21, 2016, which distorts the above-mentioned Section 74 to authorise SLGD to “take over” any public park or garden from the KMC and assign their maintenance to any company or multinational.

Including Bagh Ibne Qasim, five parks in the city — the others being Benazir Bhutto Park, Frere Gardens, Beach Park and Jehangir Park — have been or are in the process of being handed over to commercial interests.

On Dec 23, 2016, the government of Sindh issued a notification declaring the takeover of Benazir Bhutto Park by SLGD. It is also believed the powers that be in the province have decided to hand over Frere Gardens to the organiser of an annual food festival on the premises, while Beach Park and Jehangir Park are also being gifted to commercial interests in a similarly questionable manner.

The Supreme Court and the Sindh High Court orders in several cases have held the commercialisation of public parks and amenities to be a violation of the law and citizens' rights.

Bahria's Town's footprint

Notwithstanding these court judgements, the iconic Bagh Iqbal Qasim is being slowly devoured by Bahria Icon Tower with the full knowledge of the provincial government and KMC, well before the Sindh government decided to make the process 'official'.

A retired land official questioned the blatantly preferential treatment that KMC has meted out to Bahria. As per KMC rules, he said, Bahria's bid for the Rs1,73,25,000 maintenance contract was accompanied by a pay order of five per cent of the value, which came to roughly Rs 850,000. "But although Bahria did not even attempt to maintain the park, KMC has still not encashed the bid bond submitted by the developer," he disclosed. "Neither has it taken any of the actions that one would have expected it to take. It didn't cancel the contract or blacklist the firm or levy the Rs1,000 per day penalty stipulated in the contract. It didn't even invite new tenders. Instead, it gave the park for adoption to the same party!"

The high-rise complex has already spread over large chunks of parkland. For one, as alleged in Suit 2064 of 2014 and other complaints pending in the SHC, Bahria Town has illegally taken over 4,050 square yards that was given by KMC to Ram Krishna Mission Trust on temporary occupation lease in 1944 to set up a school for low-caste Hindu children.

According to the petition, several other chunks of parkland that have been illegally amalgamated into 9,360 sq yards of what used to be Hussain D'Silva flats are now part of the 17,517 sq yards the complex occupies today.

Another several thousand square yards of land to the north of Bagh Iqbal Qasim have been swallowed up by the underpass constructed to service Icon Tower. In the process of its construction, moreover, irreparable damage was done to the Kothari Parade, which was bequeathed in 1919 by philanthropist Jehangir Hormusji Kothari to the people of Karachi.

"This is how commercial interests eat away at citizens' heritage and their constitutional rights unless they themselves stand up and resist," said a former KMC official. What will it take for Karachiites to reclaim their green spaces that are being devoured by the rapacious power elite?

(By Naziha Syed Ali Dawn 01, 18/04/2017)

118 shops razed to pave way for park off MA Jinnah Road

Encroachments removed in accordance with decision of Supreme Court



One hundred and eighteen shops built on an amenity plot along MA Jinnah Road were demolished on Tuesday in accordance with the decision of the country's top court.

Eidgah SHO Ghulam Yaseen told The News that the police had received instructions to facilitate the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's (KMC) Anti-Encroachment Cell (AEC) in removing encroachments from the plot.

"The KMC team, equipped with the required machinery, reached the encroached land and demolished all the 118 shops, partially or completely. The team will come back tomorrow (on Wednesday) to complete the operation."

City SP Shehla Qureshi said: "The matter was in court for the past three years, and it ordered removing all the encroachments from the land reserved for a park."

She added: "The shop owners were served with notices, and most of them had vacated the place. Before starting the anti-encroachment drive, the AEC had marked the shops that were to be razed."

She said the land was owned by Mir Muhammad Baloch, but the KMC had been unlawfully collecting rent from the tenants for the past three decades. "Baloch filed a petition in the Sindh High Court and won the case, following which he announced dedicating the land for a park."

Tenants protest

During the anti-encroachment drive, the shop owners staged a peaceful protest demonstration on MA Jinnah Road. They said they had been running their businesses in the area for the past 30 years, but were now left with no livelihoods.

The protesters shouted slogans against the municipal body as well as demanded that the government intervene in the matter to save them from "committing suicide". SHO Yaseen said the protest caused a traffic mess on MA Jinnah Road, but they later dispersed peacefully.

'Following orders'

KMC Anti-Encroachment Director Nazeer Hussain Lakhani, who was suspended for razing an encroached portion of the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Park in Clifton last month, said the municipal body was supposed to demolish the shops earlier, but the drive was delayed due to departmental issues.

He said the Supreme Court had repeatedly ordered demolishing the shops after it had been proven that they were built illegally.

"Former KMC Municipal Commissioner Dr Badar Jameel was served with contempt notices by the SC for failing to follow the court's directives."

Amenity plot

KMC Estate Director Abdul Qayoom Khan said the KMC had rented out the shops in 1993 and had been receiving the rent on a regular basis.

"In 2015 a petition was filed in the Sindh High Court (SHC) for evacuating the land. The petitioner told the court that the shops were constructed on his property."

Khan said the KMC fought the case in the SHC but failed. "The court ordered the municipal body to get the land vacated, but the KMC approached the SC, which maintained the high court's orders and directed the body to clear the amenity plot."

He said a total of 288 shops were constructed on the land, adding that the KMC had already razed 170 shops in the first phase of its anti-encroachment drive, while the remaining were demolished on Tuesday. (The News 13, 07/06/2017)

Regularisation of five acres of Safari Park cancelled

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has cancelled the regularisation of five acres of land in Deh Okewari [Safari Park] and ordered to withdraw a notification that the provincial land utilisation department had issued two months ago, it emerged on Saturday.

An order issued by the chief minister on Friday led the land utilisation department to withdraw its notification that it issued on April 4 this year pertaining to regularisation of five acres of land of Deh Okewari into 99 years lease for residential-cum commercial purposes. The notification had created immense hue and cry among the general public.

(Dawn 18, 18/06/2017)