

NEWSCLIPPINGS

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SEWERAGE & DRAINAGE



Urban Resource Centre

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No new industrial units without effluent treatment plant, says Wahab

At a high-level meeting held on Thursday, the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) was directed to frame rules banning industrial units without having the provision of an effluent treatment plant.

The meeting chaired by Adviser to the CM Sindh on Law, Environment, Climate Change, and Coastal Development Barrister Murtaza Wahab, also the Sindh government's spokesperson, was also attended by secretary of environment Mohammad Aslam Ghauri and Sepa director general Naeem Ahmad Mughal.

"Convened a meeting on making environmental laws more enforceable and transparent in their application and issued directions with regard to framing rules for making pre-treatment or effluent treatment plants (ETPs) necessary for all industries. No new industry will be established without ETPs," Barrister Wahab stated in a Twitter message.

At the meeting, sources said, Sepa officials briefed the CM's adviser about the performance of the department so far and the challenges it faced in law enforcement.

Barrister Wahab directed officials to frame rules in such a way that no delay occurred in their implementation and offenders were punished under the law.

Additionally, he also emphasised the need for environmental self-accountability and gradually enhancing the role of Sepa in law enforcement.

"Mr Wahab asked director general Sepa to immediately formulate guidelines for the treatment of industrial waste water so that there would be no delay in the process of disposal of industrial effluent," said a Sepa spokesperson.

It is estimated that there are over 10,000 big and small industries in Karachi. The majority of them are not registered with the provincial environment authorities.

Most of these industrial units are located in seven industrial zones in different parts of Karachi such as the Sindh Industrial Trading Estate, Landhi, Korangi, Malir, Federal B Area, North Karachi and Port Qasim.

Currently, there is no proper mechanism in the city to manage any kind of waste, including medical waste and industrial effluent, the bulk of which goes directly into the sea without any treatment. The issue has been raised many times as the hazardous waste emitting toxic gases affects public health, destroys marine life and contaminates the food chain.

The environmental watchdog has been failing for decades to enforce its writ against the powerful industry.

The Supreme Court-mandated Water Commission (Dec 2016-Jan2019) took up this matter and carried out detailed surveys. The industry, including the owners of sugar mills and distilleries had given time-bound written undertakings to install pre-treatment plants, entailing contempt proceedings for defaulters, and sanctions under the SEPA Act.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 14, 08/01/2021)

Reports sought on action against using sewage for vegetable cultivation

The Sindh High Court on Monday directed the agriculture secretary and the deputy commissioners of Korangi and Malir districts to submit their respective reports regarding action taken by them to stop cultivation of vegetables using sewage.

A two-judge bench comprising Justices Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Amjad Ali Sahito issued these directives while hearing a petition regarding purported cultivation of vegetables through sewage in parts of the metropolis.

The petitioner had submitted that vegetables were being grown through sewage and industrial waste in Korangi, Malir, Landhi and other areas located on the outskirts of the city and these vegetables were not fit for human consumption.

On Monday, counsel for the Sindh Food Authority (SFA), its director-Legal Zulfiqar Nizamani, additional agriculture secretary (technical) and department's focal person Mushtaq Ahmed and additional deputy commissioner Korangi Syed Arshad Waris appeared before the court.

SHC issues notices to federal and provincial govts on a plea for completion of K-IV project

The judges observed that in the larger public interest the court had on the last date called the additional agriculture secretary and additional deputy commissioner-I of Malir who was called absent again.

Mr Nizamani submitted that the SFA had taken the contaminated samples of the vegetables and had sent it to a laboratory and were awaiting its report.

He said the samples were sent to the lab on Jan 21 and he would file the report on the next date.

The bench directed him to ensure that on the next date the laboratory report should be submitted in the court "without any fail".

It also directed the additional DC-Korangi to make inspection of the entire area and submit a progress report as to what action the DC had taken to eliminate and eradicate such type of activities from his area so that the public at large should not become victim of buying vegetables growing through sewage.

The court directed the DC-Malir to ensure that a report should be submitted in which he would mention what action was taken in his district against this activity.

The additional secretary was also directed to submit a report duly signed by the secretary with regard to action taken by them in this matter.

The hearing was adjourned till Feb 17.

K-IV completion

The same bench issued notices to the federal and provincial governments through the planning and development secretary and Sindh chief secretary on a petition seeking early completion of the K-IV project to supply additional water to the metropolis.

A petitioner had approached the court in the public interest and specifically submitted that the K-IV water project had not been completed due to which scarcity of water was being faced by the public at large.

He further submitted that the people were facing hardships as the issue of water shortage was worsening with every passing day and pleaded to the court to direct the federal and provincial authorities to complete the long-awaited K-IV project at the earliest.

The bench also issued notices to the federal and provincial law officers to submit replies on behalf of the authorities concerned and adjourned the hearing for a date to be later notified by the office.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 26/01/2021)

LG dept told to plan cleaning of 555 nullahs of KMC, DMCs

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday directed the local government department to work out a plan for cleanliness of 555 storm-water drains on the same model as adopted for Mehmoodabad and other nullahs.

“The cleanliness model of Mehmoodabad and Gujjar nullahs was a complete package under which not only encroachments were removed but the affected people have been compensated and roads are being constructed along the embankments of the nullahs,” he said.

He added that this model needed to be replicated for undertaking cleanliness of 41 nullahs of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and 514 of district municipal corporations (DMCs) so that the issue of urban flooding could be resolved once and for all.

He was presiding over a meeting of the Provincial Coordination and Implementation Committee (PCIC) here at CM House. Provincial ministers, among other officials, participated in the meeting.

The meeting was told that the anti-encroachment drive along the Mehmoodabad nullah was started on Jan 4 and 7.5km areas on both sides had been cleared and out of 56 compensation cheques, 49 had been distributed.

Committee reviews pace of encroachment removal drive along city's major storm-water drains

Cleanliness to cost Rs430m

The city commissioner told the meeting that the cleanliness work would cost around Rs430 million, adding that out of own resources the DMCs would utilise Rs119m.

The chief minister directed the LG minister to submit the requirement so that funds could be approved and released.

The NED vice chancellor told the meeting that the total drainage network of 39 drains was spread over 229.12km in length.

He said that he had already submitted a detailed survey report of Manzoor Colony drain, Gujjar main drain, Orangi main drain, Gujjar drain distributaries and Manzoor Colony distributaries, adding that the survey report of the remaining 25 drains was being prepared.

The VC said that Hub drain had 37 intercepting structures. He suggested an increase in its width from 10 feet to 25ft to cater to the expected flow.

Similarly, he said the Essa Nagri drain had 68 intercepting structures and there was a need to widen its bed.

According to the VC, the Madina Colony drain had 103 intercepting structures, therefore widening and bed maintenance of the drain was decided.

The Mowach Goth drain had 76 intercepting structures, Haroonabad 26 and Pitcher nullah had 30 intercepting points.

The VC said that Saadi Town was inundated in the last heavy rains when the rainwater had overtopped the Superhighway.

He suggested construction of a separate nullah from Saadi Town to discharge water into the Lyari River.

The chief minister directed the LG department to work out a detailed plan for restructuring of the nullahs as suggested by the NED VC.

3,957 structures to be removed from Gujjar nullah

The meeting was told that as per a survey 3,957 structures had to be removed along Gujjar nullah. The length of the nullah was 12.6km and work to remove soft encroachments had been completed between Feb 8 and Feb 18 and a full-scale encroachment removal drive was going on from Feb 19.

The chief minister was told that out of 3,957 compensation cheques, 3,587 had been distributed among the affected people and the process for handing over the remaining cheques was in progress.

The meeting was informed that Orangi nullah was six-km long in district West and as many as 1,013 structures along its embankments were identified to be removed.

It was informed that the soft removal of encroachments had been cleared and a full-scale removal was started from March.

The meeting was told that Orangi nullah had a length of 1.6km in district Keamari where 193 structures had been removed and cheques were being distributed among the affected people under the resettlement support programme.
(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 20/03/2021)

Rainwater drainage strategy discussed, KMC engineers asked to survey tail-end areas

The city administrator on Wednesday said that arrangements should be made for upcoming monsoon rains, including devising a strategy for storm-water drainage.

Addressing a meeting on rain emergency, city Administrator Laeeq Ahmed directed all engineers concerned of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation to conduct thorough survey of the sites and tail-end areas.

"Pumps should remain available all the time and arrangements should be made in view of the forecast of heavy rains this year," he further ordered.

The administrator said that at present the KMC had 17 pumps for drainage and with the purchase of four more heavy duty pumps, drainage work could be done faster.

He directed the municipal services, works and other departments to ensure coordination with each other and make joint strategy regarding rain emergencies. The departments should exchange a complete list of officers and staff deployed at all departments to ensure availability of officers and staffers around the clock, he added.

He said rainwater drainage especially in underpasses should be ensured in view of rain forecast.

"We have to keep maximum manpower and mechanical resources active while alternative arrangements should be made as required. There should be better lighting arrangements in the underpasses," he added.

Mr Ahmed said the staff deployed in the city would be supervised by the engineers and XENs of the works department during rains. He said that a permanent supply of fuel will be ensured for the vehicles carrying dewatering pumps.

He said that priority should be given to the areas where complaints of accumulation of rainwater had been received in the past. The administrator said that the provincial government would also be approached for more resources, if needed.

"Our aim should be to provide the best possible facilities to citizens for which the KMC will work closely with other institutions of the city," he concluded.

Anti-encroachment drive reviewed

Meanwhile, Commissioner Navid Shaikh chaired a meeting on Tuesday to review the progress of anti-encroachment operation being carried out at Orangi Nullah with regard to the project of remodelling of storm-water drains.

The SITE association was also invited to share their concerns so that they could be taken on board for smooth operations.

The commissioner directed deputy commissioners concerned, officials of the KMC and other officials and departments concerned to expedite the work on the remodelling of storm-water drains at Mehmoodabad Nullah, Gujjar Nullah and Orangi Nullah with coordinated efforts and ensure completion of work as soon as possible.

The commissioner directed the officials to ensure implementation of hydrological model designed by an NED experts' team so there were no obstruction in the drains.

The meeting participants were also informed that all three storm-water drains would be used only for draining storm water and they would not be used for sewerage purpose and sewerage lines would be placed under the roads and footpaths on these nullahs.

The meeting also heard the grievances of representatives of SITE Association and a committee was formed headed by Deputy Commissioner Keamari Mukhtar Abro with Shehzad Abbasi MD SITE and senior director of KMC Mazhar Khan and representative of SITE Association as members of the committee to visit Orangi Nullah.

The committee was directed to submit its report within two days.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 08/04/2021)

CM to LG dept: Clean city's nullahs before monsoon season

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah directed the local government department on Thursday to start the proper cleaning of the distributaries of three main stormwater drains of Karachi - Gujjar, Orangi and Mehmoodabad nullahs- before the coming monsoon season on a short-term basis, besides devising a plan for their overhaul in the longer run.

The CM, who was presiding over a meeting of the Provincial Coordination and Implementation Committee, stated that the width of Gujjar nullah should be increased from the existing 35 feet to 80 feet, and that of Orangi nullah from 20 feet to 40 feet.

The dredging of these drains' beds should be carried out to accommodate the anticipated discharge and sewer trunks be laid alongside the drains to separate sewage water from rain water, the CM said.

Following that, the meeting agreed on 12,500 cusecs as the design discharge for Gujjar nullah, which would have a rainfall intensity of 11 inches in 12 hours. The meeting decided to keep the rainfall intensity of Orangi nullah the same as that of Gujjar nullah. The design discharge of the nullah, however, was decided to be kept at 8,828 cusecs.

Demolitions

Earlier, the meeting also reviewed the removal of structures on account of an anti-encroachment drive alongside the nullahs.

The meeting was told that all 238 structures deemed illegal along the length of Mehmoodabad nullah had been removed.

With regards to Gujjar nullah, the meeting was informed that 3,957 structures constructed on both sides of the stormwater drain across a length of 12.6 kilometres had been identified as encroachments by the relevant authorities. Of those, structures spread across a length of 9.5kms on the nullah's left bank and dwellings constructed over a length of 8.85kms on the nullah's right bank have been cleared. The remaining structures will be cleared after Eidul Fitr, the meeting was assured.

The meeting was also briefed on the demolitions along Orangi nullah, structures identified as encroachments located along it in Central district cover a length of 4.75kms. Of them, structures across a length of 1.5kms have been demolished, and the remaining would be razed within 15 days after Eid holidays, the meeting was told.

In West district, of 1,013 structures identified as encroachments along the nullah, 860 have been removed.

Karachi commissioner Naveed Shaikh told the meeting 72 per cent of the work pertaining to the removal of encroachments along Gujjar and Orangi nullahs had been completed.

However, he added, since some residents have acquired stay orders against the razing of the structures, the demolition drives may be stalled, in turn, hampering the overhaul of the nullahs.

At that, the CM directed the legal team to pursue the cases in the relevant courts so that the stay orders could be vacated and the removal of structures along the nullahs could be resumed.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 07/05/2021)

Karachi's drains

THE initial realisation that Cyclone Tauktae was headed for the Sindh coast prompted the powers that be in the province to call for ensuring that Karachi's drainage system was in working order. While the weatherman now says that the city — along with Sindh's other coastal districts — is out of danger as the cyclone makes landfall in India, the nightmare of last year's monsoons is fresh in the mind. After the heavens opened up in August and unleashed some of the heaviest rainfall in the metropolis's history, Karachi's already creaking drainage system collapsed, and with it much of the city's infrastructure, including electricity, water supply and communication systems. However, here the lessons of disasters past are quickly forgotten. The cyclone may have thankfully changed course, but the real test of the authorities' readiness will come when the monsoon season sets in later this summer.

The government is quick to issue statements indicating it is ready to deal with disaster, as was the case when the cyclone alarm was sounded. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and when disaster does strike, more often than not the state is not able to cope. After last summer's monsoon disaster, the high and mighty of the land promised to resolve Karachi's urban flooding problem. The federal and provincial governments and disaster management bodies as well as other state institutions promised not to leave the megacity in the lurch, while the apex court ordered Karachi's nullahs to be cleared of encroachments. One hopes all these efforts will bear fruit and that the disaster of the past will not be repeated in the city. The fact is that due to decades of neglect by the federal, provincial and local governments Karachi's drainage system has been destroyed, with the natural flow of water blocked and sewage and solid waste thrown into storm-water drains, while encroachments have done the remaining damage. Along with cleaning the drains, a long-term solution is needed to address the issue.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 18/05/2021)

Nehr-e-Khayyam stews in filth as plan to overhaul hits snags

Nehr-e-Khayyam stews in filth and garbage while those living in its vicinity await the much-touted plan to revamp the site and develop a recreational spot to be implemented.

In October 2019, the Sindh cabinet approved a plan to beautify, modernise and develop Nehr-e-Khayam as a recreational point in collaboration with the People and Nature Initiative (PANI), a non-governmental organisation.

It was to be a "gift for the people of Karachi" but like many promises made to the metropolis, this one to appear to be merely on paper.

"A few trucks started taking garbage last year," said a resident, Mohamamd Sabir, speaking to The Express Tribune. "I heard the area is being cleaned and beautified as one of the most amazing spots in the city," he added, quoting the plan he read about in a newspaper two years ago.

"It was just a promise nothing else," lamented Sabir. "It's [still] just sewerage water flowing into the sea. It smells bad when it rains here." People continue to throw garbage on either side of the water channel, he added.

A sore sight Nehr-e-Khayam is roughly 10-feet-deep and one kilometer long.

It runs from the Gizri crossing, beside Ocean Mall, Clifton and runs into the sea.

It is filled with garbage and sewage even though it was originally meant for drainage of rainwater into the sea.

In fact, water travels both ways in Nehr-e-Khayam - during low tide, from the ground to the sea and during high tide, from the sea to the ground. Currently, it is a sore sight apart from a few nurseries dotting one of its banks.

The plan

After the cabinet gave the go-ahead in 2019, an agreement was inked within months, between PANI and the Sindh government, under which the former was to plant greenery on both sides of Nehr-e-Khayam, develop a park and adopt it for thirty years.

The recreational space was to be built within three years of the agreement. Besides, to segregate and ensure the smooth flow of sewerage, which continues to flow through the water channel, a separate conduit was to be constructed by the provincial government in the portion proposed for the park's development.

The snag

When The Express Tribune contacted both the signatories of the agreement, neither of them were willing to accept responsibility for the delay.

Instead, they passed the buck onto each other but did not wish to be named while doing so.

"It is the government's responsibility to divert the sewage water," one of the 16 PANI architects told The Express Tribune. "The government's contribution in the project is not more than five percent," countered a top Sindh government official, privy to the matter.

"We need the entire area dry and it won't cost more," said the architect. He insisted that PANI could not build upon its plan until the foundation has been made by clearing off the sewage and garbage. This, said the architect, is the responsibility of the government.

"[But] What has been done on the outskirts," cried out the official. He pointed out that about 60 trees were planted soon after the agreement was inked.

"Go and check if they are being maintained," he said, shifting blame onto the NGO.

'A communication gap'

And yet, it appeared that both parties were also sympathetic towards each other and both claimed to want to start the project but there was a communication gap between the two. "I feel the architects, who are very professional people, do not understand the way bureaucrats behave," said another PANI architect.

This one claimed to be the mediator between both sides and took a softer approach to the matter. He said that the architects working on the project are sincere but shy people. It can be difficult for them to interact with government offices and misunderstandings occur, he maintained.

Despite blaming each other for the 'unknown' delay, both sides also appeared optimistic regarding the development work.

"I think the delay [from the government side] is due to Covid-19 and the lockdown," said another PANI member.

He felt that the work would begin soon when the pandemic situation normalises. "Both sides are responsible," said the government official, toning down the blame.

"We need to sit again to make it possible within the stipulated time."
(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 05/06/2021)

'Less than one per cent waste water treated in country'

Pakistan Navy, like it does every year, observed World Environment Day on Saturday.

The day is observed every year under the ambit of United Nations to raise awareness of the significance of a healthy environment. This year's theme is 'Ecosystem Restoration'.

Pakistan Navy celebrates World Environment Day regularly, however due to Covid-19 restrictions, activities involving mass gatherings were not held.

A harbour-cleaning activity was conducted by PN personnel and banners and posters were displayed and leaflets about steps to restore the ecosystem were distributed in PN units and residential areas.

The Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Mohammad Amjad Khan Niazi in his message of the day reaffirmed PN's resolve and commitment to make every effort for betterment of environment, especially the marine environment and directed the men under his command to continue dedicated efforts in this direction.

World Environment Day observed in city

Seminar

Meanwhile, highlighting how Pakistan had been failing on the environmental front for decades, speakers at a seminar held on Friday said less than one per cent of waste water generated in the country was treated before it's discharged into water bodies. This situation had been persisting despite enactment of the country's first environmental law in 1997.

The event held in connection with World Environmental Day was organised by the National Forum for Environment and Health in collaboration with the United Nation Environmental Programme.

"Every development activity has the potential to affect the environment. This is why it's important that infrastructural development should be planned and carried out in a way that [it is] fully responsive to environmental sensitivities and changing climate," said Prof Noman Ahmed, a senior architect and teacher at the NED University of Engineering and Technology.

He regretted residential neighbourhoods had been built in Karachi at the expense of the city's natural drainage system.

"What the city needs is a strong local government system that should be empowered at the grassroots level to manage growing environmental issues."

Dr Asim Mehmood, the convener of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry standing committee on environment, cited the example of Singapore where waste water was treated thrice before discharge.

"The situation hasn't changed much in Pakistan since 1997 when the first environmental protection law was enacted in the country as the main causes of environmental degradation still remain unchecked," he noted.

Billion Tree Tsunami success

Former federal minister Javed Jabbar, also the chief guest, appreciated the government and said it was for the first time in Pakistan's history that the country's top leadership had given so much importance to environmental issues.

"Pakistan has been chosen as the host country of this year's World Environment Day in acknowledgement of its efforts to lessen the problem of environmental degradation. Also, an independent audit has found that the survival rate of the saplings planted under the Billion Tree Tsunami programme in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was up to 80 per cent."

Mr Jabbar was of the opinion that Pakistan's high population growth rate was the main reason behind its numerous environmental issues.

Meanwhile, at another event organised by Sindh Environmental Protection Agency to clean up sea litter in Keamari, Adviser to the Chief Minister on Law and Environment Barrister Murtaza Wahab said the purpose of the activity was to sensitise people to environment and make the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) realise that it had the primary responsibility for preventing marine pollution.
(By Dawn Reporter 14, 06/06/2021)

Govt to revive Karachi's three sewage treatment plants

Government of *Sindh* will make three sewage treatment plants in Karachi functional to safely discharge wastewater of the city into the sea, said CM's Adviser on Environment Murtaza Wahab on Wednesday.

"With resumption of sewage treatment facilities, the load of water pollution on our marine environment will be greatly reduced," Wahab said speaking at a ceremony held to mark World Environment Day at Iqra University.

According to reports Karachi had three sewage treatment plants TP-I, TP-II and TP-3 with a combined capacity of 150 million gallons per day (mgd) but 2005 their treatment capacity had been reduced to about 50mgd. By 2015 all three treatment plants were dysfunctional and their capacity to treat sewage had shrunk to zero. Thus from 2015 onwards Karachi's over 15 million citizens have been discharging 100% of their raw sewage into the nearest coastal waters.

Recently Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah approved establishment of TP-IV and there is one Combined Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) installed at Korangi Industrial Area, capable of treating wastewater generated from tanneries.

Besides sewage, solid waste management is another challenge for the government. The environment adviser said that people should adopt eco-friendly habits and improve the environment by bringing about an environment-friendly change in their attitudes as everyone has a role to play in improving the environment.

"Global warming is a global warning that we should not take lightly," he said and added that tree planting is an easy solution to global warming and climate change as trees reduce heat intensity and bring stability in the weather.

Therefore, to save the environment and for their and their future generations' survival, people should plant as many trees as possible.

Wahab further said: "For a sustainable environment, we have to give up the use of non-degradable plastic bags, and they have to say to vendors that we don't want vegetables, medicines in plastic bags. In short, we have to do our part to improve our society."

The adviser said that whenever people go out of the country, they become much civilized, they do not throw anything on the roads, this is the attitude they have to promote in their country as well. Together they can develop a green Karachi, green Sindh, and green Pakistan.

"We should make our students aware that each of them should plant a sapling in the university and their own homes. We have to tell people the benefits of a clean and green environment. We all have to make our commitment that we will plant trees, and that is what we need to encourage others as well."

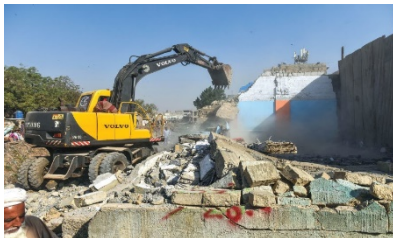
He offered that if people need plants for tree planting, the Sindh government will provide them.

He informed the audience that Clifton Urban Forest is a gift for the people of Karachi, where 50,000 saplings have been planted. Similarly, thousands of saplings have been planted in Kidney Hill, which can be seen by visiting there. Not only in all cities but saplings are being planted across the province.

Also present on the occasion were Iqra University Vice Chancellor Dr Wasim Qazi, Pakistan Navy Commander Rear Admiral Owais Bilgrami, IG Motorway Kaleem Imam, Karachi University VC Khalid Iraqi, Sindh Agricultural University VC Fateh Mari and others. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 10/06/2021)

DOWNED BY THE DRAINS OF KARACHI

It's been exactly two months since Maria Yaqub, a 21-year-old college student, saw her home located near Gujjar Nullah turn into rubble. When the bulldozers came, the young woman requested the men to wait for just a minute. "I wanted to take a photo of my late parents that was hanging in a room inside," she tells *Eos*.



The men gestured for Maria to hurry. She rushed inside. Many of her belongings, her memories, her course books were around her. Overwhelmed with emotion, she decided to grab her parents' photograph first.

She must have been inside for only a few minutes. But the men outside were apparently done waiting. As Maria was trying to take the photo off the wall, she heard the machines turn on. The giant yellow mechanical claw hit a wall, causing it to collapse immediately.

"I heard screaming and shouting [from outside]," Maria recreates the traumatic day from memory. "The photo frame slipped from my hands. I ran out and escaped with my life — nothing else."

The mass evictions of poor people and demolitions of houses as a result of the Supreme Court-ordered 'anti-encroachment' drive near Karachi's storm water drains is ostensibly to prevent a recurrence of last year's flooding in the city. But will it really work? And who will pay for the incredible human cost of incompetence?

Tayyababad in Kausar Niazi Colony, next to the Gujjar Nullah, had been home to Maria and her family for generations. "My mother was born here," she says. "And when she grew up, her *rishita* also came from this very locality."

"My sister, brothers and I grew up here, my nieces and nephews were born here," she says. "And this is also where we lost our parents."

Maria was just seven when her mother died. Her father passed away soon after, when she was only nine. "Losing one's parents so early in life makes you grow up before time," she says.

With the demolition, she lost the last-standing memory of her parents. And that was not all. The family didn't just lose one house in the area, but two. She was living under one roof with her two elder brothers and their families, while her married older sister and her family were living at another home near the Ziauddin Hospital that was also demolished.



Today, the families are awaiting the meagre compensation of 90,000 rupees per home. "My brothers and sister have been asking for their cheques, but are not getting a straight answer from anywhere," she says. "Apparently, their IDs are not coming up in the government's data, although they have legal lease papers for both homes." Their homes no longer exist. And they are being told that the government does not have data to support their claims that they ever existed. Yet, according to Maria, they still received an electricity bill for one of the homes for the month during which it was demolished.

"This is a city of utter chaos and lawlessness," says Maria. "They had also come to bulldoze our homes in 2016. Our Tayyababad home used to have six rooms and they demolished two rooms in the front, saying that there was going to be nullah cleaning and that we had exceeded our limits." Maria and her family accepted this and started living in the now four-room residence. But years went by and no nullah cleaning took place.

The city "remembered" the nullah again only after last year's record-breaking rains, and wanted to demolish houses — including Maria's family home and her sister's home — in the area.

"My brothers and brother-in-law ran from pillar to post to save our homes, but when they were not making any headway, they decided to move to a rented place," a dejected Maria says.

Her sister's home was demolished on April 4. And her family home was torn down on April 27, while she and her siblings were still in the process of moving out. "Many pieces of furniture, clothes and cooking utensils also got buried under the rubble as the machines and their unfeeling drivers went about their work," she says. But more painful than leaving behind these things was losing their family home.

The family is still dealing with the emotional toll of it all. "There was a little plastic crane among my nephew's toys," Maria says. "The first time he saw it after the incident, he was terrified. He started screaming that [the crane] was for breaking homes.

"Preoccupied by our own troubles, we sometimes forget about the trauma our children must be going through."

The family now lives in a smaller place nearby that they had hurriedly rented for 24,000 rupees a month. The Awami Workers Party (AWP) helped them find this accommodation in a rush. No other political party offered any support, Maria says.

Hers is just one of the thousands of families going through this turmoil.

"There was a little plastic crane among my nephew's toys," Maria says. "The first time he saw it after the incident, he was terrified. He started screaming that [the crane] was for breaking homes."



QUESTIONING THE SYSTEM

Abid Asghar, head of the Gujjar Nullah Affectees' Committee, has set up the committee's office right at the Gujjar Nullah. "I am a former resident who also went through eviction and demolition myself, but I am here and trying to help everyone in the same boat as me find alternative accommodations on rent," he tells *Eos*. "There is no hope now after the Supreme Court has shown us no sympathy and cancelled all stay orders," he says, referencing the court's recent decision to dismiss an application filed by some affectees of the anti-encroachment operations around Gujjar and Orangi Town nullahs, asking for a stay order. The court directed the authorities to continue the operation, despite the applicants' lawyer's arguing that the properties demolished were leased and that they have not been offered appropriate compensations.

As architect and town planner Arif Hasan recently noted in a [Dawn op-ed](#), the court also said the leases were fake. "One is at pains to understand how it knows this without an investigation," he wrote.

"We know the homes will be demolished just like the front row structures have been," Asghar says. "They did that to make their intentions clear. Everyone is worried and defenseless."

Asghar is now helping the poor families find accommodations in areas such as Surjani Town, Taiser Town, Khuda ki Basti, Lyari, in the goths, etc. These neighbourhoods are far from the affectees' Gujjar Nullah residences. Not only are these communities being displaced, they are being sent farther from their places of work and children's schools.



“A single-room accommodation costs between 7,000 to 15,000 rupees [a month],” he says. He adds that a two-room residence can cost between 12,000 and 20,000 rupees, and a three-room home between 20,000 to 28,000 rupees. The exception is Surjani Town, where it is possible to find a three-room home for 13,000 rupees a month.

“Of course, not everyone here can even afford that,” Asghar says, adding that he fears that the helpless youth might turn to crime to make ends meet. “They see two different kinds of law,” he says, “one for the rich and another for the poor. Now they either fight back and question [the system] or commit suicide.”

Asghar has been questioning the system for many years himself and has faced the consequences.

He has been locked up by the police thrice now. The first time was during Ramazan, when Asghar was “making noise” and challenging the people “threatening to take away the roofs over our heads.” He was locked up in the Gulberg Police station for about seven hours.

Most recently, he was arrested at a protest near Bilawal House earlier this week. “I completed my hat-trick of arrests on Monday,” Asghar says. He says the affectees and protesters had shown up thinking that Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari would “listen to our pleas and understand our pain.”

Instead, says the activist, they were manhandled, beaten up and arrested for raising their voices. “Even the young activists from the Karachi Bachao Tehreek, who had joined us, were arrested and detained,” he tells *Eos*.

Asghar says the police told them this is no place to hold a demonstration. “[We were told that] if we wanted to protest, we could do it at the Karachi Press Club, but not here,” he says.

June saw multiple such protests that caught the attention of the media and social media. The people losing their homes have no choice but to stand in the sweltering heat, protesting what they see as unfair treatment. They will continue to knock on every door and stand in protest, be it outside the courts, press clubs or political party head offices.

After all, thousands of Karachi’s residents are being impacted. Asghar says that people of several different ethnicities live by the Gujjar Nullah, which has some 32 colonies. “It is a very big place,” he says. “You find Urdu-speaking families from New Karachi to Shafiq Morr. From Shafiq Morr to Cafe Pyala you have the Brohi Baloch. From Cafe Pyala to Landikotal Chowrangi you have the Pakhtuns, the Rajputs, the Kashmiris and the Punjabis. And from Landikotal Chowrangi to the Ziauddin Hospital there are the Serais, the Bengalis and the Burmese.”

EVICIONS AND DISPLACEMENT

History is repeating itself.

“We have been seeing evictions and displacement in Karachi since the 1950s,” says Dr Nausheen Hafeeza Anwar, a professor at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), and the director of Karachi Urban Labs — ‘a collaborative experiment in critical urban thinking’.

“But the heavy displacement started in the late 1990s to early 2000s, mostly in the time of [Jamaat-i-Islami] Mayor Naimatullah Khan. That’s when the city government received funds for the upgradation of the roads, etc,” she says. She points out that the Lyari Expressway also displaced 80,000 individuals, and only 30,000 could be resettled. Only 33 percent of the affectees got compensated. And the compensation money — 50,000 rupees — turned out to be so little that most of it was used up by the families for transportation and shifting to Taiser Town, where most found accommodation.

“Now those evicted from Gujjar Nullah are being given 90,000 rupees cheques, which is a joke,” Dr Anwar says. “And as it is, there were two to three families living in a unit. So which family gets the money?”

These supposed ‘encroachers’ were first allowed to settle in these areas and are now being removed. “How can they be illegal occupants when they happen to be registered voters, when they pay utility bills?” questions Dr Anwar. “They were permitted in the beginning to settle wherever they could, as it was convenient for the government, which was really responsible for providing them with adequate housing at the time.”

Dr Anwar points out that when there is talk of ‘nullah cleaning’ or any kind of development work, it is easy to remove the poor and vulnerable class. “That is also what happened during the KCR [Karachi Circular Railway] evictions and demolitions. Those people are still sitting there under the open sky, waiting to be resettled,” she says.

Many argue that, nearly a year after the urban flooding last year, the government has done precious little to be ready should such showers return this monsoon season. According to some planners, the problem is actually at the mouth of the drains. But these have not been touched because they fall in posh areas like the Defence Housing Authority (DHA).

“How can they be illegal occupants when they happen to be registered voters, when they pay utility bills?” questions Dr Anwar.

Dr Anwar says that it is “much more convenient” to destroy poor people’s homes than to sit and plan properly.

She points out that when the Lyari Expressway was constructed, there was the City District Government Karachi, which at least had a resettlement plan (although this too fell short and could help only a fraction of the people). “But this government has no plan about what to do or where to resettle the KCR evicted or the nullah evicted, as tensions between the federal government and the provincial government increase,” she says.

“So we now have some 50,000 people displaced due to the nullah evictions,” she says. “The people had stay orders but the Supreme Court cancelled them and the bulldozers arrived ... The displaced have to go searching themselves for accommodations as families are destroyed. For them, it starts with the threat of displacement, and the mental tension increases during the period of waiting — which is also a form of violence.”



“So evictions and displacement are part of Karachi’s history,” she says. “This poor and vulnerable class will be targeted again and again, until the government thinks about planning properly for the poor and giving them affordable housing.”

Dr Anwar points out how having political backing, which the nullah affectees lack, can turn things around in this city. She says that bulldozers had also arrived at Jamshed Quarters and Federal Quarters, but those people had such social capital that no one could touch them. “Now no one is talking about demolishing them,” she says.

The Manzoor Colony Nullah, more commonly referred to as the Mehmoodabad Nullah, is another example of the impact supposed political backing can have. As Arif Hasan wrote, the number of planned demolitions along the nullah went from 1,205 to 56. “This change, according to the local population, has taken place because the local MPA is from the PPP and he had the ear of the provincial government,” he wrote. He added that the Gujjar and Orangi nullahs are in PTI constituencies, and the PTI, according to locals, did not intervene on their behalf.

“Meanwhile, here homes have been demolished, most of the rubble has been cleared and road rollers are paving ways, but the cleaning of the nullahs has still not started,” Dr Anwar says. “Perhaps, there is a density angle around these nullahs, along with basic sanitation issues. But, one must also not forget that the area around Gujjar Nullah and Mehmoodabad is prime land.”

GROUND REALITIES

According to Muhammad Sirajuddin of the Technical Training Resource Centre, which has taken pains in carrying out surveys along several nullahs, there are very few areas where there is any dense settlement that actually hinders the drains’ flow.

“We wanted to see if people on the nullahs are actually the cause of urban flooding, so we started carrying out on ground surveys which are bringing up different findings,” he says.

He gives the example of the Manzoor Colony Nullah. Sirajuddin, who was trained by late urban planner and researcher Perween Rahman, first explains the way the water flows through the nullah.

The nullah receives flow from Shahrah-i-Faisal, Shahrah-i-Quaideen, Shaheed-i-Millat Road, Tipu Sultan Road and Korangi Road. There are some 34 settlements around the nullah, and all the water from these areas goes through DHA Phase 7 to the Gizri Creek, from where it, finally, flows out to the sea. Coming back to the city side, from Shahrah-i-Quaideen, Kashmir Road, etc, the water flows from Nursery to PECHS Block-6 and to Mehmoodabad.

“But this couldn’t happen rapidly last year and we found the Nursery area under five feet of water,” says Sirajuddin. “The real cause of this was the Shahrah-i-Quaideen to Shahrah-i-Faisal flyover, which has its basement and pillars built over the nullah,” he points out.

“It was a 15-foot-wide drain, but now it is three-foot-wide, thanks to the pillars and basement there,” he adds.

This wasn’t all. Further research showed that two of the three pipes that cross Shahrah-i-Faisal, and carry drain water had choked. According to Sirajuddin’s research, negligence by the contractor and a lack of cleaning of the pipes greatly contributed to the flooding in the Nursery area.

He says the Gujjar Nullah has more issues than the Manzoor Colony Nullah. Sirajuddin and his team have spoken to some old settlers who say they remember clean water flowing in the drain, and claim that they would see fish in these waters during the 1960s.

According to the team’s initial surveys and research, industrial areas have been dumping solid factory waste in the drain, changing its dynamics. “The industry is also responsible for redirecting the nullah,” Sirajuddin says. “They have changed its direction to suit [their needs].”

“Sadly, these findings don’t show up in drone surveys,” says Sirajuddin. “Ground realities are quite different from what is seen from the air,” he says, pointing out the importance of speaking to the people living in these areas.

Sirajuddin says that they have also found that there is eight to 10 feet of silt in the nullahs. “But the government here is just hiding its incompetence in not cleaning the drains,” he says, adding that the cleaning should’ve been the first step towards addressing the problem, not bulldozing people’s homes.

FAIR COMPENSATION

"As far as the Sindh Government was concerned," Sindh Minister Saeed Ghani tells *Eos*, "we had wanted a one-time payment for all the affectees, which was to be from 25 lakh rupees to 30 lakh rupees. But the federal government did not agree to that, as it okayed a 15,000 rupees rent per month for six months for the first row of people living by the drains."

"They were thinking that these people can live on this rent for six months, before being relocated to the Prime Minister's [Naya] Pakistan Housing Scheme on a priority basis. I was immediately concerned, because who knows when those apartments in the PM's scheme would be constructed," he says.

"If we look at the Mehmoodabad Nullah affectees," he says, "there may have been a lot of noise there but, after the demolition work, which was not too much, the extra construction by the people was removed and their structures were no longer in the way, as they built new front walls and that was it."

"With Gujjar Nullah, there are far more affectees and a bigger problem," he admits, adding that things were "somewhat in control" when the residents had gotten a stay order from the Sindh High Court. But following the cancellation of the stay order by the Supreme Court, "the problem has gotten out of hand."

The federal and Sindh governments seldom see eye to eye on most matters. To address this, a coordination committee was formed last year to solve Karachi's issues. Unsurprisingly though, the committee has seen limited success.

"At first, I was made to head it, but I reminded [them] that I was only a provincial minister and Sindh has the smaller role in the work, while the federal government had the upper hand," says Ghani, who is now a member of the coordination committee. "Then Aminul Haque [of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement], who was a member in the committee, was asked to head it, but he wanted to pull out altogether. It was not my or the provincial government's say or mandate [to decide] who to bring in or throw out of the committee."

"Federal Minister Asad Umar is [on the committee] as well, but he has not met the affectees directly, so he does not have a clear vision of their issues," says Ghani. "As far as I and Aminul Haque are concerned, we are still [in favour of] full compensation [for] the affectees, which the federal government has turned down."

LOST HOMES

As politicians shift blame, the affectees find themselves with limited options.

Maria, who is now living with her family in a small place with a high rent, says that the affectees feel like the parcel in a game of passing the parcel. "The federal government dumps our responsibility on the provincial government and the latter pushes our fate back into the hands of the former," she says. "But still, we are a bone stuck in the provincial government's throat, [and so] it continues to give statements to calm us down while nothing happens in our favour."

"The coronavirus and its adverse effects on our household earnings had already broken our backs," says Maria. "Whatever was left, this strange drive, to clear 'encroachments', snatched away from us. Now we cannot even think of having a place of our own. We don't even have enough to eat."

Maria says that she passes by the place where her old family home once stood almost daily.

"I'm unable to come to terms with all this. I have tried, but I cannot forget our home," she says. "I think about my parents' lost picture, and my books and other household items, which we left behind while rushing out, buried somewhere deep under the muddy road that is being constructed there."

"The nullah water is black as usual with trash floating over it," she says. "It stinks like it always has, but the machines there are busier — demolishing structures and constructing roads, rather than in cleaning the nullah."

CORRECTION

A quote by Dr Nausheen H. Anwar has been modified from the original printed version to clarify that the heavy displacement of people began in the late 1990s to early 2000s, mostly in the time of Mayor Naimatullah Khan. The earlier version of the quote had implied that Khan was mayor in the 1990s, which is inaccurate. Mr Khan was mayor from 2001-2005.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn EOS, 01, 27/06/2021)