

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

***JANUARY TO JUNE 2020***

## TRANSPORT



## Urban Resource Centre

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### Sindh CM orders completion of Orange Line in 3 months

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has directed the provincial transport department to complete the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project within the next three months, as well as ready the tenders for the Red Line BRT in order to allow a ground-breaking ceremony on August 14.

He issued these orders while presiding over a meeting to review the progress of the two BRT lines at CM House on Friday. The meeting was attended by Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah, Local Government Minister Nasir Hussain Shah, adviser to the CM on information Murtaza Wahab, acting chief secretary Muhammad Waseem, local government secretary Roshan Shaikh, law secretary Shariq Ahmed, transport secretary Abbas Detho and others.

The transport minister informed the meeting that the on-going work on the Orange Line was nearly at its final stage. On hearing this, Murad directed him to complete it within the next three months, as well as to begin procuring buses, with an initial fleet of 25.

"I want the best buses to be procured; they can have a seating capacity of 40 passengers and standing capacity of 80, or they may be longer buses with double the capacity," he said, ordering the transport minister to work out the final proposals. He further advised the minister to talk to the Green Line project management and the federal government so buses with a similar appearance and identical capacity could be purchased.

The chief minister also told the transport department to enter into a facilitation and implementation agreement with the Green Line project management. The project is to be operated by the federal government for three years, after which its operations will be transferred to the Sindh government.

Murad further claimed that he had already approved Rs962 million for the construction of an underpass and mezzanine floor at Numaish, adding that the finance department had referred the matter to the cabinet sub-committee, which would submit its report for the release of the amount.

In response to a question, the CM was told that the land for the Green Line bus depot at Surjani Town had been transferred in the name of the project. The local government department is expected to issue the notification in this regard by Monday.

Meanwhile, the transport department was told to make arrangements to shift a truck stand from Mauripur to the Northern Bypass, as well as getting 100 acres of land transferred from the Board of Revenue for the construction of an inter-city bus terminal at Super Highway.

The matter of land acquisition for a biogas plant at Bhains Colony and the installation of the Red Line there also came under discussion. The chief minister said that using cattle dung for the generation of biogas would be easier and more feasible at Bhains Colony. In response, the local government minister pointed out that the land belonged to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, adding that he would talk to the city mayor to have 40 acres of land allocated for the project.

Moreover, the CM was briefed that the tender document for the Red Line BRT project was ready and would be floated within a month, while the advertisement for the appointment of a supervision consultant had been released.

Murad informed the transport department that he would perform the ground-breaking ceremony for the Red Line project on August 14. "The transport department has to expedite all the pending work accordingly," he asserted, adding, "The actual service to the people of Karachi will be the resolution of their transport issues with the launch of state-of-the-art BRT lines." (By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 04/01/2020)

### Murad orders completion of Orange Line project in three months

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday ordered the transport ministry to complete the Orange Line project within next three months.

He also asked the ministry to get ready for tendering for the Red Line for which he wanted to perform groundbreaking ceremony on August 14.

The chief minister issued these directives while presiding over a meeting to review the progress of Orange Line and Red Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) networks at CM House.

Transport Minister Awais Shah, Local Government Minister Nasir Shah, Adviser to CM Murtaza Wahab and other officials attended the meeting.

Minister Awais Shah briefed the chief minister that the ongoing work on Orange Line was in its finishing phase. The CM directed him to complete it within next three months and adopt the procedure of procurement of buses, initially with a fleet of 25 buses.

*CM wants buses of uniform design to operate on Green, Orange lines*

"I want to procure best buses whether they could have the seating capacity of 40 passengers with carrying 80 more standing; or, large buses with double capacity," he said.

He asked the transport minister to talk to the Green Line project management or the federal government so that buses of uniform design and capacity could be purchased.

The chief minister said he had already approved Rs962 million for the construction of an underpass and mezzanine floor at the Numaish traffic intersection area.

The finance department has referred the matter to the subcommittee of the cabinet which would submit its report to release the amount.

Responding to a question, the chief minister was told that the land for Green Line bus depot at Surjani Town had been transferred in the name of the project. The local government department would issue notification by Monday.

The CM directed the transport ministry to enter into facilitation and implementation agreement with the Green Line project management.

The project would be operated by the federal government for three years and then it would be transferred to the Sindh government for continuation of its operation.

The chief minister also ordered the ministry to make arrangements for shifting of the truck stand from Mauripur to Northern Bypass and get 100 acres of land transferred from the Board of Revenue to construct the intercity bus terminal on Superhighway.

The matter of land acquisition for the biogas plant at Bhains Colony under Karachi BRT Red Line installation also came under discussion. The chief minister said the biogas plant at Bhains Colony would be highly feasible since availability of cattle dung to generate biogas would be easier there.

LG Minister Nasir Shah said that land was owned by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and he would discuss the matter with the city mayor to get 40 acres allocated for the Red Line biogas plant.

The chief minister was informed the tender document for the Red Line project was ready and would be floated within a month. However, advertisement had been issued for appointment of a supervision consultant for the project.

The chief minister said he would perform groundbreaking ceremony of Red Line project on the coming day of Pakistan's independence.

"The transport ministry has to expedite all pending works accordingly.

"The true service to the people of Karachi will be helping solving their transport issues by launching the state-of-art BRT."  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 04/01/2020)

### **Cargo traffic suspended as goods transporters go on countrywide strike**

Cargo supplies across the country came to a halt on Monday when goods transporters suspended their operations in protest over a hefty increase in fines, forcing the federal government to send in its top guns for holding talks to resolve the crisis.

Sindh Governor Imran Ismail, Punjab Governor Chaudhry Sarwar and Prime Minister Imran Khan's point man Jahangir Khan Tareen have been given the task to woo the transporters who said their countrywide strike will continue on Tuesday (today).

Transporters said that they decided to halt the cargo supply as a last resort after their several appeals had failed to convince the authorities to take action on their concerns.

They said they paid millions of rupees in taxes and play a key role in the overall economic activity of the country but they were never taken on board by the government where making of the recent policy was concerned.

*Centre intervenes to resolve the crisis; strike to continue today*

"For instance, the government has changed the fine from Rs750 for every violation to Rs5,000," said Agha Jawad Raza, a spokesman for the United Goods Transporters Alliance — an umbrella body of different goods transporters' bodies.

"The transporters cannot afford this and the same was our stance from the very first day. From power corridors in Islamabad to authorities in the National Highways and Motorways Police (NHMP), we have been pleading [with] everyone for the last couple of months but in vain.

"We are left with no choice but to suspend our operation as part of a countrywide strike. Right now, more than 7,500 heavy vehicles involved in goods transport are parked in Kathore and Hawkesbay truck stand," he said.

The federal government had recently approved revised rates of fines against traffic violations on highways. The penalty, which was Rs750 on every kind of violation, is now being categorised. For speeding, the fine would be Rs1,500 for motorbikes, Rs2,500 for cars, Rs5,000 for trucks, and Rs10,000 for public service vehicles.

On the other hand, the NHMP said that higher penalties on traffic violations were resulting in safer roads and lesser violations by the heavy traffic which most of the time caused fatal accidents.

Only last month, DIG Jan Mohammad of the NHMP claimed that studies had proved that an increase in penalties resulted in safer roads and that the Rs750 fine had lost its effectiveness.

Last year, he said, 785,000 motorists were fined for speeding on highways and motorways; 1,100,000 motorcyclists got fined for not wearing a helmet; and 100,000 motorists penalised for using high beam.

For using a mobile phone, he said, 200,000 people were fined while 400,000 got tickets for not wearing seatbelts.

But despite strong arguments from the law-enforcement agency, the strike from the goods transporters apparently had sent ripples in the quarters concerned.

"The Sindh governor invited us today [Monday] and we had a meeting with him at Governor House," said Mr Raza of the United Goods Transporters Alliance.

"The governor informed the meeting about his appointment along with Jahangir Khan Tareen and Punjab governor from the federal government to hold talks with the transporters and resolve the issue. He has proposed a few measures to continue the talks which [we] would take up in our meeting tomorrow [Tuesday] and then would get back to him. In the meanwhile our strike would continue," he said.

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 15, 07/01/2020)

### **Three of a family die in accident on Northern Bypass**

Three persons, including two women, were killed when a fast-moving coach hit their motorcycle on Northern Bypass on Wednesday morning.

Police and rescue officials said that the accident took place near Mowach Goth roundabout.

The biker, his mother and wife sustained critical injuries and were shifted to the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi where doctors pronounced them dead on arrival.

The victims were identified as Abdul Hafeez, 34, his mother Zainab Hanif, 55, and wife Ulfat, 28.

A Mochko police officer said that they were on their way to Lyari from Hub to meet their relatives.

He said that the coach driver was overtaking a trailer and in the process hit the motorbike from the front.

The driver managed to escape from the scene, leaving behind the vehicle which was later impounded by the police.

### **Arambagh SHO sacked**

Police authorities on Wednesday removed the SHO of the Arambagh police station for firing at a man who failed to stop his motorbike on main M.A. Jinnah Road on Tuesday night.

DIG South Sharjeel Kharal sacked SHO Rao Akmal and issued him a show-cause notice over the incident.

Police said the wounded man was identified as Sharafat and his condition was said to be stable.

The family did not want to lodge an FIR so internal departmental action was initiated against the SHO.

A police party on Tuesday night signalled Sharafat to stop and when he did not, the police shot him.

The police said that the SHO was leading the police party and he had taken the responsibility of the said action.

Meanwhile, DIG Kharal and SSP South Sheeraz Nazeer visited the Civil Hospital and inquired after Sharafat's health.

(By newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 09/01/2020)

### **Death toll reaches nine in New Karachi van fire tragedy**

The death toll in Friday night's vehicle fire incident in New Karachi reached nine as three more persons died on Saturday during treatment, officials said.

Six members of a family, including four children, died and five suffered critical injuries when a fire broke out in a moving vehicle in New Karachi area on Friday night.

Initial investigations into the tragedy blamed a short-circuit for the fire that rapidly spread and engulfed the vehicle because of the presence of a petrol-filled bottle.

The victim family was on their way to attend a marriage ceremony in Gulshan-i-Iqbal from Surjani Town.

*Investigators say the blaze had engulfed the vehicle because the driver kept a petrol-filled bottle near the engine*

Bilal Colony SHO Fardad Shaikh said that the family had rented the vehicle, a Suzuki Hi-roof van, from Surjani Town and it caught fire near Do Minute Chowranghi causing injuries to 11 persons.

They were taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital where doctors pronounced six of them dead on arrival.

Additional Police Surgeon Dr Saleem Shaikh said that all the deceased suffered 100 per cent burns.

He added that five injured persons were shifted to different hospitals for treatment. Three of them died later, said a spokesperson for the Edhi Foundation.

Dr Ehmer-al-Ibran, the head of the Burns Centre at the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi, told Dawn that two brothers with critical burn wounds were shifted to the hospital.

He said that Jamal, 45, had received 81pc burn wounds and his chances of survival were very low. His young brother, Nasir, 30, had received 32pc burns and doctors were trying to save his life.

He said that due to inhalation of smoke and fire, their respiratory tracts and faces had been badly burnt. He said such cases were known as 'inhalation injuries' in which affected/burnt persons faced immense difficulties in breathing.

#### **Cause of fire**

Following the incident, the police called Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) and fire brigade to ascertain the exact cause of the fire.

SSP Central Arif Aslam Rao said that it was up to the experts to determine the cause of the fire. He added that the police had not received any report to this effect.

Area SHO Shaikh said the BDS in its initial report observed that there was no explosive material in the vehicle and the cause of the fire was a short-circuit.

The officer said that the driver of the van, who is a friend of the ill-fated family, also sustained minor burn injuries in the incident.

He told the police that he got out of the vehicle because of a thrust as soon as the fire broke out. The vehicle continued to move and hit a rickshaw which also caught fire.

He said that the fuel bottle was kept close to the engine (carburettor).

A fire official said that the both the van and rickshaw were completely destroyed in the fire.

The dead are identified as Mujeeb Rehman, 55, his wife, Neelofer, 50, Mehrunisa Nasir, 32, her three children, Afshan, 12 and Tufail, 9, and Hafsa, Laiba, 12, and her younger brother, Arslan, 7, and Sufiyan, 4.

City police chief Ghulam Nabi Memon told Dawn that the experts of the BDS were of the opinion that there was no explosion and in their opinion, the possible cause of fire may be either short circuit or presence of petrol.

(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 15, 12/01/2020)

### **'Green Line won't be completed in 2020'**

The federal government's Green Line bus rapid transit project will not be completed even in 2020, said Sindh Transport and Mass Transit Minister Awais Qadir Shah while talking to the media outside Sindh Assembly.

"The project has no chance of being completed before 2021," he said, adding that the current government is inexperienced in resolving the problems of the masses.

He said that Prime Minister Imran Khan only makes claims and announcements, but he has not provided a single rupee for Karachi's development. He also complained that the Centre had never taken Sindh into confidence about any project.

Meanwhile, claiming that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has turned Karachi into the city of lights once again, the provincial minister invited PM Imran to visit Karachi and offered him a ride in his car to see the development in the metropolis.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 16/01/2020)

### **Crackdown planned on violators of one-way rule**

City police chief Ghulam Nabi Memon on Wednesday said that an operation would be launched against violation of one-way rule from Friday, according to police spokesperson.

For this purpose, 100 places/spots have been selected in the metropolis where special checking would be carried out from 3pm to 6pm on Friday.

Special teams of the traffic police backed by district police have been established to take action against violators of traffic laws.

"Violators of the one-way [rule] on roads would be arrested immediately and cases against them would be lodged under Section 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way) of Pakistan Penal Code," declared the city police chief.

DIG Traffic, SSPs, SDPOs and section officers have been briefed on the campaign.

Senior police officers would personally monitor the campaign.  
(By Newspaper's Dawn, 15, 16/01/2020)

### **Sorry state of public buses**

Much of poverty, misery and apathy is transparent in Pakistan as they are elsewhere. Even blind men can see the misery and governmental and social apathy around them. Precious lives are lost as public buses frequently catch fire in the country. The reasons behind road accidents are well known so there is no point in dilating upon them neither is there much sense wasting time on trying to draw the attention of the authorities to such tragedies. Recently, a van caught fire in Karachi that killed nine and injured several other passengers. The dead included six members of one family. The family had hired the van and they were on the way to attend a wedding when the tragedy occurred. The fire is said to have been caused by a short circuit and due to the presence of a petrol-filled bottle near the engine the fire immediately engulfed the van.

Public transport in the cities and towns of the country is in a very bad shape and the relevant authorities appear to be helpless in making transporters mend their ways and reining in rude drivers and conductors. Most vans and buses plying the roads are unfit for carrying passengers. Vans and buses are mostly overloaded, seats meant for ladies are occupied by male passengers; and passengers, drivers and conductors pinch ladies and ogle at them. Drivers are unruly; vehicles either run at supersonic speed or they crawl at a snail's pace depending on the whims of drivers and conductors; fares too vary sometimes on the pretext of gas shortage and sometimes on other flimsy grounds. Substandard LPG gas cylinders and bottle of petrol are installed in vehicles putting passengers' lives at risk.

The level of official apathy is astounding. For the past several years we have a style of governance that is characterised by posters and banners carrying pictures of politicians and their hollow promises. The whole thing is appalling.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 16, 21/01/2020)

### **'Women on motorcycles will be supported in Sindh'**

Women riding motorcycles is no longer inappropriate in Punjab, and it will be supported in Sindh too, maintained Salman Sufi, the chairperson of Salman Sufi Foundation.

He was speaking at a graduation ceremony for the Women on Wheels project organised by the foundation in association with the Sindh government at the Arts Council Karachi, where driving licenses and helmets were distributed to women. "Women on Wheels is not a project – it is a message. We don't have to confine 49 per cent of our population to our homes,"

asserted Sufi in his address. "Women will come into leadership and the old-fashioned approach that a woman's role is to sit in the backseat will be transformed." He added that nothing could stop women from progressing if they enter more fields and professions.

He informed the audience that the programme had been granted permission to teach women how to ride motorcycles in other provinces too, adding that acquiring these licenses would change women's lives.

Pakistan Peoples Party's women wing president and MPA Faryal Talpur, speaking at the ceremony, said that we have to make women independent because no country could progress without empowering its women.

"It was the dream of [former prime minister] Shaheed Benazir Bhutto to enable women to become independent," she pointed out, adding that 50 women were earning an independent income by driving commercial truck in Thar under a project initiated by the Sindh government.

The ceremony was also attended by the Sindh chief minister's adviser on law, environment and coastal development Murtaza Wahab, Sindh Women Development Minister Shehla Raza, Karachi Arts Council president Ahmed Shah and others.  
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 25/01/2020)

### **Sindh's first batch of 500 women bikers gets training certificates**

Sindh's first Women on Wheels (WOW) graduation ceremony and issuance of driving licences saw the Arts Council of Pakistan auditorium packed with so many women, especially young women cheering for each other on Friday.



Shaheen Sultan was not sure where she was supposed to go when she reached the Arts Council gates.

“You know, I’m going to receive my certificate today. I can ride a motorbike now. I am so happy,” she beamed, as someone directed her to the auditorium.

She told Dawn that she got married very early and was now a mother of five too. “I always used to feel bad about burdening my husband with errands such as getting groceries or dropping the kids to school. I used to think if I could ride a bike like my husband I could do it myself. And now I can. The only thing I need now is my own bike.

Then there will be two shiny motorcycles parked in our little parking lot at home,” she smiled.

The Women on Wheels, a project of Salman Sufi which started from Punjab in 2018, has now come to Karachi with the support of the Sindh government.

*The Women on Wheels programme is set to expand its reach to other parts of the province*

In its first phase, some 500 women learned how to ride motorcycles at the University of Karachi. Two months on, the first batch was ready to receive their certificates. A select few were also awarded licences. And saving the best for last, Careem presented one of them with a brand new motorcycle through a lucky draw.

Senior journalist Mubashir Zaidi, the moderator for the event, said that the man behind the project, Salman Sufi, was aiming to have 10,000 women riding their bikes in Sindh by Women’s Day on March 8. “Women on Wheels is not just a trend, it is a way to see women enter practical life by getting jobs,” he said.

Mr Sufi said that thanks to the project there was no reason why women should be left behind at home while the men went about their work. “We were also used to seeing women seated at the back, behind the men on bikes. That image should soon become history now,” he said.

“Women are not second-class citizens. They need to be encouraged and empowered. We will also launch this project in the interior of Sindh,” he said.

#### **Low-interest loans for women to get bikes**

Asad Khan of Careem also said that females riding motorbikes on the road was a powerful statement.

“Having more women riding bikes on the road can change mindsets and perception. It can change the entire narrative. Female representation is important for the country to grow. Mobility can give lots of women independence,” he said, adding that their company would soon be launching a new women customer-specific transport service for which they will be hiring some 10,000 female riders.

He also said that partnering with JS Bank they would also be helping women buy bikes with a five per cent mark-up.

Sindh Women Development Minister Shehla Raza said that if the women in Nepal could ride motorbikes so could the women in Pakistan. “Even I would like to learn how to ride a motorbike,” she said, adding that they would be introducing the WOW project in the Sindh budget for allocation.

She also urged the women to take self-defence seriously. “It is also a part of the bike riding training programme,” she said.

PPP MPA Faryal Talpur said that it was strange that women who constitute 51 per cent of Pakistan’s population are always seen behind the men here.

She said that in India even the rural women know how to ride bikes. “They take the food they have cooked for their husbands to the fields on their bikes. They also drive tractors. There is always a need to make your women independent,” she said.

She also pointed out how in Tharparkar there were some 50 women truck drivers doing the work of men. “Change is also happening here. As their parents or as members of society, we should encourage our women to step out of their homes like the men do. The PPP is always there to support you,” she said before distributing certificates among the first batch of 500 women.

Five women were also presented with motorcycle licences while Rizwana Shireen was also presented with a free motorcycle as her name came up in the lucky draw.

Sindh government spokesperson and Chief Minister’s Law Adviser Barrister Murtaza Wahab was also present on the occasion. (By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 15, 25/01/2020)

### **Sindh CM approves bid to acquire 200 buses for public transport**

Sindh Chief Minister (CM) Syed Murad Ali Shah has approved a proposal of the Transport Department to procure 200 buses, of which 100 will be for Karachi and the remaining for five other districts of Sindh. The buses will run on dedicated routes and operated with the assistance of the private sector.

This decision was made during a meeting of Transport Department on Tuesday. Attendees included Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah, Planning and Development Chairperson Mohammad Waseem, Principal Secretary to the CM Sajid Jamal Abro, Finance Secretary Hassan Naqvi, Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani and Transport Secretary Abbas Detho, among others.

The transport minister had submitted a plan that called for a public-private partnership for purchasing 200 buses and putting them into service in Karachi and five other districts, pending the CM's approval. The operation of the buses would be handled by private parties whose selection would be carried out in a transparent manner. Meanwhile, the provincial government would select important routes and set the fares. It would fall on the private partner to implement the government's plan.

Shah has directed the transport minister to draw out a detailed plan for the operation of the busses, their specifications, the qualification requirements for the private partner, details of routes and designation of buses on a single route. He said that the process of procuring the buses should be completed within seven months.

#### **Other agenda points**

Meanwhile, at the same meeting the attendees also discussed the issue of shifting of a truck stand, the construction of a bus terminal, the construction of a bio-gas plant and the transfer of driving license branches.

The government had already made the decision to move the truck stand on Mauripur Road to the Northern Bypass. Sindh Board of Revenue member Qazi Parvez informed the CM that land had been allocated for the purpose but its entry revenue record had yet to be made, leading to Shah demanding that the transfer of title of the land be completed and a report be submitted to him within 15 days.

Regarding the bio-gas plan, the CM stated that the decision had already been taken to establish the plant in Bhains Colony, under the Karachi Bus Service Project, and instructed the transport minister to have a meeting with the local government minister and Karachi mayor. He also allocated land for the project, reminding the participants of meeting that since this matter had already been delayed it must be decided upon within the next 15 days.

Shah also spoke to the transport minister about bringing driving license branches under the control of the transport department from the police department, stating that he would approve this change on the basis that the operation of the branches were carried out professionally. The transport department must also run a driving school, he added.

The CM said he was keen to provide the best transport facilities in the city and other districts in the province as soon as possible.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 05/02/2020)

### **Murad okays plan to bring 200 buses in seven months**

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has approved a proposal of the transport department to procure 200 buses — 100 each for Karachi and five other districts — to ply them through private sector on dedicated routes. He took this decision while presiding over a meeting of the transport department here on Tuesday.



Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah informed the meeting that he had submitted a plan to the chief minister under which an international tender would be floated to purchase 200 city buses [low height].

He added that Karachi would be given 100 of these buses.

The operation of the buses would be handed over to private parties to be selected in a transparent manner, he said, adding that the provincial government would select important routes of the city and fix their fares.

*Says he will approve a summary to transfer driving licence branches from traffic police to transport dept*

The private management would have to implement the government plan and operate the buses.

The chief minister directed the transport minister to submit a detailed plan of the buses, their specification, qualification of private operations and details of the routes and dedication of buses on a single route.

He also directed the transport department to expedite the process and complete it within seven months.

#### **Mauripur truck stand to be shifted**

The meeting was told that the government had already decided to shift the Mauripur truck stand to Northern bypass.

Senior Member Board of Revenue Qazi Parvez informed the chief minister that the land had been allocated but its entry in the revenue record had yet to be made.

The chief minister directed Mr Parvez to finalise all the legal requirements within next 15 days.



The chief minister decided to construct/ establish an intercity bus terminal on Superhighway/Motorway over an area of 100 acres.

Mr Shah asked as to why the transfer of land was delayed when he had already approved a summary in this regard. He directed the SMBR to transfer the title of the land and report to him within 15 days.

The chief minister said that a decision had already been taken to establish a biogas plant at Cattle Colony under the Karachi Bus Service Project. He directed the transport minister to hold a meeting with the local government minister and Karachi mayor over the issue.

#### **Driving licence branches' transfer to transport dept**

The transport minister informed the chief minister that a summary for transfer of the driving licence branches from police to the transport department had been moved to the chief minister.

The chief minister said that he would approve the summary and he wanted the driving licence branches should be operated on a professional basis.

He directed the transport department to functionalise a driving school.

The chief minister said that he was keen to provide best transport facilities in the city of Karachi and others districts at the earliest. He directed all the participants to implement the decision as had been decided.  
(By PPI Dawn, 15, 05/02/2020)

### **Bridge on Super Highway falls victim to neglect**

A bridge – said to be the gateway to Karachi on Super Highway – has been reduced to a death trap by multiple potholes and ruptures marring the ramp. However, despite the threat it poses to commuters' lives and safety, relevant authorities have seemingly abandoned it, as it has awaited carpeting for over a year now while on the road to ruin.

The track connecting Sohrab Goth to Yusuf Plaza and crossing over Lyari River, in particular, presents a dreary picture, with broken remains of the protective railing along its edges increasing the chances of pedestrians falling into the river manifold. Adding to the problem are truckloads of garbage and dirt littering the bridge, several encroachments and a shanty town taking shape near the first roundabout of the M-9 motorway. The junctions on the bridge, along the length of the M-9 track, leading to Lyari, are in a dire need of the government's attention, with garbage cramming this space instead of paved parking areas, fuel stations and turfs adding to its utility and beauty.

Moreover, there is a need to construct overhead pedestrian bridges and U-turns along the bridge's ramp to reduce the chances of pedestrians crossing it meeting with an accident.

However, while the bridge is left in a sorry state, troubled commuters and pedestrians look up to Prime Minister Imran Khan, communications minister Murad Saeed, National Highway Authority chairperson Captain (retd) Sikander Qayyum, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and Karachi mayor Wasim Akhtar to take notice of the problem.

It has also been suggested that Pakistan Peoples Party chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who has time and again expressed interest in resolving the issues of Karachi, instruct the CM to personally inspect the dilapidated structure and allocate funds for its immediate reconstruction and carpeting.  
(By PPI The Express Tribune, 05, 06/02/2020)

### **Karachi's transport conundrum**

The curious case of Karachi's history is that it tends to repeat itself far too often. Yet again, in accordance with a plan approved by the Sindh Chief Minister, low height city buses are to arrive, in this case 100, in Karachi to counter the city's existing and persistent commute troubles. And yet again the operation of these buses will be handed over to private management for implementation of the government's plan. The question remains: Will Karachi's transport woes ever be undone? It seems not. What seems more baffling than the city's dilapidated transport condition is that even after years of repetition officials still don't get the hint. Considering the enormity of the situation, buses simply won't do. Currently Karachi's transport routes are infested with an amalgamation of useless and ill-thoughtout infrastructures. Out of 11 new projects worth Rs7 billion soon to be launched in Karachi, not a single one shows a redesign from scratch, rather the reliance is on the same repetitive approach of a bridge here or an underpass there.

The ideal solution would be to rethink and restructure the whole transport system and while this may seem farfetched a lot more can still be done with the already existing resources. What Karachi needs is a single transport mechanism that interconnects the city pivots which include heavily populated localities, major markets and industrial areas. This can be achieved by further developing, enlarging and extending the Metrobus transit network while clearing out the plethora of ineffective infrastructures built in various pockets across the city. Ramshackle buses and other obsolete means of public transport need to be removed from the streets and free metrocards allotted to citizens for easy access. This could be a good start.

The government needs to break this vicious cycle of relying on outdated solutions and take into account the various stakeholders such as traffic authorities, urban developers, designers, commuters and transporters.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 16, 09/02/2020)

## Murad orders new traffic management plan to end snarls-up

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Wednesday stressed the need for a new traffic planning and management scheme since snarls-up and poor vehicular flow on city's key streets during rush hours had become a regular feature.

"A new arrangement to manage traffic in the crowded neighbourhoods like Saddar, Metropole, Clifton and I.I. Chundrigar Road is the need of the hour. This is why this meeting has been convened to work out a plan to adopt a new traffic management methodology to avoid continued snarl-ups and inconvenience to the public," said CM Shah while presiding over a meeting at CM House to discuss traffic mess in the metropolis.

Local Government Minister Nasir Shah, CM's Law Adviser Murtaza Wahab and senior officials attended the meeting.

Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani gave a presentation to the chief minister in which various options, including one-way, removal of signals and installation of new signals were suggested.

CM Shah said only declaring one-way on Club Road was not enough.

*An agreement to turn Nehr-i-Khayyam into a recreational space signed*

"We will have to adopt a holistic approach by removing traffic congestions and jams from the areas right from Chundrigar Road to Shaheen Complex, Shaheen Complex to Fountain Chowk, further to Metropole and Sharea Faisal onwards including Clifton and at Avari Towers," he added.

"Why traffic from Shaheen Complex to Avari via Fountain Chowk and Saddar towards Avari has been allowed to create mayhem at Avari and Metropole hotel? Why certain traffic in Saddar could not be diverted towards the Army Selection Centre towards Sharea Faisal from Regent Plaza area? Why traffic coming from Fountain Chowk is not allowed to go directly towards Clifton without moving around Metropole," he asked.

The meeting decided that the commissioner, Karachi police chief, DIG Traffic and project director of Karachi Package Khalid Masroor and engineering bureau chief would visit the areas in question and assess the flow of traffic and study the streets that could offer a single direction for drivers.

Mr Shah gave three months to the team to work out a feasible plan of traffic management and implement it in June when schools go on summer vacation.

### Hopes PM will appoint new IGP

The CM said on the advice of the prime minister he had sent a panel of five officers to Islamabad to post one of them as the new inspector general of police in Sindh "yet the matter is hanging in the balance".

"However, I am sure the PM will appoint one of them as new IGP in the larger interest of the law and order of the province," he said while speaking to media after presiding over the National Women's Day organised by the Sindh Commission on the Status of Women.

Mr Shah said he had not sent those names on his own, but "it was done on the advice of the prime minister who had asked me to send him a panel of three officers and then again the PM secretariat asked for another two names which were also sent accordingly".

He believed the PM would soon accord approval for the new IGP from that panel.

The chief minister said removal of the IGP was not his personal decision but the cabinet had approved it unanimously. "Now, the federal government should honour the provincial cabinet and get its demand implemented."

He said the cabinet had decided that no katcha house would be bulldozed during the ongoing anti-encroachment drive in the city. "The Supreme Court has also been requested to give time to the provincial government so that makeshift arrangements for the affected people could be made across Sindh," he said.

### Agreement inked for Nehr-i-Khayyam Park

An agreement was signed between the Sindh government and a non-profit, People and Nature Initiative (Pani), at the CM House to turn Nehr-i-Khayyam into a park.

The ceremony was attended by CM Shah, Local Government Minister Nasir Shah, Mr Wahab, Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar, Architect Hamir Soomro, Pani president Shahid Abdullah, Jamil Yusuf and senior officers.

Pani proposes to clean the sewage flowing into the Nehr through the indigenous, sustainable 'reed bed' technology, which has been successfully employed in several global locations as well as in Karachi.

On both sides of the one-km-long Nehr, Pani proposes to plant hundreds of trees and bushes and create jogging tracks and viewing decks, accessible to public as a recreational facility.

The chief minister said the Nehr-i-Khayyam Park would be a game changer for Karachi being a beautiful recreational space.

He said his government had allowed the development of the park as an environment-friendly facility for the public.

A plantation ceremony will take place on Feb 16 to kick off the project that will be inaugurated by Mr Shah.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 13/02/2020)

### **'Govt to conduct field survey to save Malir Expressway goths'**

Sindh Human Settlements and Special Development Minister Ghulam Murtaza Baloch has said that a field survey will be conducted to save old goths lying in the path of Malir Expressway.

Talking to delegations during a visit to Samu Goth in his constituency on Friday, Baloch underscored that old goths in Karachi and its outskirts were of historical importance.

Addressing people's concerns about being displaced as a consequence of the expressway's construction, he assured them that the Sindh government believed in the welfare of people and would stand with them in difficult times.

He said that a field survey would be conducted prior to the construction to protect the old settlements, adding that it was the responsibility of elected representatives to solve people's problems.

"The Sindh government believes in public service and we are making all-out efforts to meet people's expectations," he said. "With the help of the people, we intend to solve all their problems."

Area residents apprised him of various problems they were facing, at which the minister instructed the relevant officials to take measures for solving issues pertaining to electricity, gas, graveyard land and boundary walls of schools.  
(By News Desk The Express Tribune, 05, 15/02/2020)

### **Karachi's parking scams**

Karachi continues to confuse with its dirty and chaotic appearance. The government seems nowhere. Part of the problem with the city, or if some are to be believed, part of the solution, is the informal sector. This sector takes into consideration the demands of the ever-growing population and makes ways to address these.



Bypassing the government, the informal sector takes care of housing, transport, water, power even education and health. All this, of course, comes at a price to the people.

Much of what is done comes with bribes to public servants. It is not just the traffic constable that is on the take – there is a whole chain that usually goes all the way to the top when it comes to having a slice of the pie.

While we call them mafias, they see themselves as entrepreneurs. In this business model, the overheads are high. Government officials end up taking most of the money.

One of the most lucrative businesses in Karachi today is that of car parking. It is a multi-million dollar industry. People need to park their cars in a safe environment. The parking mafia provides this and charges rates based on which part of the city the service is being provided as well as how long the parking is needed for.

The parking mafia started from Il Chundrigar Road, the country's business and banking hub, where parking space became scarce as more and more buildings were built, and demand for that space grew as more people bought cars and looked for places to park them.

Enter the entrepreneur. He would provide parking to customers based on a trust system in which they would leave their car and keys with the person in the morning and then collect them at the end of the working day. This man would park the car, look after it, clean it and make sure it was not taken away by the traffic police.

Needless to say, a portion of the parking money went to the traffic police and to the city government officials, who made sure that the land was available for the parking.

This system has now expanded to other parts of the city – Tariq Road, Saddar, MA Jinnah Road, to name a few. The entrepreneur and customer are happy and so are the police and other government officials. The only one that suffers is the government. It is losing out on millions in income daily.

For a mayor who complains he has no funds, one can only wonder why no ambitious has been launched to bring a proper parking system in the city that could raise millions. Previously when the city government was formed, a number of KMC

temporary employees were laid off. Many of them ended up becoming parking attendants as the new administration tried to enter this area. But that experiment did not last for long.

Similarly, the Citizens Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) brainchild of the late Justice Fakhruddin Ebrahim also started the Saddar Charged Parking project. That too was sabotaged by the traffic police in a couple of years. Too much money was at stake.

Today, the mafia has expanded and now wears a cloak of respectability. They are business partners with the city government. In places like next to the Dolmen Center in Clifton where a huge parking space had been built, the city government has leased out chunks of this parking space to “entrepreneurs” who in turn have leased it to big companies who have offices in the Dolmen and adjacent buildings. It is almost impossible to find parking space here for a hapless citizen. For a parking spot that should be charged Rs20, these unscrupulous elements are now charging more than Rs100. This practice is fast spreading to other parts of the city.

It is requested of the Chief Justice to take notice of the parking scams of Karachi. Parking space has been intentionally taken away through encroachments – most shopping plazas in Karachi have parking spaces that are encroached and not opened to parking. The left over land is then given out at a premium – with several stake holders involved, How long will we continue to be held hostage to a mafia and a corrupt government? It is time we did something.

(By Kamal Siddiqi The Express Tribune, 17, 17/02/2020)

### **Traffic police launch drive to make schoolkids aware of road safety rules**

With a total of 464 people losing their lives in road traffic accidents across the metropolis in the last two years, traffic authorities have launched a programme for children studying in hundreds of private and government schools in order to train them about rules and regulations of safe travelling and use of roads, it emerged on Monday.

Official data said 2018 and 2019 witnessed deaths of 217 and 247 people, respectively, in road accidents in different areas of Karachi, with motorbikes as the most vulnerable mode of transportation. In most cases, traffic rules’ violations and rash driving were found as the key reasons behind deadly collisions.

“The traffic accidents are not happening on roads on their own but unfortunately we cause them through our actions” said DIG-traffic Javed Mahar. “Violation of traffic signals, overspeeding and driving in wrong direction on major roads have unfortunately become a common practice. It’s quite strange that we no more consider such acts crime or violation of defined laws. Ultimately, they cause accidents and fatal collisions.”

*Over 460 died in traffic accidents in 2018 and 2019 in Karachi alone*

Data shows that 2018 witnessed a total of 252 road traffic accidents in different areas of the city and 190 of them proved fatal, killing 217 people and leaving 179 injured.

The situation did not improve in 2019 as 221 people were killed and 243 injured in total 247 accidents. This has happened amid different awareness campaigns launched by police authorities for commuters, riders and pedestrians.

Finding it hard to convince drivers about the effectiveness of traffic rules and regulations, the Karachi traffic police have decided to focus on schoolchildren for spreading awareness about traffic laws.

The programme, officials believed, would prove its effectiveness in the long run and help preparing law-abiding future drivers and road users.

“We have designed four stages of the campaign,” said the DIG-traffic. “At the first stage, we are conducting awareness workshops in 100 schools mainly in South and Central districts. In the next phases, we will take these children for practical and make them partners with our officers to control traffic at different intersections. It will give them real-time and first-hand experience of traffic rules and benefits of following them.”

Furqan Bilal, president of the All Private School Management Association which was coordinating with traffic authorities for the campaign, said that the schools across the city had showed great interest in the campaign and it was the first activity of its kind which was focusing on schoolchildren in view of their future role in the society.

“In this regard, we are coordinating with private schools in different areas,” he said. “The traffic police sends [their] team every day to different schools with a fully equipped bus where the officials, both males and females, train the children about safe driving and safe use of roads. So far the response is positive and we hope such a programme would help setting new trend in society,” he added.

(By Imran Ayyub Dawn, 15, 25/02/2020)

### **Chinese firm set to launch ride-hailing service in Karachi this month**

As the fate of both provincial and federal government-funded transportation projects remains uncertain amid the widening gap between demand and supply of adequate transportation facilities, international players are seeing great opportunities in Karachi to expand their businesses.

This time round, a Chinese tech giant is set to launch wide-ranging operations in Karachi, including delivery and ride-hailing cab services, with plans to invest \$600 million in the country, officials and market sources said.

These sources said that, after first setting foot in Islamabad, the Chinese firm Timesaco is now set to expand its Tatu Mobility operations to Karachi, with initial plans to launch two services this month, thereby adding to several existing ride-hailing services being operated by some half a dozen technology companies across the city.

The company, however, claims that its services will be different from the already existing operators on a variety of fronts.

“Tatu Mobility has already launched its online cab service in Islamabad and Rawalpindi with name of Timesaco,” said Donald Li, the founder and the CEO of the company. “Tatu Mobility is going to start its operation in other cities as well. Tatu Mobility will start online cab service and digitisation of current transportation network in Pakistan. We are set to launch our service in Karachi this month.”

#### *Firm to invest \$600m in Pakistan*

In the first phase, Mr Li said, the company plans to launch its online cab service and system for digitising the existing transport network, following which it plans to also introduce its commute and delivery service later this year.

When asked what opportunities the city offers and how any new operator could survive amid growing competition in an environment where there are already several players racing to win their share, he referred to some offers the Chinese company was planning to extend to its business partners that would set it apart from the others.

“Tatu Mobility offers 97 per cent share of earning to its drivers or captains of online cab service,” said Mr Li. “Other companies are offering 70pc to 75pc. We are facing competition but our focus is not just on the profit side; Tatu Mobility wants to restructure and digitise the current transport system. In its initial phase, Tatu Mobility intends to invest \$600 million in Pakistan and gradually investment will be increased based on the market.”

The keen interest of the private sector and business giants prove that there are immense opportunities when it comes to transport service in Karachi.

This relatively untapped market, coupled with a public-sector transport system that is in a state of virtual collapse, has motivated these organisations to expand operations in Karachi, with new projects still in the pipeline.

However, experts believe that besides facilitating private businesses in the area, there is still a gap that can be filled by the public sector transport service.

“Till 1996, this city was witnessing operations of both private sector and the government buses under the Karachi Transport Corporation,” said Prof Dr Noman Ahmed, chairman of the Department of Architecture and Planning at NED University of Engineering and Technology.

“There were obvious reasons for the closure of the KTC, but for a very good number of years both sides — the government and the private sector — kept serving the transport sector collectively. The government still cannot only regulate the transport business, it can also bring its share for the people of Karachi, because good and easy [to access] transport services at cheaper rates are still largely needed.”

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 15, 06/03/2020)

### **SC resents delay in completion of Karachi's transport-related projects**

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed resentment over an inordinate delay in completion of transport-related projects in the city after the provincial authorities claimed that two such projects had almost been completed.

While hearing a set of petitions regarding encroachments and transport issues, a three-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed, observed that it wanted a practical solution to Karachi's transport issues, but things were getting worse.

The advocate general and the transport secretary of Sindh informed the bench about the Karachi Mass Transit Plan funded by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. They said the Green Line and Orange Line projects had almost been completed while work on other such projects was under way.

The chief justice came down hard on the transport secretary when he admitted that these projects had been launched around three years ago, saying these schemes must be completed within one year.

#### *Authorities directed to remove encroachments from railway land without any discrimination*

On the issue of revival of the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR), Attorney General Khalid Jawed Khan said besides revival of the KCR, there were some other projects also for the provincial metropolis under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and one of the these projects could be chosen for timely completion. The federal law officer said they were ready to brief the judges on this issue in their chambers.

On Feb 21, the apex court had directed the Pakistan Railways to revive the KCR within six months and also warned that in case of non-compliance, action would be taken for not only contempt of court but also for not complying with mandatory commands of the Constitution.

The court observed that transportation of people from one area of the city to another had almost become impossible due to non-availability of road transport and whatever transport was there, it was inhuman and below the dignity of the people.

The Sindh government and Pakistan Railways as well as the federal government appeared not willing to improve the situation, it deplored.

#### **Royal Park building**

The bench dismissed a review application against its earlier order to demolish an under-construction building adjacent to an amusement park in Gulshan-i-Iqbal.

The bench observed that no fresh ground had been made out in the application.

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

The lawyer for the applicant moved an application seeking review of the order and argued that a UAE-based businessman had invested billions of rupees in this project.

The lawyer said the plot was leased out by the Sindh Revenue Board in 2010 to the builder for 99 years. However, he admitted that it was mentioned in the lease documents that the land was being allotted in exchange of other land and contented that it was an irregularity on the part of officials concerned which, he claimed, had been rectified.

Last month, the bench had dismissed an identical application of the builder and observed that the land was purported to have been illegally sold by the Sindh government, thus, all documents pertaining to transfer of the land were declared unlawful. Even otherwise, the allotment and lease documents appeared to be false and fraudulent, and thus, were not sustainable in law and hereby cancelled, the court ruled.

The bench also turned down another application moved by the allottees of Royal Park building seeking recovery of the money from the builder and directed them to approach the proper forum.

The counsel for the applicants argued that around 400 allottees had paid Rs1.5 billion against the booking of apartments in the under-construction building.

#### **Kidney Hill Park**

The bench was told that a survey was being conducted to ascertain the actual boundaries of Kidney Hill Park (Ahmed Ali Park).

The bench directed the lawyer for the applicants and other interested parties to participate in the survey and directed the authorities concerned to complete the exercise at earliest.

During a previous hearing, the mayor of Karachi was directed to remove encroachments on the land of the park and file a compliance report. The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation told the bench that it had retrieved the 62-acre land of the park and a PC-I of Rs950 million had been prepared to develop it as a model park.

However, Amber Alibhai of Shehri, an NGO, contended that only 55 acres of land had been retrieved and a private school and some houses still existed on the remaining 7.5 acres of land.

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

However, some of the occupants through their counsel moved the apex court and contended that the land in question had been leased out to them.

On Friday, the bench was informed that a survey was being conducted to ascertain whether the houses had been built inside or outside the park premises.

#### **Illegal building**

The bench dismissed another application against its previous order regarding demolition of an illegal building on Shahrah-i-Quaideen and directed the commissioner of Karachi to complete the demolition process.

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

The bench had observed that the SMCHS had not only exceeded its powers, but the Sindh Building Control Authority and other authorities were also responsible for the construction of this building and ordered action against them in accordance with law.

#### **Encroachments on railways land**

The bench directed the commissioner of Karachi to ensure that the ongoing drive against encroachments on railways land must be carried out across the board after a lawyer contended that a selective drive was being carried out as only the dwellings of underprivileged people were being removed while concrete buildings had not been demolished yet.

However, the commissioner maintained that the drive was being conducted without any discrimination and they had also demolished petrol pumps, wedding halls and other buildings located within premises of railway land.

Earlier, the apex court had observed that the railway land was encroached upon and even both sides of railway land from Keamari and up to Landhi were also encroached upon and ordered demolition of structures built on the land.

The apex court had also asked the Pakistan Railways and Sindh government for relocation of the affected people in a decent manner.

#### **Motorcycles distributed**

Later in the day, Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed attended a ceremony organised by the Sindh High Court Bar Association in connection with the International Women's Day on the premises of SHC.

On this occasion, the justice chief distributed the keys of motorcycles among women lawyers.  
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 15, 07/03/2020)

### **In Sindh, motorway encroachments hit the brakes on inter-city bus terminal**

Encroachments along the motorway have proved to be a stumbling block for the provincial transport department in the process of ensuring land for setting up its new inter-city bus terminal. As a result, the Board of Revenue, despite Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah's formal approval, has been unable to provide the required land in the designated area to the transport department.

Murad had directed the land utilisation department to allot 100 acres of land on the motorway for constructing the inter-city bus terminal, following the approval of the summary sent to him by the Punjab transport department.

Presiding over a meeting on February 4, the chief minister had inquired about the progress of the proposed inter-city bus terminal. In response to this, he was told that the required land for the project had yet not been allotted due to the encroachments on the motorway.

Irrked by the reply, the minister had issued directives to the Board of Revenue to ensure availability of the required land within 15 days from the meeting. However, despite the stern directives, the department of land utilisation has remained unable to vacate the land for the bus terminal, leaving the project at a standstill.

Later, the issue of land allotment was also discussed in a meeting of the land reservation committee, held on February 11. The committee, headed by Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Shah, had granted 328 acres of land for various projects in the province but deferred the matter of inter-city bus terminal for the same reason.

According to official sources, the land utilisation department had identified the required land near the Northern Bypass for establishing the inter-city bus terminal in Karachi but could not transfer it to the department due to the encroachments on its premises. However, it is not the first time that land identified for a project has been encroached upon. The government has twice identified land for the project since 1990, but the said land was encroached upon at both instances.

On the other hand, Sindh transport secretary Ghulam Abbas Detho, believes the matter is under process and will soon be resolved. Talking to The Express Tribune, he disclosed that the matter was raised in a meeting presided by Chief Secretary Sindh, to which the Board of Revenue has sought another 15 days to resolve the issue.

Transporters operating inter-city buses, however, are not in agreement with the provincial government's proposed location for the terminal for Karachi-bound buses, even if the encroached land is somehow vacated. In their opinion, the proposed location is too far from the city and therefore not feasible for both transporters and commuters.

"The designated land for the terminal is full of encroachments. But even if the encroachments are somehow cleared, it is around 45 kilometres away from the city and considering that, we will not run our buses on that route," said Bus Owners Association leader Murad Khan Durrani.

According to him, the transporter community is engaged in making alternate arrangements for a new terminal through its own resources. "We have identified some 30 acres of land around Gutter Baghicha near the Lyari Expressway and we are in the final stages of acquiring a formal approval from the relevant authorities," Durrani disclosed. "This location will be more suitable for the bus terminal and offer easy access to the commuters and the transporters," he added.

As per Durrani, their organisation is invested in setting up the terminal at the location as soon as the official matters and the paperwork are dealt with. According to him, the inter-city buses will utilise the Lyari Expressway from Sohrab Goth to reach this location and after the completion of the inter-city bus terminal, they will stop running their buses within the city.

"Currently, there are some 300 buses utilising city stops on a daily basis but once the terminal is ready, we will no longer use Taj Complex, Cantt Station and Passport Office stops and instead the buses will come from and leave for different destinations of Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and other parts of the country from the new inter-city terminal," he explained.  
(By Razzak Abro The Express Tribune, 05, 08/03/2020)

### Women bikers hold rally along beach

There were bandanas, shin and knee guards, goggles and of course, the women wearing them with their motorbikes all getting ready for the Women on Wheels (WoW) Mega Rally on Abdul Sattar Edhi Avenue organised by the Salman Sufi Foundation in collaboration with the Government of Sindh's Women Development Department to mark International Women's Day on Sunday.



Ayesha Zamir, one of the young trainee riders, who was there with her sister Amna, said that they grew up riding on a motorcycle with their father who now encouraged them to ride their own bikes. "When we registered ourselves in the Salman Sufi's WoW programme at Karachi University in January, we saw so many women there who were overwhelmed by the motorcycles," she told Dawn.

"Some said they will never be able to handle such a heavy machine as they were not built strong or big themselves like men, some had not even ridden a bicycle before so weren't sure if they could balance a motorcycle. That's when I realised that men don't hold us back as much as we do ourselves. Thankfully, all successfully learnt to put their fears aside and ride," she said.

*'It feels so great to say goodbye to public transport'*

Naheed Anwar was there with her aunt Ayesha Aziz, and both were very excited to be taking part in the rally. "It feels so great to say goodbye to public transport," said Naheed.

Ayesha said they had joined the WoW programme on Jan 27 and by Feb 4 they could easily ride motorcycles. "There were classes from 12pm to 2pm and from 3pm to 5pm and we could opt for the timing which suited us," she said, adding that they had not yet bought motorbikes of their own but they were being offered to get them on easy instalments after they were given their licences.

Watching them from across the road while also there to provide security during the rally were Head Constable Bushra Iqbal of the Special Security Unit of the Sindh police dressed in her smart black uniform and ready with her heavy Suzuki bike. Speaking to Dawn she said she was taught how to ride a bike by her younger brother some six years back. Nearby was Lady Police Constable Samavia Abbasi in complete white waiting on her official white heavy bike. Samavia said she was taught how to ride a bike by her colleagues in the traffic police. "Now I chase ladies in cars if they carry out any traffic violation on Sharea Faisal," she said.

The rally was attended by hundreds of WoW trainees who showcased their skills and prowess. Most also had pillion riders. Besides teaching them how to ride motorcycles, WoW aims to provide the women

riders with employment opportunities too. They have been taught about road safety, too. The programme was officially launched in Punjab in 2016 where 10,000 women learnt how to ride motorbikes across the province. In Karachi, it was officially launched in November 2019 where over 3,000 women registered.

Speaking on the occasion, Salman Sufi said that it was not just a motorcycle rally that they were organising on International Women's Day, it was in fact a message that women could do everything. "They can be everything that they want to be and do anything that they want to do," he said.

Alia Shahid, secretary, Women Development Department, said that logistics support opens the doors to legal, social and economic empowerment of women.

The Ambassador of Sweden in Pakistan, Ingrid Johansson, said there were only positives with women empowerment.

Sindh's Minister for Women Development Shehla Raza said that when women could fly fighter jets in the Pakistan Air Force, when a woman could be the prime minister of Pakistan, then should she not be able to ride a motorcycle.

The Salman Sufi Foundation has a vision to train 500,000 women across Pakistan by 2025. The ultimate aim of the campaign is to empower women to reclaim public spaces in the country as well as inspire them to become agents of change.  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 14, 09/03/2020)

### Transparency in petroleum prices

International oil prices (Brent crude) fell to \$50.52 per barrel in the end of February. The highest peak in recent times was \$85 in the last months of 2019 — a godsend for the government and the people of Pakistan. In 2016-17, oil prices came down to this level which greatly benefitted the PML-N government.

In the beginning of March, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) reduced both petrol and diesel prices by Rs5 per litre. However, the people are not happy as the full benefit has not been passed on to the consumer. While there has been a reduction of Rs2.46 in taxation for High Speed Diesel (HSD), a tax reduction of Rs6.85 was made for petrol. These are rough estimates due





to the lack of transparency in the petroleum sector wherein the GoP has stopped releasing firm data in this respect. This is an issue worth considering by the government. We will discuss it a little later in this space.

It should be noted that petroleum prices and taxation are still lower in Pakistan than in other countries in the region. In India (New Delhi, where the prices are the lowest in India), petrol costs Rs154.38 per litre as opposed to Rs111.59 in Pakistan. Similarly, HSD costs Rs138.42 per litre in New Delhi as opposed to Rs122.26 in Pakistan. In other areas in India, these prices can be higher by 10%.

The GoP would earn Rs35.96 per litre out of petrol sales, resulting in an annual revenue earning of Rs358.83 billion, provided prices and taxation remain the same for one year. Similarly, the taxation earning on HSD is Rs42.81 per litre and can result in a projected one-year revenue of Rs461 billion. Together, petrol and HSD enable the GoP to earn a revenue of Rs820 billion — with quite some help by the poor consumer. However, in a country where the elite and businessmen do not like to pay their due tax liabilities, there are few other options left.

This earning is not without quid pro quo in terms of political and socio-economic costs. Productivity and economic competitiveness go down with undue increases in energy prices. A mid-point should be calculated. One wonders if some analytical tools are available in our system to determine this mid-point. Conceptually speaking, there is a case for fixed taxation on energy. As an opportunity develops in terms of lowering energy prices, all or majority of the savings should not be devoured by the government. There is no apparent logic of earning more taxes/GST on price changes.

There is a case for taxing energy consumption, as it has externalities, harming other sectors in terms of health, pollution and climate change. Earlier, there used to be excise duty to cover these aspects which continues to be the case in India. In Pakistan, it is called the Petroleum Development Levy (PDL), originally meant for development projects of the petroleum sector. A decade earlier, the courts created quite a hue and cry on it, like the present-day protests on GIDC. It is time, perhaps, to change the nomenclature. An appropriate name would be the Carbon Tax which is increasingly being demanded by climate change activists. PDL may be divided into two parts: one, Carbon Tax, which may remain as a fixed component; and the other variable, the Petroleum Levy.

Petroleum has been traditionally considered a luxury good and thus eligible for heavy taxation. However, it is no more a luxury but a necessity, especially, HSD, which is used by the public transport sector. Almost 40-50% of gasoline in Pakistan is used by poor motorcyclists and Suzuki loaders also consumer petrol, the latter being used for intra-city transport of goods and even as a public transport vehicle. Europe continues to tax petroleum heavily. In Norway, despite being a petrol producer and exporter, the current petrol prices are Rs250 per litre or more, almost double that of the price in Pakistan. Similar is the case in other European countries like France, Germany, Italy and the UK. The US, however, indulges in moderate taxation and its petroleum prices are used as a benchmark by the policymakers.

It has taken this scribe quite some time and effort to calculate the taxation impact under the current price announcement. The PML-N government stopped issuing price build-up data apparently for no good reason. The purported reason was competitive pricing at petrol pumps. The negative impact is that all kinds of inaccurate data circulate in the electronic and print media. It hurts the government image amidst confusion. In our region, in India, there is price competition as well, however, price build-up transparency is maintained there. I have more reliable data on India than I have on Pakistan. One has to do backward calculations on the basis of widely dispersed data for Pakistan's case. Earlier, Ogra used to publish this data and it continues to post historical price build-up data on its website. Serious consideration may be given by the GoP to eliminate this vestige of the past and announce its own well-considered policies.

In conclusion, the GoP would be well advised to make some more downward adjustment in petroleum prices to save its political capital and boost economic growth and output through its taxation policies. High interest rates and heavy currency devaluation has already taken its toll. No further space appears to be there on this account.  
(By SYED AKHTAR ALI The Express Tribune, 17, 10/03/2020)

### **More delays for Karachi's Orange Line as project shuffles between govts**

Four years after the project inauguration in 2016, the Sindh government has remained unable to procure buses for the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, also failing to ensure the timely completion of the short network that stretches over a mere 3.9 kilometres.

Owing to incompetent officers in the provincial transport department and the Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA), the Sindh government, responsible for the Orange Line BRT project, has issued a letter to the federal government. The letter requests the centre to cater to all affairs related to the project, including procurement of the buses and running them on the corridor for three years.

Lamentably, the Orange Line Bus project is suffering the same fate as several other mega projects pending with the Sindh government, including plans for transport, water supply and sewage. However, given the snail-paced construction which has hampered the bus network's progress, the latest deadline for completion of the project – this month – seems to be a pipe dream.

"The Sindh government has issued a letter to the federal government-run Sindh Infrastructure Development Limited (SIDCL), requesting the procurement of buses for Orange and Green Line BRTs," informed a provincial government official on conditions of anonymity. "The Sindh government has further requested SIDCL to run the buses for three years on the Orange Line network.

However, it will be on the Sindh government's expenses and the SIDCL will render the project to the provincial government after supervising it for three years," he added.

Incompetence, bias plague project

On the other hand, a concerned official cited political appointments as a reason behind the incompetence of the provincial transport department and the SMTA to ensure timely completion of mega projects like the BRT.

Due to certain underlying reasons, in the first phase of the project, the Sindh government had requested the federal government to assume the operational and managerial affairs of the Green Line BRT for three years. But later, by the second phase, it further requested the Centre to undertake the responsibility of procuring and running the buses for the Orange Line BRT as well.

Following the orders of the Prime Minister, the federal government has agreed to supervise the Green Line BRT project. As per the approved PC-I of the Green Line Project, the federal government was to assume the responsibility of procuring the buses and completing the project, after which the network is to be handed over to the Sindh government, which will be responsible for running the buses on it.

However, now the federal government will also undertake the responsibility of managing and operating the Green Line BRT for three years before the project can be transferred to the provincial government.

#### **No buses, no BRT**

According to the Sindh government, 25 buses to be procured for the Orange Line Bus project have been pending for the past one year. Meanwhile, higher authorities in the Sindh government have divided opinion on the matter.

Where one faction believes the provincial government should handle the operational and managerial affairs of the buses, the other believes that the task should be assigned to the SIDCL instead.

Nearly a year on, the Sindh government, on the directives of Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, has decided to hand over the project affairs of the Orange Line BRT to the federal government.

According to a SIDCL officer who spoke to The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity, a few months ago, the Sindh government had sent a draft requesting the federal government to undertake all affairs of the Orange Line BRT project for three years, for which the provincial government would later pay.

"Upon certain conditions, SIDCL has in principle accepted the request but as per one of the conditions in the agreement, the Sindh government has to provide an advance payment for the management and procurement of the buses. So now the provincial transport department has prepared a new draft which will be sent to the SIDCL by next week with the approval of the CM," the source informed this reporter.

As per SIDCL CEO Sauleh Farooqui, a letter from the Sindh government has been received, requesting the entity to undertake all affairs of the project for three years. "The Sindh government is yet to send the final draft but as soon as it is received, it will be sent to the SIDCL board for approval, following which the provincial and federal governments will sign the agreement," said Farooqui. "Some 80 buses for Green Line BRT and 25 for Orange Line are to be imported, which require extended proceedings, while the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) approval for the Green Line buses is expected sometime around next month," he added.

Farooqui further shared that the SIDCL has prepared tender documents for the procurement of buses which will be sought shortly after the ECNEC's approvals. "However, it would require three months' time till the contract is awarded and the procurement and import of buses will take another eight months. It is expected the buses for both the BRT projects will arrive in Karachi by March 2021, following which bus operations on the two corridors will commence."

#### **Situation on ground**

According to a survey conducted by The Express Tribune, the Orange Line Bus project is under construction, stretching from Orangi Town Office to the Matric Board Office Chowrangi and Shahrah-e-Orangi. Although civil works of the project have been completed, developmental work on the four BRT stations and the bus terminal is being carried out at a snail's pace.

An engineer on site, on the condition of anonymity, shared that the Sindh government had set March 2020 as the project deadline. "However, it seems near impossible that the project will conclude by then. Efforts are afoot to complete works on the BRT station by May, while works on the terminal are to be completed by August," the engineer shared.

As per The Express Tribune's survey, work on the four stations and the bus terminal has been slow, which, if not expedited in time, will hinder the timely completion of the project by this year.

When Sindh transport secretary Ghulam Abbas Detho was contacted for his comments on the situation, he refused to answer, saying that the Sindh government had restricted him from speaking to the media.  
(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 19/03/2020)

## The story continues for Karachi's Green Line Bus Rapid Transit

Since its inception in 2014, the Green Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme has been hit with several delays, the latest of which are courtesy of the oldest residents of the bus network's vicinity.



Trees old enough to be considered ancient present along the busway's track have hindered the project's progress, convincing authorities to once again rethink the project plan.

In a bid to save the historic trees, the federal government has decided to revise the Green Line BRT's design, allowing 26 trees near Radio Pakistan on MA Jinnah Road to remain unaffected while agreeing to transplant the remaining 69.

Following the revised project design, the once optimistic intra-city bus project which had been in a fix for the past 2.5 years owing to disputes between the federal and provincial government, has finally recommenced upon consensus between the two authorities.

In the latest developments, the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Limited (SIDCL), a federally-run entity has sought tenders for laying down Phase II of the Green Line BRT, which spans from Taj Medical Complex to Jama Cloth Market.

"Previously, the busway was to be elevated all the way from Taj Medical Complex to Jama Cloth near Municipal Park, which wouldn't have affected the trees along the route. But following the government's order, the track is now being built at grade on land and the SIDCL has tweaked the design to protect some of the trees and has also allocated funds to transplant the rest," informed a SIDCL official on conditions of anonymity.

SIDCL chief financial officer Bilal Memon, while talking to The Express Tribune, shared that the tender for the Green Line Project's second phase has been sought.

"Once the tendering process is complete in the following 1.5 months, construction work on Phase II is expected to begin sometime around May," said Memon. "The phase occupies a 3.5 kilometre area and although there are nine months to the project due date, it can take up to a year to bring it to completion. The traffic management plan is yet to be implemented, which has been causing most of the delay," he added.

The complication which arises with the traffic management plan is that MA Jinnah Road is one of the city's busiest thoroughfares; closure of both the tracks simultaneously could cause a gridlock on alternative routes.

In an attempt to alleviate the traffic issue, a decision has been reached to keep traffic operational on the roadside, which would allow for construction on the middle of the road to continue unaffected by traffic.

According to Memon, the revised project design will save all 95 ancient trees present along the busway. "The new design saves us from cutting down 26 trees, the remaining are to be transplanted upon consultation with Haneef Nasir, the former Parks director-general and a member of the Horticulture Society of Pakistan. Further, we also plan to carry out a plantation drive along MA Jinnah Road, which will make sure the developmental project does not harm the urban trees," he confirmed.

Nasir, meanwhile, said that there are some 95 trees present on the stretch of road going from Taj Medical Complex to Jamia Cloth Market (Municipal Park), which are a century old or less. "These trees include Banyan, Sacred Figs, Indian lilacs, Lignums and others. We have spoken to the SIDCL and recommended March, April, July and August to be the most suitable months for their transplantation," Nasir told.

Apart from that, he said, an excellent team, along with the right machinery, season, land and supervision were also required. "It is only then that these trees would be able to grow after transplantation," he explained. "There are also a few Conocarpuses growing along MA Jinnah Road. Those will be chopped down and the plantation of more suitable trees will be carried out around the construction area as an alternative."

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 20/03/2020)

### Intra-city public transport suspended in Sindh

As the Sindh government's lockdown came into effect after midnight on Sunday, Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah ordered a ban on intra-city as well as inter-city public transport across the province on Monday.

The provincial government had announced a complete lockdown of the province on Sunday, as part of its efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus in Sindh.

Buses, taxis, rickshaws and online cab services have also been suspended across the province. As the provincial minister asked people to stay at home, the only means of transport left for citizens was private vehicles. Even then, only two people are allowed to travel in a vehicle together, or three in case of a medical emergency. Vowing to win the war against the pandemic, Shah praised the people for supporting the difficult decisions made by the government in the face of the global pandemic. He disclosed that in the last two days, 300 vehicles have been issued challans, 50 route permits have been cancelled, 20 vehicles have been impounded, one

transporter has been booked and more than 12 transporters have been arrested for violating government orders in the crisis situation.

#### **Domestic flights suspended**

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Monday decided to close Karachi's Jinnah International Airport and Sukkur's airport for all domestic flights from today (Tuesday) till April 4, as a precautionary measure to limit the spread of coronavirus in the country.

The airports will remain closed for all types of domestic incoming and outgoing passenger flight operations, with effect from 6am on Tuesday till April 4, said the notification issued by the CAA amid the provincial lockdown.

Pakistan International Airlines has also cancelled all flight operations from Karachi and Sukkur whereas other airlines have also been informed about the decision. On Saturday, the federal government had decided to suspend all international flights coming into or leaving Pakistan till April 4.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 24/03/2020)

### **Numaish Chowrangi underpass inches closer to inauguration**

After more than a year of construction, together with several administrative blockades and delays, the construction of the Numaish Chowrangi underpass has reached its final phase of completion - a move that will enable Karachi motorists to breathe a sigh of relief. It's inauguration, however, is contingent upon the ongoing lockdown in Karachi, which has completely disrupted the schedule.

After its completion, which is expected this month, the main Numaish Chowrangi road will be opened for two-way traffic. Meanwhile, roofing work of the underpass will continue until August this year.

The bituminous carpeting on both the roads that link the MA Jinnah Chowrangi with Numaish Chowrangi had been underway while traffic signals were also being installed there. However, work had to be stopped because of the outbreak.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, construction workers and site engineers working on the project said that the lane extending from Britto Road to Shahrah-e-Quaideen has already been opened for traffic.

The lanes linking the MA Jinnah Road and Parsi Colony Road with Numaish Chowrangi will be opened for the traffic this month, meanwhile, Nizami Road will be opened on April 7 if the schedule is not further changed.

#### **Karachi lockdown**

Despite vigorous efforts to complete the construction of the road in the last few months, all progress had to be halted because of the pandemic. Meanwhile, the supply of construction material has also been suspended.

"We had earlier planned to open the Numaish Chowrangi on March 23, however, the plan could not be implemented per schedule because of the coronavirus lockdown," a site engineer, who chose not to be named, said. "Irrespective of the new hurdles, the situation is under control. We have enough material, manpower and machinery at our disposal, therefore, we are highly hopeful to complete the construction of the Numaish Chowrangi underpass as soon as the situation normalises, probably by mid April."

He also said that the staffers and labourers working on the project have been educated about the spread of the Covid-19 disease. Accordingly, they have been instructed to wear protective masks, frequently wash their hands with soaps, use sanitisers, and maintain distance from coworkers to keep themselves safe once the project resumes.

"Even though we are all set to complete the project in April, everything now depends on the coronavirus situation in the city. In case of a widespread outbreak, an extended lockdown, a curfew, or if some labourer gets affected, the situation would get beyond our control and the project would probably have to be further postponed," he said.

#### **Stuck in limbo**

The construction of the underpass at Numaish Chowrangi was primarily delayed because of the

federal government's Green Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme, one which links Surjani Town to Municipal Park (Jama Cloth market). The project commenced in January 2016 and was scheduled to be completed by December 2017, however, owing to the delayed response of the federal government, frequent design changes and differences of opinions between the federal and provincial governments, the project was deferred.

The first part of the Phase I of Green Line BRT that extends from Surjani Town to Gurumandir is 17- kilometres long. The civil work has been fully completed while the construction of the stops and stations is in its final stages.

However, the second part of the Phase-I of the bus project, one that extends from Numaish Chowrangi to Taj Medical Complex, has been stuck in limbo for the past three years. As for the Phase-II of the project, construction work from Taj Medical Complex to Municipal Park has not commenced yet. Sources, however, said that Phase-II is likely to commence from May this year, depending on the situation.

An official of the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Limited (SIDCL), who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that the construction work on Numaish Chowrangi was delayed numerous times. Per the original planning of the federal government, an elevated structure was to be erected, however, after the objection of the Quaid-i-Azam Mazar Management Board (QMMB), the federal government decided to change the design and construct an underpass instead.

As a result, the main Numaish Chowrangi was completely closed for traffic in October 2018 for the construction of the underpass.  
(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 01/04/2020)

### **Five arrested for violating transportation ban in Karachi**

Four drivers and one other were arrested by the police for allegedly transporting passengers out of Karachi despite the ban on public transport and inter-city transport services late on Saturday night.

A truck with dozens of passengers hidden in the back was stopped by the Artillery Maidan and Civil Lines police in a joint operation near Fawwara Chowk.

The police arrested truck driver Muhammad Shah and his accomplice Naseeb Wali, while taking the truck into custody. According to the police, Shah revealed during interrogation that he had been transporting 43 people to Mansehra at exorbitant fares.

The passengers, meanwhile, explained that they had been travelling back to their hometowns from Karachi due to the financial crisis created by the lockdown. The police advised them to practice precautionary measures in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus and returned their fare money to them.

Meanwhile, the Gadap City police arrested three drivers and seized their vehicles in separate operations at the Karachi-Hyderabad Motorway.

According to Gadap City SHO Naimat Bhatti, driver Syed Nabi Shah had been illegally transporting passengers to Peshawar in his coach for Rs5,000 per passenger. Bhatti claimed that the same vehicle had been caught earlier in another illegal bid to transport people out of the city during the lockdown.

Furthermore, another driver, Mukhtar Ali, was arrested by the Gadap City police for transporting at least a dozen passengers out of the city in a Hiace van. Ali stated that he had charged the passengers a total amount of Rs70,000 for carrying them to Mansehra.

Separately, driver Faqeer Muhammad was arrested for transporting citizens from the New Sabzi Mandi to Kathore Mor for Rs1,000 per passenger in a Suzuki pickup van.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 06/04/2020)

### **Islamabad to operate Green Line bus service for three years after completion**

The Sindh government has finally signed a facilitation and implementation agreement with the federal government that will allow the centre to operate the Green Line bus rapid transit system (BRTS) project for three years and then transfer it to the provincial authorities.

The agreement has removed a key hurdle from the execution of the federal government-funded project, which has already consumed four years but yet to become operational.

A senior government official said that the key development came recently before Prime Minister Imran Khan had chaired an important meeting at the PM House and reiterated for uplift of Karachi.

"The delay in the facilitation agreement with the Sindh government was a key hurdle in becoming the [Green Line] project a reality," Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar told Dawn.

*The project's control will be transferred to Sindh govt after the three-year period*

"Originally, when the project was launched, it was decided that the project would be jointly shared by the federal and Sindh governments. The centre would build it and they [provincial government] would operate it," he recalled. "But unfortunately, they [Sindh authorities] backed out and we were left with no option to continue it on our own. So we needed an agreement with the Sindh government for that purpose. We were waiting for this agreement since January [2020] and finally it has been done."

He said with the key development the project would be further reviewed in the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) that would further give a boost to the project's execution.

With hopes are high for the project after the fresh development, the latest meeting chaired by the prime minister on Karachi was already told that the infrastructure of the project would be completed by within a year.

In February 2016, then prime minister Nawaz Sharif had performed the ground-breaking of the Rs16.85 billion federal government's BRTS project.

A few months ago the federal government had approved Rs6.5bn more for the project to extend it by another 10km as was initially sought by the Sindh government.

According to the original plan of the Green Line project, being executed by the Karachi Infrastructure Development Company Limited, starting from KESC Power House Chowrangi in Surjani Town, the bus service will terminate at Municipal Park, M.A. Jinnah

Road, after passing through Nagan Chowrangi, North Nazimabad, Nazimabad, Gru Mandir, with 22 stations on its route. It will cater to 300,000 passengers on a daily basis.

With over 20km dedicated tracks, including 11km elevated section, the route of the bus service project was further extended on the request of the provincial government. The project is being constructed on a bus-way in the median of the road along the corridor with stations in the centre of the median at the ground and elevated sections, which will provide 25-km-per hour high capacity service to 29,400 passengers every hour.

“The fresh meeting chaired by the prime minister has also decided for capacity building of the Karachi Infrastructure Development Company for some upcoming mega projects. The prime minister has a very clear vision about Karachi and he personally takes interest and seeks updates of all projects. He would meet his commitments,” said Mr Umar.

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 06/04/2020)

### **Karachi's transporters take a different route**

The pandemic lockdown, in place for over a month now, applied brakes on the business for transporters, forcing them to look elsewhere for their livelihoods. It took a while before they were able to find another means of sustenance, but they eventually did so. With no other solution in sight, they rented and took private cars to the roads, offering services for long-distance travel, mostly out of city.

At present, this seems like the only way they can survive in the middle of the seemingly never-ending quagmire.

#### **When traffic came to a halt...**

Karachi, the financial hub of Pakistan, has long been facing a transport crisis. As the metropolis' public transport infrastructure has continued to degenerate over the years, the state of the city's buses has kept worsening by the day, while risky qingqis temporarily presented a cheaper alternative to relatively safer rickshaws and taxis vanished off the roads as ride-hailing enterprises announced their arrival.

The emergence of these online ride-hailing services proved to be one of the biggest blows to the city's already dismayed transporters. And they had just begun to come to terms with the drastically changing transport landscape, when the lockdown made its appearance.

A day after the lockdown began, Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah ordered a ban on intra-city as well as inter-city public transport across the province. Buses, taxis, rickshaws and online cab services were suspended across the province. Business came to a sudden halt, adding to the woes of not just commuters, but also transporters. And some among the latter even saw it as the complete breakdown of the transport business in the city.

#### **...transporters found a way out**

However, they soon found an alternative means of sustenance in the once-bustling.

Left with no other option, they turned to rent-a-car dealers.

Since then, Karachi has seen a steep surge in the rent-a-car business, as transporters began hiring the only means available for transport in the city during the lockdown – private vehicles. Rent-a-car businesses have flourished, hiring out vehicles to transporters, including drivers of public buses, for as long as a month. Transporters then used these vehicles to carry passengers on longer routes, even out of the city.

As of now, they are charging commuters between Rs15,000 and Rs17,000 per head to travel to Multan, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Abbotabad, Mansehra and as far as Battagram. On the other hand, charges for commuters travelling from any of these cities to Karachi are drastically lower, between Rs5,000 and Rs7,000.

Not more than four passengers are transported in Vigos, Corollas or other cars having similar seating capacities while bigger vehicles are being used to transport six to eight passengers.

These transporters, driving hired, private vehicles, usually travel via motorways and rely on CNG for fuelling even old models of vehicles.

Meanwhile, seeing an opportunity amid worsening financial crunch, cabs at Karachi airport have also started offering rides to other cities in Sindh at discounted rates, as train service and flight operations remain suspended.

While some rent-a-car dealers take the initiative to offer similar services for out-of-city travel themselves, it is now being feared that the upsurge in the demand for private cars will result in transport charges peaking on Eid.

(By Ehtesham Mufti The Express Tribune, 04, 30/04/2020)

### **Price of petrol slashed by Rs15, diesel by Rs27**

The government on Thursday reduced the prices of petroleum products in the range of 15 to 38 per cent for a month to partially pass on the impact of international price crash and also increased tax rates on oil products to mop up windfall revenues.

The decision was announced by the finance ministry in a balancing act to share the drastic fall in international oil prices between the consumers already affected by coronavirus-induced lockdown and the public revenues facing shortfalls after consultations with representatives of the International Monetary Fund.

Under the announcement, the ex-depot price of petrol was fixed at Rs81.58 per litre, showing a reduction of Rs15 or 15pc from the existing rate of Rs96.58. In doing so, the government increased its taxes by Rs5.68 per litre. The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) had proposed the ex-depot price of petrol for next month at Rs75.90 per litre, a 21.4pc cut.

Likewise, the ex-depot price of high speed diesel (HSD) was set at Rs80.10 per litre instead of the existing rate of Rs107.25, showing a reduction of Rs27.14 or 25.3pc. Here again, the government increased its tax take by Rs6.79 per litre. Ogra had proposed about 31.6pc (Rs33.94 per litre) reduction in the price of HSD to Rs73.31 per litre.

Similarly, the government fixed the ex-depot price of kerosene at Rs47.44 per litre, down by Rs30.01 per litre (38.75pc) when compared to the old price of Rs77.45. In this case, the government increased taxes by Rs14.06 per litre. Ogra had recommended a reduction of 56.9pc (Rs44.07 per litre).

#### *Finance ministry increases tax rates on oil products*

Also, the ex-depot price of light diesel oil (LDO) was fixed at Rs47.51 per litre instead of Rs62.51, showing a reduction of Rs15 per litre or 24pc. Here too, the government increased the tax rate by Rs9.57 per litre. Ogra had proposed a reduction of 39.3pc or Rs24.57 per litre in the LDO rate.

An official said the petroleum levy was increased by 24pc on HSD, 26pc on petrol, 300pc on kerosene and 273pc on LDO on Thursday.

At present, benchmark Brent crude prices have plunged by a massive 30pc to \$20 a barrel from about \$27 per barrel on March 25. The Brent crude price has tumbled by almost 65pc since February 25. This is the steepest fall in oil prices in recent history.

The official said the finance ministry wanted to make up for revenue losses arising out of lower import parity price for crude and petroleum products and lower consumption due to the lockdown and the overall revenue shortfall it had faced in the first 10 months of the current fiscal.

The government has already increased general sales tax (GST) on all petroleum products to a standard rate of 17pc across the board to generate additional revenues. Until January last year, the government was charging 0.5pc GST on LDO, 2pc on kerosene, 8pc on petrol and 13pc on HSD.

Besides the 17pc GST, the government had almost quadrupled the rate of petroleum levy on HSD to Rs30 per litre from Rs8 per litre in January last year. The levy on petrol had also been increased to Rs23.76 per litre from about Rs10 almost a year ago.

On Thursday, petroleum levy on kerosene was also increased to Rs18 per litre, up by 300pc when compared to Rs6 per litre last month. Also, the levy on LDO was also jacked up by 273pc to Rs11.28 per litre from existing rate of Rs3 per litre.

Over the last many months, the government had been increasing petroleum levy rates to partially recoup a major revenue shortfall faced by the Federal Board of Revenue. The levy remains in the federal kitty unlike GST which goes to the divisible pool taxes and thus about 57pc of its share is grabbed by the provinces.

Petrol and HSD are two major products that generate most of revenue for the government because of their massive and growing consumption in the country.

Average petrol sales are touching 700,000 tonnes per month against monthly consumption of around 600,000 tonnes of diesel.

However, the sales of petrol have dropped in recent weeks due to the lockdown. The diesel consumption has also dropped after the lockdown but has since picked up owing to wheat harvest. The sales of kerosene and LDO are generally less than 11,000 and 2000 tonnes per month, respectively.

Last month the international oil prices had dropped by almost 52pc but the government had reduced the local prices by 12-13pc to make up for the revenue loss.

Meanwhile, Ogra increased the price of LPG by 24pc to Rs 112 per kg.  
(By Khaleeq Kiani Dawn, 01, 01/05/2020)

### **PTI govt reduces petrol price by Rs15 per litre**

The government on Thursday made a massive cut of Rs27.15 per litre in the price of high speed diesel (HSD) for the month of May 2020, following a dip in the global oil prices due to the coronavirus-induced lockdowns.

After the revision, the price of HSD will come down to Rs80.10 per litre as compared with the existing price of Rs107.25 per litre.

The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) had proposed a decrease of Rs33.94 per litre or 31.6% in the price of HSD, which is

mainly used in the transport and agriculture sectors. However, the government passed a relief of Rs27.15 per litre to the consumers. With start of the harvesting season, the demand of diesel has increased, which led the government to lift the ban on its import.

The government also reduced the price of petrol by Rs15 per litre against the proposed reduction of Rs20.68 per litre or 21.4%. Petrol would now be sold for Rs81.58 per litre as compared to Rs96.58.

Petrol is an alternative fuel for compressed natural gas (CNG) and is mainly consumed by vehicles in Punjab where local gas is not available and CNG retail outlets are run on comparatively expensive imported gas.

Also, the government reduced the price of light diesel oil (LDO) by Rs15 per litre. Ogra had suggested a cut of Rs24.57 per litre or 39.3% in its price, which is an industrial fuel. Following approval of the government, its price has come down to Rs47.51 per litre from Rs62.51.

The government also slashed the price of kerosene oil by Rs30.01 per litre. Ogra had proposed a reduction of Rs44.07 per litre or 56.9% in its price. Its new price is Rs47.44 per litre as against Rs77.45.

Kerosene is used for cooking purposes, especially in the far-flung areas where liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or pipeline gas is not available.

In the tenure of the previous Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government, the petroleum levy was charged in the range of Rs3 to Rs10 per litre, however, GST was higher than the current rate.

As GST is shared with the provinces, the federal government has slashed the sales tax and has hiked the petroleum levy in a bid to collect more revenue for the federal purse to meet its high revenue requirement.

Since the current Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government came to power in August 2018, prices of petroleum products had gone up in the wake of the rupee's depreciation against the dollar.

Pakistan is a net importer of petroleum products and meets almost 85% of its needs through imports. The rupee's depreciation has played a key role in increasing petroleum product prices, which has fuelled inflation in the country.  
(By Zafar Bhutta The Express Tribune, 01, 01/05/2020)

### Oil price relief

The government has approved massive cuts in fuel prices, with a litre of diesel going down by over Rs27 and petrol getting Rs15 cheaper. Diesel will now sell for Rs80.10, and petrol for Rs81.58. Amazingly, the cuts are still below what the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) had recommended. The regulator had suggested dropping diesel prices by almost Rs34, and petrol by Rs21. These would have amounted to reductions of around 32% and 21% respectively, which are still below the amount by which the international oil prices have fallen.

Prices, of course, have crashed due to an unprecedented fall in global demand thanks to the global Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic and the lockdowns imposed to level its infection curve. Demand fell so much that at one point West Texas Intermediate, the oil standard in the US, fell over 300% in a single day and went into negative territory before rebounding slightly, with dealers literally paying around \$37 a barrel to get the black gold off their hands. Pakistan, like much of the world, relies on Brent Crude, which also fell dramatically in the past few weeks, although not as much as WTI. Brent prices have dropped more than 50% over the last month.

Even ignoring such anomalies, the rate of decline has been such that even countries that allow more frequent price changes based on international oil price trends have struggled to keep pace. In Pakistan's case, the problem is two-fold. The country remains dependent on indirect taxes such as those on fuel. Lowering fuel prices too much also means lowering government revenues, which are also in a precarious shape due to additional outlay on coronavirus stimulus and tumbling incomes due to reduced economic activity. Another problem is the rupee crash against the dollar. After stabilising somewhat over the winter, the rupee is down more than 3% against the greenback since March, and at one point had fallen almost 9%. That has caused the cost of imports to rise sharply and fueled further inflation.

Despite this, fuel prices in Pakistan are still among the lowest in the world for countries that are net importers of oil. Unfortunately, so are incomes.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 02/05/2020)

### Sindh govt refuses to lift ban on public transport, ride-hailing services

Despite an appeal from Prime Minister Imran Khan to standardise lifestyle while staying safe from the coronavirus pandemic, the Sindh government on Friday made it clear that it was not going to lift the ban on public transport anytime soon as it believed that the operation of buses and ride-hailing services could turn Karachi and other Sindh cities into Italy and Wuhan of China.

Sindh Transport Minister Syed Awais Shah categorically ruled out the possibility of resumption of the public transport in the current situation when coronavirus cases were witnessing a sharp rise in Karachi and other cities of the province.



He was critical to the PM's advice and asked him to consult experts before sharing his thoughts on the matter of Covid-19, its risk and precautions.

"As the PM of the country we respect his views and suggestions," the Sindh transport minister said in a statement right after the PM's televised address where he came up with a number of suggestions and future prospects of life with threat of the coronavirus.

"But we can't allow public transport services. We are seeing cases rising every day and in this situation it would be absolutely a wrong decision to allow buses and other vehicles of public transport on roads to add risk to the people's lives," he said.

*Transport minister asks PM if he wants the country turned into Italy or Wuhan*

He cited the violation of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) and government guidelines both by traders and buyers when the lockdown was relaxed earlier this week, claiming it resulted in a spike in cases of Covid-19.

A similar situation, he said, was witnessed at different industrial units allowed to resume their operations, but they failed to meet the commitment and follow the rules of social distancing and implementation of all due precautions.

The Sindh government put a ban on all kind of public transport services in the third week of March before the lockdown was formally imposed on March 23. With the imposition of the lockdown, the operations of ride-sharing services was also suspended leaving people mostly dependent on private or personal vehicles to move from one place to another. The provincial government also banned the intercity bus service to stop movement of people from one city to other.

The Pakistan Railways (PR) on March 24 suspended the operation of all its passenger trains throughout the country in view of the fast-spreading coronavirus, further reducing options for commuters.

Despite pressure to review the policy, the Sindh transport minister stood firm on his decision even passing almost two months to the ban and warned that the relaxation in the lockdown being demanded by certain segments of society and supported by the federal government could prove disastrous.

"Does our PM want our country to turn into Italy or Wuhan," said Shah in his statement. "The PM should consult some experts for such suggestions and decisions. There is a strong fear that with the relaxation in the lockdown we could have faced an Italy-like situation. The PM himself has admitted that the SOPs are being ignored while the lockdown is relaxed. We appeal to the PM to coordinate with provinces for joint efforts. This is high time to save lives of the people not for politics."

#### **Hotels, restaurants will not open**

Meanwhile, the provincial minister for industries and commerce and cooperative department and anti-corruption, Jam Ikramullah Dharejo, said that the government could not take the risk of opening hotels and restaurants.

He said this while participating in a meeting via video link on the situation of coronavirus at the National Command and Operations Centre, Islamabad, said a statement.

"In the current situation, hotels and restaurants cannot be opened while the automobile industry can be opened under SOPs," the statement quoted the provincial minister as saying. "There is a need to provide employment opportunities while giving priority to human lives. There is a need to change the lifestyle due to the coronavirus. The Sindh government is cooperating with the federal government for the betterment of the people at all levels. The coronavirus can only be defeated jointly."

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 16/05/2020)

### **CNG sector seeks reduction in its prices to stay alive**

The charm of saving in terms of rupees by running vehicles on compressed natural gas (CNG) has almost become irrelevant for owners of vehicles after a drop of Rs35 per litre in petrol price over the past two months, CNG stakeholders claim.

Three months ago, CNG was considered at least 30 per cent cheaper than petrol in running vehicles.

Petrol price has now become more attractive for people and further cuts in its rate will shift more consumers towards petrol.

Suspension in plying of public and school transport coupled with shrinking private transport movement owing to lockdown and closure of many industries and offices from last week of March till to date have played havoc with CNG sale, the people connected with CNG business added.

#### **Jobs situation in CNG sector**

However, conflicting claims have emerged over job situation at CNG outlets as one group of CNG stakeholders claim loss of 50 per cent jobs while other group rejects the stance.

Chairman of the All Pakistan CNG Forum Shabbir Sulemanji said pumps had employed people in two shifts and closure of pumps and massive drop in sales had made 50 per cent of workforce redundant. It means one shift is now almost jobless, he added.

Giving an example of sales, he asked how a pump could survive when it was hardly selling 250 kilo of gas a day as compared to 1,000-1,500 kg during April and over 3,000 kg a day ahead of lockdown.

As school vans and public transport are already not turning up for over a month at filling stations, the movement of people has confined to their homes after 5pm, he said adding that marriage ceremonies, parties and functions had already been discontinued ahead of Ramazan and no iftar dinners and other religious gatherings were being held.

Despite ease in lockdown and opening of some factories and shops, the CNG sales are still very low if compared with pre-lockdown situation, he said.

Mr Shabbir added that after the reduction in petrol prices on June 1, people would further lose hope in CNG resulting in more depressed sales in May.

“The government should restore tariff of 980mmbtu for CNG stations as compare to current 1,283mmbtu. This will bring down CNG price and may help pull more buyers due to low price,” he said adding that it looked strange that CNG price was higher when world crude oil, finished oil products and gas prices were falling in world market due to low consumption.

“Huge investment of CNG stakeholders in opening of CNG outlets, transporters’ and consumers’ expenses in fitting CNG kits and cylinders in vehicles are now at stake,” he said.

Samir Najmul Hassan of the All Pakistan CNG Association said, “Saving in terms of running vehicle on CNG is now hardly five per cent, which does not augur well for price conscious consumers.”

Predicting a doomsday scenario for CNG sector in case of further crash in petrol prices, he said some 40 pumps out of 350 in Sindh had suspended their operations as they could not afford in meeting expenses of salaries of workers amid declining sale.

“Amid tight business environment, our members have still not removed any employees of the pumps,” Samir claimed.

He urged the government to bring down gas tariff by 300mmbtu so that the CNG sector could survive. “This would definitely boost sale of the gas.”

CNG is currently sells at Rs123 per kg.

In February 2020 petrol was priced at Rs116.60 as compared to current rate of Rs81.58 per litre, as Rs35 has been reduced in per litre price.

(By Aamir Shafaat Khan Dawn, 14, 18/05/2020)

### Number of road casualties fell in April thanks to lockdown

Though the coronavirus lockdown has brought new challenges to life, the number of road and traffic accidents have come down significantly, killing eight people and injuring four — the lowest number recorded in more than a decade in April.



Thin traffic movement on roads due to the lockdown and almost non-existence of heavy traffic on main links of the city during this period has automatically cut down the number of road accidents, resulting in a smaller number of injuries and fatalities.

Recently compiled data suggests that during April 2020 when the lockdown was in place after it was imposed on March 23, eight road accidents were reported in a month. Six accidents proved fatal, killing eight people and injuring four others. In the three earlier months — January to March 2020 — 51 people had died in road accidents, most of them in February when 24 people were killed. Thirteen people died in road accidents

in January and 14 in March 2020.

An official said the number of deaths in road accidents in April had never been so low and it was for the first time in more than 10 years that the number of traffic collisions had come to a single digit figure.

*‘Despite the lockdown, we have not cut the number of our officers and constables performing operational duties’*

“In April 2015, 34 people died in road accidents and in the same month next year [2016] 23 people were killed on roads in different accidents involving vehicles and different modes of traffic. In April 2017, 17 people lost their lives and in the same month of the next two years [2018 and 2019] 21 each died in road accidents,” he added.

He said the least number of deaths in April was registered more than 17 years ago but that too was in double digits. Though the situation looks positive for the authorities, it does not appear surprising to them amid the reduced movement of traffic on roads and almost non-existent commercial activities during the period under study.

Officials said that heavy vehicles always remained a key factor in most of the deadly road accidents.

“The number of heavy vehicles plying in the city crossed the 100,000 mark more than a year ago, making it a serious challenge for the authorities to manage the movement of these vehicles as they pose a serious threat to other motorists,” said an official.

He referred to a report compiled by the municipal authorities regarding the traffic situation in the city and number of vehicles moving on Karachi roads suggested how big the challenge was amid growing traffic, limited available space and insufficient number of traffic policemen.

"The report says that the number of heavy vehicles in Karachi right now stands at 107,000," said the official. "Among them is the highest number of oil tankers, which are 65,000 in total, and then 13,000 10-wheel trucks. There are some 10,000 long-haul, or 22-wheel trailer trucks, which are seen moving in the city; there are 8,000 water tankers, 7,000 dumpers and 4,000 six-wheel trucks." The new situation, however, has brought new challenges for the law enforcement agencies which are directly related to the imposition of lockdown and keeping the commuters off the roads under the recently-designed standard operating procedures.

"We have more than 7,000 personnel for Karachi," DIG Javed Mahar told Dawn. "Despite the lockdown, we have not cut the number of our officers and constables performing operational duties. There are some 200 traffic intersections on different roads and key links for the imposition of lockdown. We have experienced mixed response from the people, but we have to implement the rules in the larger interest of the public."

He said the traffic police faced challenges while enforcing the ban on pillion riding and those who were travelling on four-wheelers against SOPs set by the government. The traffic personnel, he said, were actively involved in implementing the government orders, which led to challans over violation of the pillion-riding ban and against travel of more than two persons in a car. (By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 27/05/2020)

### **Sindh govt announces resumption of intercity transport from today**

The Sindh government announced on Tuesday that the intercity transport services would resume from Wednesday (today) in all parts of the province.

In addition to allowing resumption of intercity transport, the government was also restoring "online transport services".

These announcements were made by Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah at a press conference. Information Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah and Chief Minister's Adviser Barrister Murtaza Wahab were also present.

The transport minister said that transporters would be required to strictly follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs).

He said that the transporters who would not comply with the government SOPs would not be allowed to operate.

*SOPs have been prepared for restarting online transport services*

Awais Shah said that detailed discussions had been held with transporters and they had given full assurance that they would implement the SOPs issued by the government.

About resumption of online transport services, he said separate SOPs had been devised and it would be mandatory for operators to follow them.

Speaking on the occasion, Information Minister Nasir Shah said that transporters would also be required to reduce their fares. He appealed to the people to fully take all precautionary measures while travelling.

Murtaza Wahab also asked the people to adopt the principle of social distancing while travelling.

#### **People asked to learn to live with virus**

The ministers also warned that the spread of the coronavirus in the province was showing an alarming sign, but maintained that the people have to learn to live with it "for a long time".

Nasir Shah said that the Sindh government was repeatedly saying if the guidelines issued on health were not followed, there could be huge losses. "If a complete lockdown was imposed in the beginning, the coronavirus would not have spread so much today. But now we have to live with it for a long time."

He said that it was unfortunate that despite repeated explanations, people were not taking the coronavirus seriously. "Our healthcare system has not got enough capacity to handle so many patients, so people have to take the coronavirus seriously," he said.

Mr Shah said that the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government was fortunate to have a sensible (PTI) mature opposition in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, but the situation in Sindh was completely different.

He said whenever the Sindh government talked about imposing a lockdown or ensuring implementation on health advisory or SOPs just to save lives, the opposition immediately held a press conference against it.

He said that the people had been constantly incited against the Sindh government by the opposition, adding that the Sindh government was portrayed as a villain or enemy.

#### **Call to increase country-wide testing capacity**

Mr Shah said that the Sindh government was continuously increasing the capacity of conducting tests for detection of people affected with Covid-19.

He said that in terms of population, the number of people infected with Covid-19 in Karachi was less than in Lahore and Islamabad. He said there was an urgent need to increase testing capacity to detect patients across the country.

He said that after the meeting of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) a unanimous voice and agreed decisions should reach the people so that they take these decisions seriously and realise that they had to follow them.

He said that if differences came to light after the NCC meeting, people would never take the decisions regarding the lockdown seriously.

He said that the Sindh government would ensure implementation of the decisions taken by the federal government regarding lockdown across the province.

Mr Shah said that when PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari was told that the people in the province were censuring the Sindh government owing to the imposition of a tougher lockdown and that they would not vote for the party in the next elections, he responded by asking the Sindh CM that he could lose the elections but would not compromise on people's lives.

Although the decisions taken by the Sindh government were unpopular, all these decisions were taken for the benefit of the people, he claimed.

He said that the PPP chairman had also asked the Sindh government to work with the federal government on the issue of coronavirus from the very outbreak of the pandemic.

#### **Check on prices ordered**

Regarding inflation, Nasir Shah said that CM Syed Murad Ali Shah had issued clear directives to all commissioners to keep an eye on inflation and to ensure that prices of essential commodities did not shoot up.

He said that the Sindh chief minister was trying to ensure that the prices of essential commodities should come down after the fall in prices of petroleum products.

He said that from now onwards everyone had to take precautionary measures at all times, adding that this was the only way that they could protect themselves and their loved ones from getting infected with the coronavirus.

He said that the Sindh government would have no objection if the services of Pakistan Army were sought for ensuring the implementation of the SOPs.

He said the opposition leader in Sindh feared that if the government arranged for his coronavirus test, it would come positive by any means. He clarified that he and the CM had also got tested from the Dow Lab.

Barrister Wahab urged the people to take precautionary measures as much as possible as the only way to keep safe.

He said people should now make face masks and sanitizers a part of their lives.

He said that the situation regarding coronavirus in the province was very bad as not only the elderly but also a large number of children had been infected.

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 03/06/2020)

### **Karachi buses get the green light**

Sindh Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah announced on Tuesday that the government had granted permission to resume ride-hailing services in Karachi and intra-city transport services across the province, starting today (Wednesday).

He made the announcement after a meeting with transporters, clarifying, however, that the resumption of public transport services was subject to conditions in line with the standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued to protect the public against the coronavirus.

#### **Transport guidelines**

Outlining the guidelines to be observed while using public transport, he said that only two persons would be allowed to travel in a vehicle booked via a ride-hailing company at a time, adding, though, that more persons could be allowed to travel at a time in case of an emergency.

Moreover, he stated that online bus-hailing enterprises had only been permitted to offer seat-to-seat services while the use of air conditioners was prohibited while carrying passengers.

Besides, transporters have also been instructed to keep sanitisers in vehicles and only allow persons wearing face masks to ride their vehicles, he said, adding that buses could only pick and drop passengers at specific terminals.

According to a notification issued by the transport and mass transit department, buses, terminals and waiting areas must be cleaned and disinfected, while social distancing must be observed during ticketing, boarding, traveling and alighting. Further, it stated that the body temperatures of every passenger as well as the driver and conductor must be checked before boarding, and no one with a cough or fever should be allowed on board.

The notification added that only half the seats should be filled, with reasonable distance between them, and ventilation should be ensured by opening windows or ventilators. Unwell or elderly passengers are also not permitted on board.

Inter-district and inter-province transport is still prohibited.

#### **Action against violations**

The transport minister warned that if any transporter failed to follow these guidelines, they would be restricted from operating and action would be taken against those not carrying sanitisers in vehicles and allowing people to ride their vehicles without wearing face masks.

He said that he had formed a monitoring and inspection team, comprising transport and revenue board officials, to ensure that SOPs issued for public transport were duly followed, maintaining that he had received assurances from transporters that they would observe the guidelines and allow only limited number of passengers to board their vehicles.

Meanwhile, in a meeting of transporters, Karachi Transport Ittehad president Irshad Bukhari gave assurances that drivers and fare collectors would use face masks, hand sanitisers and gloves, while passengers would only be allowed to sit seat by seat. He added that transporters failing to follow the SOPs would not receive any support.

#### **Recent developments**

Ride-hailing services and intra-city buses had been suspended as the government earlier imposed a lockdown to try and curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

In accordance with directives from the provincial government, Careem and Uber had temporarily suspended services in the province of Sindh from late March. Mass transit startup Airlift had also decided to temporarily suspend its services as the number of Covid-19 cases rose in Pakistan. Airlift had initially shut down its services till April 6, 2020.

Transporters, on the other hand, had persistently requested the government to allow them to resume services as they continued to face financial loss in the face of a pandemic-induced lockdown, warning that they would bring their buses onto the streets despite the ban earlier this week.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 03/06/2020)

### **Court gives transport dept a week to consult with transporters**

The Sindh High Court gave the provincial transport minister a week's time to consult with the transporters and resolve the matter of inter-provincial public transport.

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Omar Sial and Justice Zulfiqar Ali Sangi, was hearing the plea seeking removal of the ban on inter-provincial transport in Sindh.

The provincial Deputy Advocate-General informed the court that standard operating procedures (SOPs) for buses have been prepared, and the lifting of the ban is conditional upon adherence with the SOPs. Buses would be permitted to operate from the official bus terminals with implementation on SOPs, he said.

The counsel added that each bus that meets the condition would be issued a certificate by the motorway authorities, the transport department, and health inspectors and these certificates would be checked at the Toll Plaza.

The bench directed Sindh Transport and Mass Transit Minister Awais Qadir Shah to hold consultations with the transporters and resolve the matter within a week.

#### **Action against violations**

Separately, according to a notification issued by the Sindh transport and mass transit department on Tuesday, the department has taken notice of the violation of inter-district and inter-provincial public transport ban. Subsequently, the department has begun cancelling route permits of buses operating on inter-city routes.

According to the notification, only intra-city public transport has been permitted to operate in the province as of yet, and the ban on inter-district and inter-provincial transport remains. However, buses have been operating in violation of the ban from Kathore Bus Stop.

The department has constituted separate seven-member committees for each district - headed by the relevant assistant commissioner, which will act against violators of the ban.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 17/06/2020)

## No further forward for Orange Line BRT in sight

While several developmental projects halted by the lockdown gradually resume pace in the metropolis, the once ambitious Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project still remains a distant reality for the people of Karachi. Inaugurated in 2016 by erstwhile Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, the project which was expected to be completed in four years' time has since dwelled in the provincial government's neglect with snail's-pace progress. Although the government has earmarked Rs843.3 million for the project in the budget for the fiscal year of 2020-2021, yet the non-issuance of funds for the ongoing fiscal year has managed to bring the project to a grinding halt.



Since commencing in 2016 under the supervision of Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA), only 75% of the Orange Line BRT project has been completed so far. Citing reasons for the delay, a Sindh government source who wished to remain anonymous informed The Express Tribune that senior provincial government authorities have made

several political hirings in SMTA and the provincial transport department during these four years to support their ulterior motives. "In addition to that, although The Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA) was supposed to be responsible for the procurement of buses and the operational management of the project, it had to seek the federal government's help once the situation fell beyond its capacity. So given the incompetence of the department as a whole, the federal government has accepted the SMTA's official request to intervene and undertake the said responsibilities in order for the project to be completed," the source revealed. As per latest agreements, while the Sindh government will bear all the project expenses, the federal government now will procure 25 buses and handle the megaproject's operations for a period of three years. Following which, the centre will hand the buses and operational affairs back to the provincial government.

However, despite the Sindh government's latest responsibilities being reduced to only laying down the corridor for the bus system, there still seems to be no progress happening in that regard. A transport department officer privy to the project speaking to the Express Tribune on conditions of anonymity, cited various reasons for the project's delay. According to him, work on Orange Line BRT is halted since 22 March; when the provincial government imposed the coronavirus induced lockdown in the city. "Ironically, the development work on the project could not be resumed despite the ease in lockdown. The non-payment of arrears of the contractors is the reason behind the recent suspension of the project, in which the Sindh Finance Department is creating impediments. The arrears could not be cleared due to the non-payment of funds from the department, and thus, work on the project could not be resumed. It is feared that the project has been hit with a delay which will last for the next couple of months," the source asserted. However, Transport Secretary Ghulam Abbas Detho was unavailable for comment when approached for confirmation on the situation, by The Express Tribune.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 05,24/06/2020)

## Elusive mass transit

The Sindh capital, Karachi, has seen many plans drawn up for mass transit projects, but few have gone beyond the paper stage. As a result, over the years, public transport in the biggest city of the country has gone on shrinking while its population continues to swell. The Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit Project had kindled a new ray of hope, but this too has inordinately been delayed. Work on the project's construction was inaugurated in 2016 by then Sindh chief minister, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, and the project was to be completed in four years. Since the imposition of a lockdown in March this year the construction work has come to a grinding halt. Even before this, work had been moving at a snail's pace.

Besides the stoppage of work on the project, now it has hit several snags. The provincial government has earmarked Rs843.3 million for the project in the budget for 2020-2021 but no amount has so far been released. Officially, 75% of work has been completed on the project. A Sindh government official says provincial authorities had made several political hirings in the Sindh Mass Transit Authority, under whose supervision the Orange Line Project is being executed. Finding it difficult to carry on with the project the provincial government has sought the Centre's assistance.

Under a latest agreement with the federal government, while the Sindh government will bear the cost of the project, the former will procure 25 buses and handle the megaproject's operations for a period of three years. After three years, the federal government will hand over the buses and the project's operations to the Sindh government. Officials in the provincial government attribute the delay in the completion of the project also to non-payment of contractors' dues. They claim the provincial government is creating hurdles in the way of clearing contractors' arrears. However, the main reason for the delay in the project's completion is lack of political will.

(By Editorial 14, 25/06/2020)