

NEWSCLIPPINGS

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URBAN SERVICES



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Clean drinking water not available to majority of people in Pakistan, says PMA report

It is neither terrorism nor natural disasters but the unavailability of safe drinking water which leads to the highest number of deaths in Pakistan. The discharge of untreated industrial waste, poor sewerage system, agriculture run-off and unplanned urbanisation have downgraded water quality in Pakistan, depriving almost two-thirds of over 200 million Pakistanis of potable water, says a Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) report released on Thursday.

The report sheds light on the health challenges the country faced in the year 2020 and highlights flaws in the government strategy. It begins with the Covid-19 pandemic, its impact on the whole world and how people in Pakistan responded to it.

"Unfortunately, despite our regular warnings regarding coronavirus nobody acted upon our advice. Even the public has never followed the preventive measures seriously and the government also seems to be failing in implementing SOPs.

"Now the second wave is proving to be more lethal and deadlier as the virus has mutated itself and has become more transmissible and more infectious. It has been observed that people are not getting fully recovered even after being declared negative," it says.

Safe water remains a dream

One of the most pressing and fundamental health challenges the country faces, the report states, is the non-availability of clean, safe drinking water.

'Hepatitis B and C are several times more lethal viral diseases than the coronavirus infection and resulting in around 300 to 325 deaths daily'

"It is estimated that, in Pakistan, 30 per cent of all diseases and 40 per cent of all deaths are due to poor water quality. Diarrhoea, a waterborne disease, is reported as the leading cause of death in infants and children in Pakistan while every fifth citizen suffers from illness and disease caused by the polluted water," the report says.

On the country's failure to address the issue of poor water quality, it cites the outbreak of XDR-typhoid, which affected people, particularly children, in thousands in Sindh.

"It is a serious water-borne infection caused by the bacterium Salmonella Typhi that spreads through contaminated food and water. The germ has developed resistance to common treatment mainly due to the extensive, unnecessary use of antibiotics."

The association regrets that polio remains endemic to Pakistan despite over 100 rounds of vaccination carried out in the past decade. "Our anti-polio programme has deteriorated; in 2018 polio programme seemed to be on the brink of eradicating wild poliovirus transmission but unfortunately during the year 2019 as many as 117 cases were reported and in 2020 the tally of polio cases reached 83.

"This shows that we have not improved much. This is very unfortunate that the International Monitoring Board (IMB) observed that there is a lack of political unity behind polio resurgence in the country."

About government performance vis-à-vis hepatitis, it says an estimated 15 million people are infected with hepatitis B and C while thousands of new patients are being added every year due to lack of prevention, testing and treatment resources as well as poorly screened blood transfusions, improperly sterilised invasive medical devices and unsafe injections.

"Hepatitis B and C are several times more lethal viral diseases than the coronavirus infection and resulting in around 300 to 325 deaths daily in Pakistan, while Covid-19 is causing far fewer casualties than viral hepatitis. PMA believes the main reason for the rising number of hepatitis C cases in Pakistan is the presence of a large number of quacks."

The association also raises alarm over the growing number of HIV/AIDS patients in the country, which currently stands at 183,000.

"The ratio of spread of HIV/AIDS cases in Pakistan is 57 per cent, similar to the Philippines, which is very alarming. Out of the big number of estimated positive cases, only 25,000 cases are registered. This shows our poor performance. There is a dire need to increase testing capacity to check HIV/AIDS patients.

"The HIV and hepatitis B and hepatitis C are mostly spread through reuse of injection syringes, unsafe blood transfusion and mishandling of hospital waste."

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 01/01/2021)

Per unit tariff of SSGC consumers hiked by Rs44

The Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) on Thursday allowed Rs44 per unit (5.4 per cent) increase in the prescribed price for Karachi-based Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC).

The increase was determined on the request of the utility on the basis of its estimated revenue requirement (ERR) for financial year 2020-21. The regulator said the company will be able to meet Rs14.3 billion shortfall in its ERR, including prior year shortfall of Rs51bn. The new prescribed price has been worked out at Rs779 per Million British Thermal Unit (MMBTU) from the existing rate of Rs636 per MMBTU.

Ogra has also allowed the utility to double its gas meter rent from Rs20 per month to Rs40 per month for domestic consumers. In its determination, Ogra recommended to the government to fix Rs779 per unit rate for all consumer categories so that all consumers pay at least the cost of gas supply.

Under the law, the government has the right to set within 40 days different rates for various consumers within the overall revenue requirement approved by the regulator. Ogra said that if the federal government failed to get back

to it with its advice within 40 days and the prescribed price for any category of retail consumers determined by the authority is higher than the most recently notified sale price for that category of retail consumers, the authority would be obligated to notify in the official gazette the prescribed price as determined by the authority to be the sale price for the said category.

The regulator suggested that the petitioner should focus and make concerted efforts on reduction of UFG, improvement of internal control systems, increase of efficiency, quality of service, emergency response plan, and effective cost control, reduction measures should be taken to remain financially viable instead of making all-out efforts to seek passing on of costs associated with its own inefficiencies, malpractices, thefts, bad debts and alike to consumers.

Ogra said the SSGCL had reported that revised estimated revenue requirement (RERR) for the said year was reflecting a surplus of Rs22.745bn. However, after inclusion of Rs50.98bn, being unadjusted shortfall for prior years up to FY2017-18, the revenue shortfall stood at Rs28.242bn that required Rs78.95 per MMBTU increase for indigenous gas business.

However, examination of record and arguments of the interveners, the regulator allowed an increase of Rs44 per unit or 5.4pc increase in prescribed price for SSGCL.
(By Khaleeq Kiani Dawn, 01, 29/01/2021)

Fire truck fleet tours metropolis

A flag march was taken out in Karachi on Saturday, with 50 fire tenders and two bowsers, which were procured by the federal government for the metropolis last month, leaving the Governor House to journey through the city and return.

The fleet of the fire tenders and bowsers passed through Sharae Faisal, Karsaz Road, Hassan Square, Ghareebad, Liaquatabad and Nazimabad, and retraced the route to return to the Governor House.

According to a statement issued by Sindh Governor Imran Ismail's spokesperson, the march was led by chief fire officer in Karachi Mobin Ahmed.

The spokesperson said that the new equipment would help build the capacity of the fire department in the metropolis.

Procured at a cost of Rs1.4 billion from China, the purchase of the fire tenders and bowsers was made under a package announced by the Centre for Karachi, and the initiative is aimed at improving the city's fire emergency system, he added.

A ceremony to hand over the vehicles to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation will be held today (Sunday) at the Governor House.

However, according to sources in the fire department, there are not enough drivers to drive the trucks and no appointments had been made in the department since 2009.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 14/02/2021)

KMC receives 24 fire tenders

The much touted about fire equipment procured by the federal government was handed over to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and other bodies at a ceremony held at the Sindh Governor House on Sunday.

Addressing the event, former Karachi mayor Wasim Akhtar lauded the Centre's move and chided the Pakistan Peoples Party-led provincial government.

It is good news for Karachi that an effort has been made to improve the service of KMC's fire department, said Akhtar. It was the responsibility of the Sindh government but it did not pay attention to his request in this regard, added the former mayor, while thanking the federal government for taking the initiative.

"The provision of fire-fighting equipment is positive but, unfortunately, the KMC does not have enough drivers to drive them nor the money to buy diesel for them," remarked the Muttahida Quami Movement-Pakistan leader.

The former mayor demanded of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to immediately approve the summary of fire risk allowance, which, he claimed, has been facing delays for the past 13 months.

The government of Sindh has not been paying the share of the legally approved taxes for the past 13 years and the municipal corporation has not been receiving its complete share of octroi taxes either, decried Akhtar.

As many as 24 of the 50 recently imported fire tenders were received by the KMC while the remaining fire trucks and two bowsers were distributed between the Korangi Association of Trade and Industry, North Karachi Association of Trade and Industry, North

Karachi Association of Trade and Industry, FB Area Association of Trade and Industry, Bin Qasim Association of Trade and Industry, SITE Association of Trade and Industry, Export Processing Zone Authority and Bin Qasim Park. Moreover, the Saylani Welfare Trust and Sindh Rangers were given two fire tenders each while the Korangi Creek Industrial Park and Karachi Chamber of Commerce received one each.

Handing over the 50 fire tenders and two bowsers to the different recipients, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail censured the provincial government as well.

The mayor of a city is called the father of the city but stripped of his powers and funds, the mayor of Karachi was rendered "helpless," said the governor. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader apprised that Rs460 million tax was waived off for the fire fighting equipment - that was imported from China at a cost of Rs1.4 billion under the Centre's Karachi package - after approval by the premier and the Federal Board of Revenue. Ismail added that Rs6.5m tax was also waived off by the Karachi Port Trust, where the fire equipment had first reached.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has given special instructions to meet the expectations of people regarding development works in the metropolis, said Ismail.

The governor further said that the PTI-led federal government has decided to employ public private partnership models for the betterment of the city. Industrial associations, Sindh Rangers and the Saylani Welfare Trust are the party's allies and it is to them that the Centre has decided to hand over the fire equipment, the governor said.

These allies are not investing but they have been assigned responsibilities, elaborated Ismail.

Moreover, the governor claimed that Rs24b have been earmarked for the Sindh Infrastructure Development Corporation and Rs11b have been spent on the Green Line Bus project in the past three years. Besides, Ismail said, hospitals are to be built in every district of Sindh after approval by the premier. A model hospital has already been set up in this regard, he said.

Karachi Administrator Laeeq Ahmed, the Chinese consul general and PTI lawmakers also attended the ceremony.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 15/02/2021)

KMC seeks Sindh govt's nod for fresh recruitment to operate fire tenders

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court has summoned a senior government official after the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) submitted that it lacked manpower to operate all fire tenders and the department concerned had not responded to its letter yet.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar also directed the commissioner office to file a report whether a reference was sent to the registrar of the SHC for appointment of magistrates at district level as provided in the civil defence laws.

The bench directed the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) to come up with a final progress report about a mechanism for approval of building plan after obtaining no-objection certificates (NOCs) from the civil defence and fire departments till April 8.

When the bench took up for hearing a petition seeking implementation of Building Code of Pakistan and Fire Safety Provisions 2016 across the province, Assistant Commissioner Aijaz Rind filed a compliance report on behalf of the commissioner office and submitted that a helpline number (1299) had been made functional to meet any emergency.

SBCA director environment and building Irfan Haider informed the bench that in compliance with its earlier order, the SBCA director general had convened a meeting with an official of civil defence and he placed some viable proposals including a provision of fire exit door to meet any emergency in each flat site and commercial as well as industrial buildings.

SHC asks commissioner office to share details about appointment of magistrates as provided in civil defence laws

KMC's Chief Fire Officer Mubin Ahmed said that he had also attended the meeting and submitted some proposals for incorporating in the approval letter for buildings. The bench directed the director-SBCA to come up with the final progress report on the next hearing.

The lawyer for KMC, Saeed Akhtar, submitted that 52 fire tenders had been provided by the federal government and 10 out of 30 damaged firefighting vehicles had been repaired.

The bench directed him to file a report about the remaining out-of-order fire tenders on the next date.

The counsel further argued that there was a lack of manpower to operate these vehicles and the metropolitan commissioner had already sent a letter to the local government secretary in this regard, but no action had so far been taken.

The bench asked the additional LG secretary to be in attendance on the next date of hearing along with latest update on the issue.

Focal person of civil defence Shahid Masroor said that as per civil defence laws, there was a provision of appointment of a magistrate at each district to take cognizance of non-compliance of the directions, but no such appointments had so far been made.

The assistant commissioner submitted that the appointments were to be made on the recommendations of the SHC chief justice.

The bench directed him to file a progress report whether the competent authority had forwarded a reference to the registrar of the SHC for appointment of magistrates.

Petitioner Nadeem Shaikh submitted that in view of the directive issued by the bench earlier, the task force for inspection of different buildings and implementation of fire safety laws had become functional at the district level.

The bench was further informed that the task force was conducting inspection vigilantly to make sure that all fire safety measures were being taken by all commercial and industrial establishments.

The bench directed the task force to continue it in future as well.

The lawyer for KMC said that there were 14 industrial zones in the provincial metropolis and 26 fire tenders had already been dedicated to such zones to meet any emergency.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 20/03/2021)

Murad approves Rs17.7bn for snorkels, fire tenders, refuse trucks

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah approved on Tuesday Rs17.7 billion to buy eight snorkels, fire tenders, refuse trucks, tractors and trolleys for Sindh's local bodies.

He took this decision while presiding over a meeting here at CM House. The meeting was attended by Local Government Minister Nasir Husain Shah and relevant officials.

The local government department presented a proposal to purchase eight snorkels for extinguishing fires in high-rise buildings.

The chief minister was told that eight snorkels, each one 35 metres long, would be purchased for the divisional headquarters — three for Karachi, one each for the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, Nawabshah, Sukkur, Mirpurkhas and Larkana divisions.

The local government minister told the chief minister that tenders for the purchase of snorkels had been floated. He added that the snorkels were needed for all divisional headquarters. At this the chief minister said that Rs1.5bn would be made available in the next financial year.

The LG minister further informed the meeting that the municipal committees had to transport garbage collected in their respective areas to their landfill sites, therefore, 102 tractors and trolleys were required and the purchase would cost Rs4.1bn.

The chief minister, in principle, approved the proposal and directed the finance department to make the amount available at the start of the next financial year.

The local government department presented another scheme for the purchase of 89 fire tenders for different municipal committees.

The local government minister said that most of the municipal committees were in need of fire tenders for firefighting.

Murad Ali Shah approved Rs2.8bn for purchase of 89 fire tenders to be provided to the municipal committees all over Sindh.

The chief minister approved another proposal of the local government department under which 115 refuse trucks would be purchased for Rs9.3bn in the next financial year.

Murad Ali Shah directed the LG minister to activate the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and the DMCs to clean their major nullahs. "The monsoon season is approaching, therefore, desilting of major nullahs should be started shortly," he said.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 21/04/2021)