

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JANUARY TO JUNE 2020

URBAN SERVICES



Urban Resource Centre

A-2, 2nd floor, Westland Trade Centre, Block 7&8, C-5, Shaheed-e-Millat Road, Karachi.
Tel: 021-4559317, Fax: 021-4387692, Email: urc@cyber.net.pk, Website: www.urckarachi.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/URCKHI Twitter: https://twitter.com/urc_karachi

As flames erupt in Karachi, fire tenders run out of diesel

As a blaze broke out at a towel factory in SITE on Thursday, fire tenders engaged in attempts to douse the inferno ran out of diesel. They were helped out of their predicament by the SITE Association, which provided fuel for the fire department's vehicles.

Sources informed The Express Tribune that 18 fire tenders belonging to the city's fire department were not functional, out of which 10 were not working purely due to the non-availability of diesel. This left only four operational fire tenders for the city of over 20 million people, during the dry winter season in which fires in the metropolis have become a daily occurrence.

The factory fire erupted at a three-storey building, Sardar Textiles, near Habib Chowrangi in SITE. The flames rapidly grew in intensity and enveloped the building, burning cloth, cartons, machinery and other equipment worth millions of rupees to ashes. No loss of life was reported.

Police, Rangers, SITE Association representative and other rescue organisations quickly arrived outside the burning building and immediately informed the fire department. Two fire tenders and one bowser arrived at the scene and managed to control the flames in three hours. The risk of halting the efforts when the vehicles ran out of fuel was averted by the timely provision of diesel by the SITE Association.

M Farhan, a representative of the association, informed the media that on the request of the fire department, they had provided 150 litres of diesel, of which 70 litres has already been filled into the vehicles. He claimed that they had been ready to fetch more diesel if needed, adding that two water tankers had also been deputed to assist the fire-fighters.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Navy personnel also participated in the efforts to cool down the factory building. Hawaldar Mohammad Sharif, who took part in the operation, said that the rescuers had trouble extinguishing the blaze due to narrow staircases and the presence of large amounts of flammable material in the building.

He added that the cause of the fire had not yet been ascertained. However, he went on to say, the factory was completely packed with material such as cloth and cartons and lacked evacuation points in case of emergency.

Sharif said that the provision of diesel to the fire department had been stopped because of non-payment of dues. As a result, the fire-fighters had requested the factory owners and SITE Association representatives for fuel.

After the news of the fire tenders running out of fuel broke on Thursday, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation released funds to supply diesel to five vehicles, of which two arrived at the factory to help douse the flames. However, the fire was already under control at that point.

There are 23 fire stations in Karachi, out of which 10 were forced to shut down due to persistent negligence by the authorities, The Express Tribune previously reported. The dire situation has been further exacerbated by the unavailability of diesel, which forced the number of functional fire stations down to seven last weekend. The matter has severely compromised the fire department's ability to respond to emergencies.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 17/01/2020)

CM orders purchase of Rs4bn snorkels, fire tenders, vehicles for local councils

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has asked the local government ministry to expedite the process for procurement of snorkels, fire tenders and tractor trolleys for local councils across the province.

He issued these directives while presiding over a meeting here on Saturday. The meeting was attended by the ministers for local government and excise and taxation, Nasir Shah and Mukesh Chawla, principal secretary to CM Sajid Abro, the secretaries for local government and finance, Roshan Shaikh and Hassan Naqvi, director general of the Sindh Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (SPPRA) Raheem Shaikh and consultant Niaz Soomro.

Officials said the provincial government had decided to provide snorkels to the local councils in all the divisional headquarters, and tractors trolleys, fire tenders, refuse vans, and garbage compactors to every municipal and town committee across the province.

They said there was a proposal to purchase 15 snorkels, 89 fire tenders and a large number of refuse vehicles, compactors and other equipment, vital for firefighting, at a cost of around Rs4 billion.

Plan to develop geo-information system for the regions with forests across Sindh

Some Rs1.5bn has been allocated in the current year, 2019-20, to spend on the project aimed at saving people's lives.

The meeting was told that snorkels would be provided to the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, Qasimabad Municipal Committee and large municipalities in the cities of Nawabshah, Sukkur, Mirpurkhas and Larkana.

Those divisional headquarters, except for Qasimabad, have no snorkel to extinguish fires in high-rises.

Out of 89 fire tenders, 15 would be provided to Karachi, 10 to Hyderabad, eight to Larkana, six to Benazirabad, four to Qasimabad and certain others towns.

Similarly, tractor trolleys, refuse vehicles and compactors would be provided to the town and municipal committees.

The chief minister asked the LG minister to revise the list of municipal and town committees and rearrange them in order to ensure the biggest such municipalities, in terms of population and works, could be provided firefighting equipment on a priority basis in the first phase. The remaining local councils would get the same equipment in the second phase.

CM Shah also asked local government officials to issue strict directions to all local bodies operating across the province, including the rural regions, to ensure that proper cleanliness of streets and roads could be made and their sanitation system could be better maintained.

The meeting decided to invite international tenders with the objective to give an opportunity to foreign companies to compete as well.

Geo-information system

LG Minister Nasir Shah, who also holds the portfolio of forest and wildlife, told the chief minister that he had worked out a plan to develop the geo-information system (GIS) for the regions that hosted forestry across Sindh.

The chief minister said the Board of Revenue's automation unit had the technology and asked the minister to get that facility involved in introducing GIS in all forests in the province.

The CM said the provincial government would be able to watch activities in forests with the help of the GIS. Besides, those who had been given forest land could also be monitored to know whether they were complying with the preconditions they had accepted while being allotted those lands.

He said time had arrived to take maximum benefit from the latest technology — from protecting forests to making the taxation system efficient.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 26/01/2020)

Karachi gas leak

MORE than 10 days have passed since what appeared to have been a mysterious gas leak claimed 14 lives and affected hundreds of others near Karachi's port. Questions have been raised, multiple inquiries launched, and various far-fetched and probable theories floated, both in private circles and in the public domain. And yet the absence of clear answers from the concerned authorities and provincial government is baffling. With no new patients being admitted to hospitals, the incident may soon be forgotten, but it has exposed massive governance lapses. Even now, we have not ascertained the source or type of gas that led to the deaths of so many and caused some 250 people to fall sick. If the authorities cannot provide answers to questions raised by a concerned public — or worse, if they are involved in some sort of a cover-up and deliberately concealing information — it only leaves citizens vulnerable to future environmental and industrial threats, as they will be forced to make sense of one tragedy after another. One cannot help but wonder what — if any — system of industrial checks is in place, and what would the government do if an even bigger tragedy were to unfold? Or are we supposed to live according to the law of the jungle, with each citizen looking out for themselves?

Industrial accidents and gas leaks pose a constant threat to workers and the general public, and there is no room for negligence or ambiguity in such matters of life and death. Memories of the Bhopal disaster — when in 1984 a gas leak from a pesticide plant endangered the lives of 600,000 people, killing around 15,000 of them — were awakened once again. Even decades later, residents of the city continue to suffer from the aftereffects of the toxic fumes, its residue left behind in the environment and groundwater. It is not clear if any lessons from the most recent tragedy in Karachi have been learnt. Welcome to the jungle.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 27/02/2020)