

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

**JULY TO DECEMBER 2018**

## URBAN SERVICES



## Urban Resource Centre

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## **CM approves one snorkel, three fire tenders for Karachi**

Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has announced to hand one snorkel and three fire tenders over to the Karachi administration and seven other fire tenders to the administration of divisional headquarters of the province.



The CM took the decision on Monday while presiding over a meeting to review progress of ongoing development schemes launched under Karachi Package.

Shah expressed his concern over recent blazes in various factories and shopping centres in the city. He directed the local government minister to inquire into the fire incidents.

"I want to hand over one snorkel and three fire tenders to Karachi, six fire tenders to divisional headquarters and one fire tender to Qasimabad, Hyderabad," he said.

### **Murad Ali Shah and his cabinet to take oath today**

The snorkel procured for the city is 104 metres long, purchased at a cost of Rs199 million. The fire tenders have been purchased for Rs19 million each.

The CM inquired about four major ongoing schemes in the city – renovation of Tipu Sultan Road, Tipu Sultan Flyover, Sunset-Gizri Boulevard Flyover and Cant Station road – which were in progress when his last tenure ended. He was informed that all the schemes were almost complete with only minor touch-ups left.

Shah asked Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani to make necessary arrangements for their inauguration. "I want to officially open them for public this week," he said.

Soomro briefed the CM on the construction of U-turn at Natha Khan Bridge, which is a Rs70 million project. The meeting was informed that the pace of work was slow and only 5% of work had been completed. Shah directed his principal secretary Sohail Rajput to look into land acquisition issues of the U-turn so that it could be completed within the next two months.

The meeting was informed that 70% work on Drigh Road underpass along Sharae Faisal with restoration of right turn bridge had been accomplished and further work was in progress. It is a Rs1.6 billion scheme.

Work on Submarine Chowrangi project worth Rs2.2 billion was 95% complete, the CM was informed. The CM pointed out that beautification of the chowrangi and opening of connecting roads was still pending. "I have seen it personally and want you to complete it at the earliest," he directed Karachi Package Project Director Niaz Soomro.

Shah also expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace of development work at Karachi Zoo. It is hardly a Rs331.3 million scheme, he said, directing Soomro to expedite the work.

It was pointed out that widening of Stadium Road from the National Stadium to Rashid Minhas Road, which is a Rs379.8 million project, had been completed 75%. Similarly construction of road from Tank Chowrangi to the Super Highway via Thaddo Nalo, which is a Rs574 million project, had been 85% achieved.

The construction of a storm drain from the Star Gate to Chakora Nullah, that has been estimated at Rs200 million, is still in its initial stages, the meeting was informed. To this, the CM directed the local government minister to personally monitor the completion of on-going schemes. "I want them to be completed at the earliest so that we could start new schemes," he said.

### **Murad Ali Shah scorns Shehbaz's promises for Sindh**

The meeting was also attended by Local Government Secretary Khalid Hyder Shah, Finance Secretary Noor Alam, Planning and Development Secretary Shireen Narejo and other officers.

### **CM calls on Bilawal**

The CM also called on Pakistan Peoples Party Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at Bilawal House. Ghani was also present at the meeting. The CM informed Bilawal about his strategy to improve governance in the province and and resolve issues being faced by the people.

Ghani briefed the PPP chairperson on the role of his department in facilitating local bodies of the province to deliver facilities at the grass-root level.

Speaking to Ghani, Bilawal said local governments were the basic tiers of democracy and they were responsible for the delivery of civic amenities to people. The PPP chairperson directed the local government minister to take steps to improve local bodies. (By Our Correspondent, The Express Tribune, 05, 28/08/2018)

## **104-metre high snorkel, three new fire engines given to Karachi mayor by CM**

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah handed over 10 brand new fire engines and one snorkel to different local bodies during a ceremony held at Baradari on Friday.



The fire engines are Meraj special purpose MFT-8500 model firefighting vehicles built on the chassis of Isuzu FVR 4x2 Euro-2 trucks. Each engine has an 8,000 litres water tank and a 500 litres foam tank made of polypropylene sheets that have a life-time warranty and corrosion protection.

Besides this they have German origin normal and high pressure fire pumps and a built-in priming system along with high pressure 50-metre-long hose reels among other things, including a spacious crew compartment for firefighters equipped with all necessary tools.

Each fire engine has been purchased at a cost of Rs19 million bringing up the total cost of 10 fire engines to Rs190m.

A Bronto firefighting snorkel of 104 metres height has a 600-LPM fire pump capacity, a 1,000 LPM foam tank, remote water monitor for firefighting from cage having capacity of 3,800 LPM.

It has four hydraulically powered outriggers that provide a strong stabilisation system to rescue at a maximum height with accuracy and stability.

*Different local bodies in Sindh given a total of 10 new fire trucks*

It also has 360-degree rotation with telescopic booms. The snorkel has been purchased for Rs495m.

While handing over the snorkel and three fire engines, the CM also handed over the remaining fire engines to the elected representatives of local bodies from Hyderabad, Qasimabad in Hyderabad, Sukkur, Shaheed Benazirabad, Mirpurkhas, Larkana and Jacobabad.

Mayor Karachi Wasim Akhtar received the keys of the snorkel and the three fire engines.

Addressing the ceremony, the CM said that there was a dire need to equip all district and taluka headquarters with fire engines and other such equipment to improve the firefighting capabilities of the fire brigade.

"We started this exercise during our last tenure and had ordered the purchase of one snorkel and 10 fire engines for the local bodies of Karachi and other districts," he said adding that he was glad to hand over the keys of the fire trucks to the local bodies' representatives.

He said that Karachi was one of the biggest cities of the world with lofty structures and multistorey buildings.

"It was in need of a snorkel for firefighting in high-rise buildings. The snorkel I am handing over to the mayor of Karachi is one [of] the highest snorkels in the world with 104 meters height for rescuing people stuck in high-rise buildings during a fire incident," he said.

The programme was also attended by Minister for Local Government Saeed Ghani, Women Development Minister Shehla Raza, Adviser to the Chief Minister Murtaza Wahab, the Hyderabad mayor and representatives of different local bodies.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 15, 13/10/2018)

### **Shady deal: Karachi's snorkel cost taxpayers more than double its price**

Amid much pomp, the Sindh government handed over a 104-metre snorkel to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) around three weeks ago. At the handing-over ceremony, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah hailed it as one of the highest snorkels in the world and a much-needed apparatus to navigate fires in high-rise buildings in the city.



What was left unsaid was that the equipment cost taxpayers more than double its actual price.

According to the CM, the snorkel was procured for Rs495 million. Now, before you start counting the zeroes in that figure, let this give you some perspective – the snorkel actually costs Rs210 million.

Niaz Soomro, the project director, told The Express Tribune that the Sindh government had given the contract, keeping the Punjab government's procurement in mind. "The only difference is the dollar rate, which was slightly higher when we placed the order and we also paid extra as two-year operational costs," Soomro told The Express Tribune.

His words were echoed by the project manager, Khalid Masroor, who said that at least four or five vendors had bid for the contract, out of which the contract was awarded to the bidder with the closest price to Punjab's purchase. In this case, the winning bid was made by the same company that supplied the snorkel for Lahore.

What either of the officials failed to explain was the discrepancies in the actual price of equipment, as invoiced by Bronto Skylift, and the amount paid for by the Sindh government. The actual cost, according to the Customs clearance document, available with The Express Tribune is around Rs210m. Add to this, the Rs90m in Customs duties and taxes and you have yourself the total amount spent by the contractor to land the equipment in Karachi's streets.

The local bodies minister, Saeed Ghani, told The Express Tribune that he had inquired from his department the price of the snorkel procured for Lahore. "My department's officials told me that the snorkel for Lahore cost the same and was delivered at the same time as ours," he said, claiming that each snorkel was tailor-made to the client's specifications.

In fact, the duties and taxes could have been avoided altogether had the Sindh government imported the snorkel itself, without involving the middle man. According to Custom's law, chapter 44 and 99, no duty is imposed on machinery imported by the Sindh or federal governments to facilitate citizens.

When this was pointed out to Soomro, he reasoned that the Sindh government did not have the technical expertise to make such procurements, which is why they contracted them out. "The same is the case in the construction of roads," he justified. "If we had to operate this way, wouldn't we make the roads ourselves too, instead of giving them to contractors?"

Even so, how this figure was inflated to Rs495m is beyond anyone's imagination, save the Sindh government's.

According to the source, who spoke to The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity, the Finnish company does not give any kickback or commission on the sale or purchase of equipment. The Sindh government, the source alleged, hence chose to go with a local vendor. In this case, the contract was given to a Meraj Limited.

### **The firm**

According to its website, Meraj Limited is a "manufacturer and supplier of special application truck bodies, pump and equipment". The company, founded in 1976, has supplied equipment to civil authorities, Pakistan's armed forces and even exports its products to other countries.

In 2009, however, the firm was blacklisted by the Punjab Emergency Service "on account of poor performance". In an advisory, a copy of which is available with The Express Tribune, the deputy director for procurement, Dr Muhammad Yahya Butt had noted that the "firm had failed to fulfill her contractual obligations, supplied defective vehicles and delayed the repairs".

In 2015, the firm was embroiled in yet another controversy – this time in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa – when it was established in a National Accountability Bureau inquiry that Meraj Limited worked in connivance with local government department officials to sell sanitation vehicles and equipment on exorbitant rates. The total loss to the national exchequer, NAB noted, was Rs110m. Asked why the Sindh government chose to do business with a firm that had such a checkered history, Ghani said he had just taken charge of the department and could not respond to why the local government department had chosen to do so.

When The Express Tribune contacted Meraj Limited for comment, the company's spokesperson directed all queries related to the project to Soomro.

For his part, Soomro justified that Lahore had given the contract to the same company, therefore it was not blacklisted in the province any longer. "The same company also provides equipment to the army," he justified.

### **Snorkels in court**

In December 2016, a petition was filed in the Sindh High Court, seeking an inquiry into alleged corruption in the purchase of a snorkel at an exorbitant rate by the local government department. The petitioner had alleged that the officials will misappropriate the hard-earned money of the tax payers in the shady procurement deal through kickbacks and commissions.

In January 2017, the finance additional secretary of the provincial government had informed the SHC that not a single rupee had been released for the purchase of the 104-metre snorkel as its bid was cancelled.

The very next month, however, the contract was awarded to Meraj Limited, which was to procure the snorkel for Rs495m.

### **Not fit for use**

The vehicle that carries the 104-metre snorkel is 55-foot-long, 8ft wide, 14.6ft high and weighs 65.4 tonnes. According to a senior official in the fire department, the snorkel cannot be used in most areas of Karachi as its dimensions and weight severely restrict its maneuverability and mobility.

"Commercial areas such as II Chundrigar Road, MA Jinnah Road and Saddar as well as densely-populated areas such as North Nazimabad, Nazimabad and Gulshan have narrow streets that are inaccessible with this snorkel," the fire official told The Express Tribune, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Soomro rubbished these claims, however, saying that most areas of Clifton and II Chundrigar Road, where high-rise buildings were located, had wide enough roads to accommodate the snorkel.

For all it's worth, Karachi – this city of over 21 million people – finally has a snorkel. It may have cost the city over double its actual price. It may not be suited to the city's needs. But the shiny red truck may give the wary citizens a false sense of security that they may be saved in case a fire caught them unawares.

(By Naeem Khanzada / Shahzeb Ahmed The Express Tribune, 04, 30/10/2018)

## City firefighters get latest equipment

The fire brigade department of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation was on Friday handed over latest firefighting equipment and gear, including jumping cushion and complete Nomex firefighting suits with boots.

City Mayor Wasim Akhtar handed over the new equipment and apparatus worth over Rs160 million to the fire department during a ceremony.

He said that the municipal administration would continue its efforts to modernise the fire brigade and maximum funds would be allocated to it as the firefighters protected the life and property of people by putting their own lives in danger.

Talking to media on the occasion, the mayor said that he started efforts for improvement in the KMC fire brigade since he took over the office of mayor.

Metropolitan Commissioner Dr Syed Saif-ur-Rehman was also present on the occasion. The mayor gave fire brigade different fire extinguishing and rescue equipment including five positive pressure ventilators/smoke extractors, one jumping cushion for emergency rescue operations, one vertical spiral escape chute, one decontamination tent, decontamination shower system, 25 complete Nomex firefighting suits with boots, 25 fire helmets, 25 leather gloves and 25 respirators with full face piece and 25 others with half face piece.

A demonstration was also held on this occasion during which firefighters used equipment to rescue people in a mock fire drill.

The mayor said that the firefighters were getting fire risk allowance on regular basis.

### Anti-encroachment operation

The anti-encroachment operation continued in parts of the city, including M.A. Jinnah Road from Lighthouse to Tower.

Officials said that all encroachments from footpaths were removed along M.A. Jinnah Road, from Lighthouse to Tower.

They said that anti-encroachment staff also seized goods and material present on the extended parts of the shops on pavements.

The officials said that encroachments were removed at Bara Board and Pak Colony in district West and Power House,

Bara Market, 5000 Road, Sector 5-BJ and adjoining areas in North Karachi.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 08/12/2018)

## Sindh govt urged to take up gas supply issue with Islamabad

A day after the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) suspended gas supply to compressed natural gas (CNG) stations in the province, Sindh Assembly's opposition and ruling parties jointly condemned the decision and demanded the federal government to intervene in the matter and restore gas supply to Sindh, which produces 70% of the total national gas output.



Submitting a resolution in Sindh Assembly secretariat on Wednesday, Grand Democratic Party MPA Nand Kumar Goklani asked the Sindh government to approach the Centre to ensure uninterrupted gas supply to CNG stations, power plants and industries located in the province.

"Sindh, [despite] being the largest province in terms of producing gas, is suffering from an energy crisis. Gas loadshedding has started in various cities and towns. The government must take notice of this issue and resolve it without any delay," said Goklani, while speaking to the media.

Meanwhile, Sindh Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh termed the suspension of gas supply a deliberate attempt on the part of the federal government to punish the people of Sindh, who have rejected Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the province.

### K-Electric alleges SSGC reluctant to commit natural gas supply

"The Prime Minister, in his speeches, had promised to resolve the energy crisis, but he has apparently taken yet another U-turn. I have called the federal petroleum minister and recorded Sindh's protest on it," said Shaikh, adding that Sindh plays a significant role in gas production.

"We have demanded to first fulfill Sindh's needs regarding energy consumption, then supply gas to other provinces," he said.

### Transporters' protest

SSGC's decision to suspend gas supply to CNG stations has also irked transporters and the CNG association. They have threatened to protest the move. A large number of buses, taxis, rickshaws and vans were seen parked at various CNG stations in the city, waiting for the gas supply to resume.



The Sindh CNG Association slammed SSGC's move of suspending gas supply indefinitely to CNG stations. At a press conference in Hyderabad on Wednesday, the association's patron, Dr Zulfiqar Ahmed Yousfani, claimed that the decision has adversely affected 40,000 labourers employed in Sindh's 650 CNG stations.

#### **Gas pipelines necessary to save economy from collapse**

According to him, between Rs80 billion and Rs100b have been invested in setting up CNG stations in the province. He lamented that their investment has been put on stake due to irregular supply of fuel.

He argued that the gas supply to the CNG stations has been suspended from Tuesday for an indefinite period without a justifiable reason. "It has happened for the first time that the stations are closed indefinitely."

Yousfani said that the association is planning to hold protests at the offices of SSGC in Karachi and Hyderabad. "Pakistan's federal government had claimed that it will create jobs for tens of thousands of unemployed people. On the contrary, its measures are rendering as many people redundant."

He said that the Sindh province is responsible for 70% of the country's total gas production and Article 158-B of the Constitution allowed a province to meet its demand before sharing gas with other provinces. He contended that the gas supply suspension is a violation of that Article.

Meanwhile, Sindh Hiace Van Association announced to block the National Highway in Sukkur on December 16. The association's president, Manzoor Ali Brohi, claimed that 5,000 to 6,000 CNG-fitted vans in Sindh provided transport to around 400,000 passengers daily in the province.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 13/12/2018)

### **Sindh threatens to stop gas supply to other provinces**

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has threatened to halt gas supply to all other provinces and also start a protest movement from today (Friday) against the suspension of gas supply to CNG stations in the province. Addressing a joint press conference on Thursday, the PPP's Sindh chapter president, Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, lashed out at the Centre over the move. "People from all walks of life are suffering due to the suspension of gas supply.



Domestic consumers, CNG stations, industries as well as small factories are all affected by the federal government's decision to stop gas supply in the province," he said.

#### **Senate panel recommends lifting ban on new gas connections**

Khuhro was flanked by adviser to CM on information, Barrister Murtaza Wahab, Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh and Transport Minister Owais Shah. "Around 71% of Pakistan's gas is produced by Sindh," he claimed.

"Pakistan's Constitution guarantees to fulfill the energy demand of the area where the gas is produced and then supply it to other areas," he said, adding that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-led federal government was displaying a step-motherly attitude towards Sindh.

"We have planned rallies in all district headquarters and a large demonstration will be organised in Karachi, which has been bearing the brunt of the energy crisis owing to the federal government's incompetency," he said.

Referring to the PTI's promises, Khuhro said, "They made tall claims to do justice and uphold the rule of law but now sitting at the helm of affairs, PTI government has committed flagrant violations of Article 158 of the Constitution by snatching rights of smaller provinces," he said. "This all is being done in modern Pakistan, which is being compared with the welfare state of Madina."

According to Khuhro, the people of Sindh were first deprived of water and now the PTI has gifted a gas crisis. He appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan to reconsider his policies and not force the people of Sindh to take to the streets against federal government's discriminatory policies.

Energy Minister Imtiaz Ahmad Shaikh was of the view that soon after the suspension of gas supply, he had recorded Sindh's protest with the federal government. Shaikh also raised the issue of Sindh's representation in the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA).

"They don't take Sindh into confidence in power generation and other matters which affect the whole country," he said.

Transport Minister Owais Qadir Shah complained that owing to the closure of CNG stations, the flow of public transport has been badly affected in Karachi. "People are unable to get to work due to shortage of transport," he said.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that the PPP believed in respecting the Constitution and every article in the Constitution was important to the party. He added that the people of Pakistan could not be served until the implementation of every Article was ensured. Before coming to power, the PTI had made tall claims of upholding the rule of law, but after coming to power, its actions had proved that the Constitution bore no value for them.

"The suspension of gas supply for the last three days is in sheer violation of Article 158 of the Constitution," he said. Wahab said that Sindh was contributing a major chunk to the country's gas production and as per the Constitution, Sindh had the first right on its resources.

"Unfortunately, the federal government is repeatedly denying the rights of the people of Sindh," he remarked.

### **Sindh govt urged to take up gas supply issue with Islamabad**

Transport woes With CNG stations closed across the province, the streets of the country's economic hub wore an almost deserted look on Thursday as transporters chose to not ply their vehicles. Commuters, who normally relied on public transport to get to their places of work or schools, were in a fix as the only other alternative were the more expensive taxis or private vehicles. In Badin, hundreds of dailywage drivers and other bus staff expressed apprehension over the loss of their sole source of income.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 14/12/2018)

## **Gas crisis**

THE prime minister did the right thing by intervening directly when the gas crisis spread in the country earlier this week, crippling industry and disrupting traffic across Punjab and Sindh. But he could have waited till the crisis was over to launch an inquiry into allegations against the top management of the gas distribution companies.

That announcement did not need to be made at the very peak of the crisis because it fuelled a sense of panic amongst the staff of the gas companies precisely at a time when their energies needed to be focused on resolving the situation. Once supplies were restored and normalcy returned, there would have been ample time for initiating inquiries.

The petroleum minister set the standard for evading responsibility and scapegoating the companies that fall directly under his authority. He told the prime minister that the senior management of these companies provided him with incorrect information about the demand in winter and the operational status of some parts of the distribution grid.

Yet the inquiry committee consists of precisely those people who for years have been drawing up gas demand projections in winter. It beggars belief how the government believes that such an inquiry committee will furnish the answers they seek, unless their response to the crisis is nothing more than finding heads to roll.

The government's response to the crisis appears to be driven by panic and scapegoating and blaming instead of fixing the problem first.

Having now constituted the committee, the government should perhaps use this opportunity to look at the kinds of policy reforms that the gas sector is in urgent need of.

It should also take seriously the complaints from Sindh that the Constitution's Article 158 — which gives priority access to gas to those provinces where it is being produced — is being violated.

Beyond that, pricing as well as governance reforms are badly required across the sector, especially as imported LNG is all set to play a bigger role.

Transmission and distribution losses are mounting, the public companies are riddled with maintenance issues, liquidity problems, financial mismanagement and much more. It is a matter of concern that they keep asking for the Unaccounted for Gases target to be raised, and that the gas pricing structure gives them a fixed return no matter what their performance.

Short, sharp crises of supply during the winter months are now becoming routine in the gas sector, and last year we saw a similar episode during which SSGC cut off supplies to K-Electric and tried to cite the absence of a gas purchase agreement as the reason. Clearly, shortages are growing, and without pricing and governance reform, the deficits will continue to trigger more such episodes. This crisis, as well as the inquiry, provide, an excellent opportunity to launch an effort at comprehensive reform.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 15/12/2018)