

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

*JULY TO DECEMBER 2020*

## URBAN SERVICES



## Urban Resource Centre

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## Moveable public toilet at Lea Market opens

In the heart of Lea Market, near the Hub Chowki bus stop, there is now a cargo container having four clean toilets, washbasins, soap and sanitiser dispensers, as well as diaper-changing tables and ramps offering easy access to special citizens, at its entrance. The toilets, two for women and two for men, are a part of Pakistan's first privately-managed public project 'Saaf Bath', launched by the Salman Sufi Foundation in collaboration with the government of Sindh on Sunday.

A brainchild of Salman Sufi, the project looks to initiate an inclusive health and sanitation campaign across the country.

Saaf Bath is designed to benefit pedestrians, especially women, and to cater to people of all genders and different abilities.

"The toilet containers will be maintained on a daily basis through the foundation's coordinating officers and an independent waste management and sanitation providing agency," Mr Sufi told Dawn, adding that there was availability of boring water in the Lea Market area.

He said that for the project, his foundation was partnering with several corporate companies including Reckitt Benckiser, that had donated the first two sets of toilets for Lea Market and Jheel Park, and Sufi Group, which were in charge of installing public toilets in the urban, semi-urban and rural areas of the country.

"To this end, the second phase of the initiative will be implemented in Punjab," he added.

He said that women were particularly affected by a lack of public toilets. "There are also toilets and washing up facilities in mosques for men but womenfolk don't have that," he pointed out.

Junaid Jamil, a sanitation worker brought in to oversee the cleaning of the toilets, said that he would have a toilet, used once, cleaned before the next person would use it.

He also said that Rs20 would be charged for using the facility.

Deputy Commissioner Irshad Sohail, who had suggested to Sufi to initiate the project from Lea Market, said that he wanted the facility near bus stops where there are lots of people.

"We had thought of Seaview beach and the Abdullah Shah Ghazi shrine as well as other places for installing the toilets, but then we thought this place would be best," he said.

Sindh Minister for Women Development Shehla Raza shared that it had often happened with her as well that she was out shopping with her mother and they have had to rush back home to use the bathroom. "Access to clean toilets prevents possible spread of diseases. Keeping good hygiene in pandemic times is also needed," she said while appreciating the initiative.

Showbiz personality and brand ambassador for Saaf Bath, Saba Hameed, asked people of the area to take care of and take ownership of the project. She also appealed to men to respect women and help them in whatever way that they could in daily life. "Cleanliness is Godliness," she concluded.

Akbar Ali Shah, country manager for Harpic and Reckitt & Benckiser, also spoke.  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 28/09/2020)

## Fire safety laws

Recently, during the course of hearing of a petition in the Sindh High Court relating to frequent fire incidents in Karachi, many startling shortcomings with regard to implementation of fire safety laws have come to light. Around 80% buildings in Karachi had no emergency exit as builders ignored fire safety measures during construction, the Civil Defence secretary claimed at the hearing. He alleged that the Sindh Building Control Authority did not provide the Civil Defence the building plans approved by it. He informed the court that fire tenders could not reach numerous buildings at many places in the city due to construction faults, and the spaces meant for installation of fire-fighting equipment had been put to other uses.

Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar expressed displeasure over the lax enforcement or non-implementation of fire safety laws, saying often fires broke out in factories and other buildings. He wondered if fire safety laws existed, why they were not being implemented. The views of the honourable judge echo with those of the common people who are asking the authorities the same question considering that several fire incidents have lately occurred in this overcrowded city. The court also emphasised the need for updating the fire safety laws and ordered the authorities to take steps to enable people to get immediate response from the relevant departments in case of fires, because now more often than not fire engines reach the fire site after much delay causing deaths and injuries as well as destruction of goods and property.

There are many congested localities in the city where fire tenders can only enter with great difficulty. What makes matters worse is that these areas have large numbers of warehouses. So there is a need to adopt modern techniques of fire-fighting together with the use of fire tenders. Over the years, the city's fire department has remained much neglected and people have been paying the price of official lethargy. We all aspire to utopia, but the prevailing situation shows that we are moving towards dystopia. Fire and water know nothing of mercy.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 05/11/2020)

## Another World Toilet Day sans public toilets

Hammad Shah, a fourth-grade student, doesn't remember his school ever having functional toilets. Located in the low-income local of Ibrahim Hyderi, the toilets at the Government Boys School, Rehri, have always been seen as a replacement for a storeroom, he told The Express Tribune a day before World Toilet Day, observed every year on November 19.

"Our school's toilets remain strewn with broken furniture and most children have to go home when the nature calls," he said.

According to other students at the school, as well as teachers, complaints regarding the issue have been made to relevant authorities multiple times, but to no avail.

The sorry state of the school, which cries out for a working toilet, reflects the situation elsewhere in Sindh. Most public schools in the province lack functional toilets, and so do the majority of public spots.

Consequently, the sight of people turning to a corner and relieving themselves in bushes, agricultural lands, playgrounds, footpaths and vacant plots is not rare.

### No relief?

According to a report published by non-profit organisation Alif Ailaan in 2016, one in three public schools in Pakistan lack toilets, for multiple reasons.

To add to it, 40 per cent of Pakistan's population - comprising more than 79 million people - does not have access to a decent toilet, according to WaterAid Pakistan country director Siddiq Khan.

Specifically talking about Sindh, activist Liaquat Ali told The Express Tribune that of over 42,000 public schools in Sindh, 18,128 are deprived of facilities like proper toilets and clean drinking water.

Plus, as per a report submitted to the Sindh High Court four years ago, there are no public toilets in at least seven districts of Sindh: Karachi's West and South districts, Dadu, Kashmore-Kandhkot, Ghotki, Nawabshah and Mirpur Mathelo.

The report was prepared by Sindh Bar Council (SBC) members, who were tasked by the high court to verify the Sindh government's claim that toilet facilities were provided at the district level across the province.

Medical experts, too, have voiced concern that in the absence of toilets and scant sanitation, numerous diseases are common among children, particularly diarrhoea.

"Around 19,500 children under five years of age die each year due to diarrhoea and related diseases," said paediatrician Dr Zakir Hussain. Citing figures from a report by the United Nations Children's Fund, he said, "More than two-third of households in Pakistan consume water contaminated with bacteria and [around] 53,000 Pakistani children die of diarrhoea every year after consuming this water."

Moreover, the per capita Water and Sanitation (WASH) allocation in Pakistan from 2018 to 2019 was Rs491. A breakdown shows it was highest in Balochistan at Rs1,167, followed by Sindh at Rs876, then Punjab at Rs318, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) at Rs311 and at Rs244 in the federal capital.

According to budget books, the per capita WASH expenditure during the same period in the country was Rs291, standing at Rs776 in Balochistan, Rs396 in Sindh, Rs344 in K-P, Rs205 in the federal capital and Rs182 in Punjab.

### World Toilet Day

As Pakistan struggles to improve sanitation - clearly evident in the afore-mentioned figures - others continue to observe World Toilet Day every year, looking to tackle global sanitation problems.

An international United Nations (UN) observance day, it is also aimed at sensitising governments and state institutions towards ensuring public access to toilets, the absence of which pollutes the environment.

Since water and sanitation improvements are part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, Pakistan's provincial governments have committed to launch schemes for the purpose.

### Down the drain?

However, in Sindh at least, the schemes seem to be in doldrums.

Provincial and local government authorities in Sindh had earlier announced plans to set up 2,300 toilets at public places, including bus stops and parks. The plan is yet to materialise.

"It has been four years, but no serious efforts have been made to finalise the plan for establishing these public toilets," claimed Rizwan Akhtar, a member of the SBC. "The unavailability of toilets at public places causes inconvenience for women and children in particular."

Raising alarm over the disregard for the problem, Khan said, "Whilst the world has urgently risen to the challenge of Covid-19, every year hundreds of thousands of lives are lost because of the lack of clean water, decent toilets and hygiene. Having access to these is a basic human right so as to prevent infectious diseases."

And, he stressed, toilets and sanitation systems were even more vital as the impact of climate change hit vulnerable communities.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 19/11/2020)

### **Only 14 of 44 fire tenders working in Karachi, SHC told**

The Sindh High Court on Wednesday expressed resentment over local authorities after it was informed that only 14 fire tenders were working in the megacity of Karachi and 30 such vehicles were out of order for the past six months and had not been sent for repairs.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar directed the metropolitan commissioner for maintenance of the fire tenders and summoned him on Dec 8 along with a progress report.

The bench also directed a task force to submit a mechanism about inspection of buildings and industries to ensure that they were following all fire safety measures.

It summoned divisional engineer of the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) over an inordinate delay in restoring the helpline of fire brigade.

When the bench took up a petition seeking implementation of the Building Code of Pakistan and Fire Safety Provisions 2016 across the province, Deputy Controller Shahid Masroor of the Civil Defence Department submitted a reply stating that 80 per cent of the city's buildings had no emergency exits, fire hydrants and other safety equipment and most of the multistorey buildings had no access for fire vehicles.

He further submitted that the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) should be asked not to issue completion certificate of any commercial or industrial/residential buildings without inspection as under the safety laws and Building Code of Pakistan 2016, the responsibility to issue no-objection certificate was assigned to the civil defence department.

In the last hearing, the bench had also directed the SBCA to submit comments with regard to a mechanism or coordination with the civil defence department for inspection of buildings to ensure safety measures.

However, during Wednesday's proceedings SBCA's environment and building services director Nadeem Ahmed submitted that the director general of the authority had assumed charge a couple of days ago and sought further time.

He maintained that in light of the last order, they had made out some draft and the same would be placed before DG for his approval.

Assistant Commissioner Aijaz Hussain Rind also filed comments on behalf of the commissioner office stating that a fire emergency control room had already been established at the commissioner's office to attend related complaints.

He submitted that they had also approached the chief fire officer (CFO) of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) to provide technical officers to run the control room smoothly.

The bench pointed out that one telephone line was not enough to cater to the need of people of Karachi. However, the official assured the bench that more lines would be added and that he would submit a progress report in the next hearing.

KMC's CFO Mubeen Ahmed informed the bench that fire brigade department was operating 22 control centres in Karachi with only 14 working fire tenders and at least 30 such tenders were out of order for the past six months, but these vehicles had not been sent for maintenance.

The bench observed that it was really an alarming situation that the megacity had to make do with 14 fire tenders only. It asked an assistant advocate general as to who was responsible for the maintenance of fire tenders.

The AAG responded that it was the responsibility of KMC. Thereafter, the bench summoned the metropolitan commissioner to appear in person on Dec 8 and in the meanwhile, he would start maintenance work of 30 fire tenders and submit a progress report.

The CFO further submitted that the helpline "16" was out of order after heavy monsoon rains in the city and a complaint was also lodged with the NTC but to no avail.

The bench put the NTC's divisional engineer in Karachi on notice with direction to ensure his presence on the next hearing.

Additional commissioners (I & II) Junaid Iqbal and Dr Waqas Roshan also appeared and informed the bench that they were the members of a task force on fire safety along with petitioner Nadeem Shaikh and Mr Masroor of the civil defence.

They further submitted that after the last order, they convened the meeting of the task force and decided some action to be taken by them but the progress report was not available on record.

The bench directed the task force to submit a mechanism as to how they carry out inspection of different buildings and industries/factories to ensure that these establishments were following all fire safety measures.

“There must be some proper procedure for conducting inspection of all such establishments with the help of allied offices in a fair and transparent manner,” the bench concluded.

The petitioner had said that the federal government had introduced by-laws of the Building Code of Pakistan, Fire Safety Provisions 2016, but the provincial government had yet to implement these laws in letter and spirit in Sindh and particularly in the provincial metropolis.

### **CS given last chance**

Another SHC division headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar has granted a last chance to the Sindh chief secretary to fully comply with its earlier order regarding recruitment of physically challenged persons in different departments.

In compliance with the court's last order, a compliance report was filed that stated that appointment orders had been issued to 101 petitioners while one petitioner had been recommended for future vacancy in district Badin and his appointment order would also be issued on availability of post.

However, the bench rejected the report and expressed concerns that the responsibility was especially assigned to the chief secretary, but the order was not implemented in letter and spirit as proper reasons had not been given nor speaking orders had been passed in respect of those petitioners whose applications had been rejected.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 26/11/2020)

## **Karachi fire safety**

WITH rapid and unplanned growth in Karachi, fire hazards present a major challenge where protection of life and property are concerned. This is especially true considering the mushroom growth of high-rises and multistorey commercial and residential buildings in the metropolis over the last few years. When incidents of fire occur, civic agencies are found to be woefully unprepared and under-resourced. Unfortunately, in their effort to cut corners, builders do not include essential safety features in their structures. In this regard, the Sindh High Court has been hearing a petition regarding the enforcement of fire and safety regulations. The court was told during a recent hearing that task forces have been formed at the district, divisional and sub-divisional level to inspect buildings and factories to ensure they are adhering to safety codes. During an earlier hearing the court was informed of the sad state of the Karachi fire brigade. For example, only 14 fire tenders are said to be in working order, with 30 faulty vehicles sent for repairs. The court was also told that the federal government will provide 48 fire trucks for the Sindh capital.

To ensure that Karachi is ready to deal with fire emergencies, two things are essential. Firstly, the relevant building code and fire-safety provisions must be enforced so that new structures coming up in the city do not turn into fire traps. These must have clear fire exits, escapes and sprinkler systems in place — especially where high-rises are concerned. Regular inspections by the civic authorities are also important. Secondly, the city must have a well-equipped, well-trained fire department where personnel can handle blazes of various intensities. At present, the fire department often has to depend on support from other institutions, such as the navy or KPT, to control blazes of high intensities. Ignoring fire-safety codes in buildings and leaving an unequipped fire department to its own devices puts the lives of citizens at risk.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 11/12/2020)

## **LNG crisis**

THE controversy over the higher spot purchase price of LNG cargoes being imported by the government for covering the gas shortfall during the winter months this year is intensifying with every new order. The latest tender placed for the procurement of three shiploads of gas for delivery in the latter half of January by Pakistan LNG Ltd, for example, has attracted the highest-ever minimum bid rate. No supplier had bid for the same amount of LNG the government wanted delivered between Jan 8 and Jan 18. It is for the first time in the last five years that a tender could not attract any response from the suppliers, raising concerns of greater shortages during the peak winter months. The spot rate of 17.32pc of Brent quoted for the first two shipments to be delivered between Jan 20 and Jan 27 is far more expensive than the one offered during the summer for winter supplies and is significantly higher than 13.5pc for the long-term contract between Pakistan and Qatar.

Critics of the government blame the inordinate delays in the placement of orders for the higher spot prices that Pakistan is being forced to pay for the winter supplies. Moreover, the rising global demand for LNG in recent weeks has also pushed up its spot price. Many contend that the government could have saved billions on spot LNG purchases had it bought future contracts in summer when the prices for winter delivery were at their lowest. The special adviser to the prime minister on petroleum had himself, unwittingly though, admitted as much. The PLL, however, claims that 11 cargoes have been secured for the next month and arrangements are being made for two more shiploads. It also blamed a 'media campaign' for having harmed the latest tender by causing some suppliers to stay away. Additionally, it defended expensive spot purchases saying “the wide range of prices offered for the same delivery date clearly shows that the time between the bid opening and the delivery date is not the price determinant; the main driver is global demand and supply”. In order to end this blame game, the government should conduct an impartial inquiry into the matter. But the longer-term and sustainable solution to the issue lies in breaking the government's monopoly over LNG trade and market through involvement of the private sector with the capacity and wherewithal to take timely import decisions.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 12/12/2020)