

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2020

WATER SUPPLY



Urban Resource Centre

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Water shortage

In the megacity of Karachi, a considerable proportion of drinking water is supplied over ground as opposed to underground as is the norm in most of the world. Like the past many years in hot summer months, most city residents are again experiencing an acute shortage of water. Over the years, the situation has only been deteriorating. Karachi suffers from water shortage all around the year though. A combination of power and water shortage makes life miserable for the people. The past few years have seen some improvement in power supply, but water shortage refuses to go. At present the city needs 12,00mgd water but officially it is supplied 550mgd only.

Out of this more than 100mgd is lost due to leakages and theft. Even when water shortage is at its peak during the hot summer months, it is available in sufficient quantity, if not in plenty, through tankers and in cans. Only those who have money can afford to have water, and others are compelled to buy it to stay alive. There are many localities in the city where residents have not received a single drop of water in their home taps for years, yet they go on paying KWSB bills for fear of disconnection. The bills keep growing.

The K-1V project, aimed to augment water supply to the city, was planned in the early 2000s. It was expected to be completed in 2019. In 20 years, it has not made much headway on the ground even though its paperwork continues to grow because of endless revisions of cost and changes in design. The Sindh government in its budget for 2020-21 has allocated a mere Rs150 million for the K-1V project. Initially, the scheme was expected to cost Rs25.5 billion. Government officials continue to blame one another for the delay. Informed circles say the project might not be put on line in another 20 years because of the involvement of vested interests.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 01/07/2020)

Water woes : Completion of K-IV still a distant dream

Despite Karachi's burgeoning population and its ever-increasing water problems, phase-1 of the Greater Karachi Bulk Water Supply Project (K-IV) has been embroiled in controversies over various financial and design-related issues. As a result, development work on the project has been stalled for the past year.

In the budget for the new 2020-2021 financial year, the Sindh government has allocated Rs500 million for the development works of the K-IV project and another Rs50 million to purchase land.

On the other hand, the technical committee set up by the Sindh government has rejected the key recommendations submitted by the National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK) regarding the project, suggesting that the route of the K-IV project would not be changed and obstacles to the existing design would be addressed by engineers.

Over the past two years, many objections have been raised about the performance and design of the K-IV consultant, Osmani & Co Ltd.

The initial approved cost of PC-1 was set at Rs25.5 billion which has significantly increased but the final cost has not been announced yet. In the approved PC-1, the federal and the Sindh government will have an equal contribution.

It should be noted that the foundation stone of the K-IV project was laid in 2016 and it was to be completed in two years. However, despite the passage of four years, only 20 per cent of its work has been completed.

The K-IV project will ensure a supply of 260 million gallons of water per day (MGD) for which a 121-kilometre canal system is to be constructed from Keenjhar Lake to Karachi. Due to the non-completion of the project, Karachi has been facing the worst water crisis in history.

Karachi needs 1,200 MGD of water given its growing population, but at present, the supply is only 420 MGD.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, several engineers of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) said that experts had expressed several reservations about the design prepared by Osmani & Co. The project cost has also tripled, about which the federal government has expressed its concerns.

"The Sindh government tasked NESPAK, a third-party consultant, to review the design to resolve all these issues," a senior KWSB engineer, who requested anonymity, said. "About six months ago, NESPAK submitted a report suggesting that K-IV's design and route were flawed and that changes were necessary."

According to KWSB sources, NESPAK's suggestions have opened a Pandora's box, putting the future of the K-IV project in jeopardy.

Osmani & Co and KWSB engineers also expressed their concerns over the report, saying that development work on the project had already begun and work had been done on various sites, making it impossible to change the route now.

The engineers said that the design flaws identified by NESPAK could be addressed without changing the route.

Subsequently, the Sindh government set up a technical committee, headed by local government secretary Roshan Ali Shaikh and comprising technocrats and engineers, to review NESPAK's report and come up with a solution.

The technical committee then submitted a report completely rejecting the change in route, which was NESPAK's main proposal.

The KWSB engineer added that the world has made great strides in the field of engineering, provided that every stakeholder works within their capacities with commitment and honesty, something which has been absent in case of the K-IV project.

"Osmani & Co should formulate a revised PC-1 so that costs could be properly determined, and development work could be started immediately after removing the objections raised by NESPAK," he said. "The project is already late and the people of Karachi, who have been facing severe water crisis for many years, cannot afford any further delays."

The Express Tribune tried contacting the local government secretary for comment several times, but he did not respond. (By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 06/07/2020)

Karachi's water woes continue

Contaminated water, taps running dry, irked and exasperated citizens taking to the streets, illegal connections, water theft and corruption tell the sordid tale of Karachi's long-standing water crisis.

However, things aggravated on Tuesday when citizens held a demonstration, protesting water shortage in Korangi, and the high court issued notices over a plea alleging the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) of sanctioning illegal connections and a resultant water shortage in New Karachi.

Meanwhile, the anti-corruption department raided KWSB managing director's (MD's) office, after receiving complaints of alleged corruption in the purchase of sewer machines.

On the other hand, the KWSB claimed to have seized nine tankers and arrested as many persons for selling contaminated water and water theft, in joint operations with police.

Corruption allegations

Anti-Corruption team, headed by West Anti-Corruption deputy director Zafarullah Dharejo, raided on Tuesday the office of Karachi Water and Sewerage Services Improvement Project (KWSSIP) director Ayub Sheikh and seized different files and records.

The raid was conducted after reports surfaced of alleged corruption in the issuance of tenders for KWSSIP- a major project launched by the KWSB- and contractors approached the anti-corruption department with complaints and evidence.

As per the allegations, the tenders for the procurement of 14 sewer cleaning machines are being given to 'favourite companies,' bypassing the laws of the Sindh Public Procurement Authority.

Sources in the anti-corruption department have revealed that three companies have already submitted the proposal for the tenders but instead of selecting the company making the lowest bid, tenders are being given on the basis of favouritism.

The sources said that following the raid, Sheikh was interrogated on the matter for two hours and asked to produce the documents in relevance to the issuance of tenders, but he tried to evade the officials. The officials, however, remained resolute and left after collecting the required records and files.

KWSB technical staff officer Amir Waqar and others were also questioned on the matter.

Court hearing

A two-member bench of the Sindh High Court issued notices to the local government secretary, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board MD and other parties over a plea pertaining to water shortage and illegal water connections.

The counsel for the petitioner alleged that the residents of Shafiq Colony were deprived of water as the KWSB had sanctioned illegal connections to supply water to industrial areas. "The water is diverted to industrial area and the colony suffers water shortage," he said.

At this, the court issued notice to the local government secretary, KWSB MD and other respondents, seeking their replies on the plea by August 8.

Protest

The residents of Korangi took to the streets on Tuesday, protesting the suspension of water supply in the area and resulting water shortage.

Staging a demonstration outside Korangi deputy commissioner's office, irate protesters held placards emblazoned with demands for the restoration of water supply, shouted slogans and blocked the road up to Korangi crossing.

The protesters claimed that they had been facing water shortage for the past three years, mainly due to tanker mafia. They went on to blame the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board for their predicament, accusing the department of closing the main valves supply water to the area and instead, providing water to tanker mafia.

Demanding of Korangi deputy commissioner and other relevant authorities to take action tanker mafia and ensure the restoration of water supply to their area, the protesters lamented that they had been deprived of a basic necessity for a long time.

Crackdown

Meanwhile, the KWSB, in a joint operation with police, arrested nine persons and seized as many tankers for selling contaminated water and water theft. The authorities also removed a water hydrant during the operation.

According to the KWSB spokesperson, seven suspects were arrested during separate actions in the limits of Manghopir and Mochko Police Stations, while nine water tankers filled with contaminated were also seized from the areas.

The suspects were identified as Sajid, Hameedur Rehman, Rehman, Ali Akbar, Amir Khan, Faisal Ahmed and Musheer Ahmed, all involved in the supply of contaminated water from Sakran, Balochistan.

Separately, the same team raided an illegal hydrant near Khyber Hotel at Northern Bypass and removed it while arresting two individuals. The arrested, identified as Liaquat and Badshah Khan, are said to be involved in selling water after stealing it through illegal connections.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 15/07/2020)

Diamer-Bhasha dam

Prime Minister Imran Khan promised to build the "biggest dam in Pakistan's history" as he spoke in Chilas at a public address related to the Diamer-Bhasha Dam project. He also went on a site visit with Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and Water Resources Minister Faisal Vawda. Once completed, the dam would generate around 4,500MW of hydel power and have a storage capacity of about eight million acre-feet. Around 16,000 jobs will also be created for its construction. These numbers will make it one of the country's largest functioning dams, though not quite at the level of Tarbela. For what its worth, it will be Pakistan's highest dam, and could challenge Tarbela in terms of power generation.

The PM also rightly noted how beneficial the dam would be for the local and national economy, including as a potential tourism engine down the line. Unfortunately, the rest of the PM's speech was littered with unnecessary exaggeration. He drew parallels to China and the vast number of dams it has, ignoring the fact that the country has more rivers and a land area about 12 times that of Pakistan. Yes, "massive mistakes" were made in the past, but they have less to do with the raw number of dams and more with construction delays and timely replacement of the ones that were planned or built. The PM also overstated the dam's approval timeline by a few decades and oversold its overall significance. Diamer Bhasha dam will primarily be a hydel facility with a massive reservoir. In terms of agriculture, while important, it will not substitute for other water projects because its location makes the reservoir unsuitable for a broader canal network.

The PM did say that the government will build more dams on rivers, noting how they will eventually help reduce the fuel bill for power plants. However, he did not mention Kalabagh Dam, which has benefits across the board but would probably cost a few PTI leaders seats in K-P. The ANP of 'Purana Pakistan' had vehemently opposed the dam for the same reason — political expediency. Will the PTI be different?

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 17/07/2020)

Citizens demand reversal of KE privatisation, shutdown of illegal hydrants

At a press conference held at the Karachi Press Club on Saturday, the Shehri Awami Mahaz, comprising citizens of Karachi, demanded that K-Electric's privatisation be cancelled and it be placed under democratic control of the citizens and more than 100 illegal hydrants in the city be shut down immediately.

The power and water mafias have taken 20 million citizens of Karachi hostage. Water scarcity and power outages have left the citizens suffering from mental and physical ailments, the activists pointed out.

Nasir Mansoor, secretary general of the National Trade Union Federation, said Karachi has been suffering from the inflicted punishment of two big mafias for long, and these mafias have the blessings of major political parties and powerful circles.

'Power and water mafias have taken 20 million citizens of Karachi hostage'

He said the privatisation of the KESC in 2005 was a "fraudulent" deal. General Pervez Musharraf, Shaukat Aziz and Karachi's "false" representatives were directly involved "in this robbery". The company, whose shares were valued at Rs9 per unit at the time of privatisation, was sold for Rs1.60 per share, causing a loss of more than Rs70 billion to the exchequer. This major power company was sold for only Rs15.8bn.

He said the privatisation of KESC (renamed K-Electric) is tantamount to recognising the IMF's dominance by handing over important public resources to foreign traders. On the occasion of privatisation of state-owned enterprises, it was said that state subsidies placed an undue burden on the exchequer, but despite handing over the KESC to a private party, the government was giving it an annual subsidy of Rs41bn. So far, the state has given more than Rs600bn in subsidies to K-Electric. Despite the huge state subsidies, the people had been waiting for proper supply of electricity for 15 years.

Mr Mansoor added that the group that had taken over KESC in 2005 announced that it would invest \$1bn to improve the power transmission system, but even 15 years later it had not been done. Currently the situation was that the country's largest city was

intentionally plunged into darkness, unannounced loadshedding of 10 to 12 hours has become the fate of 22 million citizens in the sizzling heat and lockdown.

He said that despite the lack of electricity, overbilling was a tried and tested weapon of KE that had made citizens mentally ill. Through the same "criminal method", the KE had made a profit of more than Rs17bn this year, which was 40 per cent more than the previous year. Despite the protests of the people, the present government had allowed KE to increase the tariffs of electricity in phases. KE had immediately increased the tariff of electricity by Rs2.8 per unit.

Comrade Gul Rahman, convener of the Workers Rights Movement, said KE had installed meters that were faulty and did not conform to international standards. The government, NAB and Nepra had given the KE a free hand of lawlessness and arbitrariness because its owner, Arif Naqvi, was considered the closest friend of the current ruling oligarchy. He had provided huge funds to the party in power to run the election campaign.

Khaliq Zadrán, chairperson of the Lyari Awami Mahaz, said that like the KE the water mafia had made the lives of the citizens of Karachi "worse than hell".

Zehra Khan, general secretary of the Home-Based Women Workers Federation, said that more than 100 illegal hydrants were earning Rs90bn annually by selling people's share of water to the citizens. Currently the water tanker mafia was making more money than the drug mafia.

Nisha Rao, president of the TransGender Rights Society, deplored that the city, provincial and federal governments were constantly showing a lack of seriousness in resolving Karachi's problems.

Aqib Hussain, president of the National Youth Committee, said that at a time when all parties had left citizens at the mercy of the mafia, it had become imperative for the people to organise themselves to achieve their basic rights.

On behalf of the citizens of Karachi, the Sheri Awami Mahaz demanded that privatisation of the KE be cancelled and it be given under the democratic control of the citizens, the increase in electricity tariffs be withdrawn and overbilling be stopped.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 19/07/2020)

Sharing waters

THE decision of the Council of Common Interests to constitute a committee to "look into the issue of fair distribution of water among the provinces" recognises the inherent weaknesses and inadequacies of the Water Apportionment Accord signed back in 1991. Often hailed as a landmark agreement on the distribution of the waters of the Indus River System among the provinces, the accord lacks a clear objective. If the purpose, as is widely accepted, was to resolve the long-standing interprovincial disputes — particularly between Punjab and Sindh — on the sharing of waters, it has utterly failed to do its job. Some would go so far as to blame the accord for having accentuated tensions between the two provinces in its nearly three decades of operation. The ambiguities in the provisions of the agreement, according to numerous research studies carried out by experts, also let the stakeholders interpret the document variously to suit their own interests and perspectives.

The agreement assumes that 117.35MAF of water will be available in the system for allocation to the provinces according to their share agreed under the accord. But in reality the actual system supplies have always been much lower than the assumed volumes. More problematic is the ambiguity or lack of a clearly defined mechanism for sharing the shortages — the differential between the assumed and actual volumes in the system. The provision that the record of the actual average system uses for the period between 1977 and 1982 would form the basis for sharing water shortages and surpluses has intensified the dispute between Punjab and Sindh, instead of ending it. Punjab remains adamant on interprovincial water distribution on the basis of historical uses. However, Sindh insists on the allocation of its share on the basis of the supplies assumed in the accord. Sadly, Irsa, which oversees the operation of the water accord, is not seen as an impartial arbitrator and, for various reasons, has failed to resolve the disputes over the formula for sharing the shortages. The formation of the CCI committee has spawned hopes that the centre and the provinces are now ready to discuss the contentious provisions of the accord and tackle them sooner than later. In spite of its shortcomings and ambiguities, the water accord is considered an important milestone towards the resolution of interprovincial tensions over the water-sharing mechanism. The CCI committee needs to only bring clarity to the vague stipulations of the agreement.
(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 08/08/2020)

Hub Dam begins to overflow amid downpour

After threatening to spill over all day, the Hub Dam finally overflowed on Thursday evening.

The dam's water level rose close to its maximum capacity of 340 feet after almost 13 years on Thursday, with area residents informing The Express Tribune later in the day that water had begun to flow outside it.

The dam, located at the Sindh-Balochistan border, supplies water to Karachi and Hub, the Balochistan city near the provincial border.

Sources told The Express Tribune that an emergency gate had been built for such emergency situation's during the dam's construction in the 1960s. However, they added, it had never been used in the past.

"We have never witnessed such a situation before," disclosed a resident.

Earlier in the day, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board spokesperson Rizwan Ahmed told The Express Tribune that the water would soon start overflowing from the dam's spillways. "The last time it reached its maximum level was in 2007," related the official. "It is at a dangerously high level at this time. The district and local administrations have been informed about the situation.

The dam provides about 60 per cent of its water to the city's West district and, given the current water levels, Ahmed claimed it had enough water to supply the area for the next three years.

Meanwhile, residents living in the area told The Express Tribune that despite the hazardous situation, people from different areas of the metropolis had started arriving at the Hub Dam to see the sight.

"This is not a safe place right now," insisted Abdul Latif Rind, a union committee member, stressing the gravity of the matter. "If the dam overflows and breaches, it will submerge numerous villages located nearby."

Rind stated that more water was expected to flow through the catchment areas of Balochistan, adding that he had been told by residents in the neighbouring province that more water was heading towards the Hub Dam.

He further opined that the deployment of armed forces seemed necessary. "The dam is a very sensitive place right now and citizens should stay away from it for at least a week," he advised.

Official sources told The Express Tribune that the dam's emergency gates would be opened before the water from the spillways was discharged, while officials from the relevant departments, including district officials from Lasbela, Balochistan, and irrigation department staff, had reached the site.

Once the excess water is released through the spillways, it will reach the Hub River before entering the sea near Mubarak Village.

An alert had reportedly been issued to the residents of nearby areas, including Mir Muhammad Mengal Goth, Ali Mohammad Goth, Yaqoob Goth, Raees Goth, Mai Garhi Goth and other adjacent localities, warning them to evacuate their residences.

Meanwhile, Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan tweeted that the administration had been engaged in evacuation efforts for the last three days, adding that people could still take extra precautions.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 28/08/2020)

Questions arise over Hub River Bridge stability

After a video showing the Hub River Bridge's seemingly crooked pillars went viral on social media, officials from various departments visited the bridge for inspection on Friday and Saturday. Following this, a Sindh government spokesperson declared the bridge stable, even as the National Highway Authority (NHA) raised questions about its condition.

In a letter issued on Saturday after the inspection, a copy of which is available with The Express Tribune, NHA officials stated that due to a high volume of traffic, including heavy vehicles, on the bridge around the clock, its condition was not good.

According to the NHA, the important bridge falls under the limits of the N-25, acting as a link between Karachi and Gwadar ports. Around 500 metres in length, it was constructed approximately 50 years ago.

The NHA officials also recommended and asked for technical experts to provide a detailed design and working methodology to repair the bridge.

"This bridge is not in the limits of Sindh," said a senior official of Karachi's West district while talking to The Express Tribune, adding that it was the NHA's prime responsibility to maintain the vulnerable bridge. "Our teams are supporting the NHA teams," he added.

Meanwhile, police from both the provinces, Sindh and Balochistan, were deployed at the bridge to restrict commuters from travelling in a single row.

Later, Sindh government spokesperson Barrister Murtaza Wahab stated in a tweet that the condition of the stated bridge was stable.

"This is NHA's bridge. The South NHA general manager visited the bridge after the video was made viral and has confirmed that the structure of the bridge is stable. Unfortunately, the video was made from an angle which does not reflect the true picture," he said, adding that experts from NED University, Karachi, were in touch with the NHA about the bridge.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 06/09/2020)

Call to revive natural waterways

Freshwater flows should be regulated as they enhance local livelihoods, conserve wildlife and promote environmental sustainability. For this purpose, we need to revive our natural waterways and redesign development schemes, which would also help tackle urban flooding and minimise the adverse impacts of widespread rains.

This was stated by speakers during a briefing session about the city-wide partnership for sustainable water use and water stewardship held at a local hotel on Monday.

The event was organised under a World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan project titled International Labour and Environmental Standards (ILES) Application in Pakistan's Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Highlighting the scarcity of clean drinking water, Dr Mir Zafar Ali, the founder of Eco-Pakistan, a community-based organisation, said 60 to 80 per cent people living in 24 major cities of Pakistan faced problems in accessing clean water.

"Most people in Karachi get water supply once a week and the water they get after so long cannot be used for cooking or drinking purposes," he said.

'Govt and citizens should take responsibility and start acting on issues, such as plastic pollution and encroachments'

He underscored the need for improving water quality, reducing pollution and eliminating dumping and discharge of hazardous chemicals and other materials into water bodies, warning that release of untreated industrial waste water directly into freshwater bodies or the sea could damage the aquatic ecosystem and destroy wildlife.

"Individual health is dependent on environmental health, therefore, mutual efforts are needed to ensure sustainable management of freshwater resources."

Senior officer ILES project Love Kumar said freshwater species and healthy rivers provided food and supported income-generation opportunities for local people.

He also cited a recent WWF report according to which a shocking 84pc of freshwater species populations had been lost due to multiple threats over the last 50 years. He warned that if this trend continued, most freshwater species would become extinct.

Speakers also shared problems being experienced in Karachi and said the city had witnessed rapid and uncontrolled expansion in population over the past three decades.

The city despite being the country's financial hub faced an acute lack of robust planning and coordination among relevant departments, which had resulted in economic losses and damage to the infrastructure, they said.

The devastating rains of last month exposed Karachi's vulnerabilities and it's time that the government starts focusing on them.

The participants also suggested solutions to the many problems Karachi faced, one of which was to create a sense of city's ownership. Relevant government departments and citizens, they said, should take mutual responsibility and start acting on issues, such as plastic pollution and end encroachments on drains.

They also suggested better water management practices and setting up waste-water treatment plants.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 23/09/2020)

SHC orders removal of illegal RO plants in Karachi

The Sindh High Court directed the Sindh Food Authority (SFA) on Tuesday to remove illegal reverse osmosis (RO) plants from across the city and submit a reply before the court.

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui and Justice Kausar Sultana Hussain, was hearing a petition against RO plants set up illegally in the city, including one established in a residential building in North Nazimabad.

The SFA's legal director appeared before the bench and faced the court's ire.

The bench inquired why the SFA was not carrying out its work, asking whether a show-cause notice should be issued.

The legal director assured the bench that action would be taken against illegal RO plants and a report submitted before the court in this regard.

Issuing directives for action against all illegal RO plants in the city, the bench adjourned the hearing for three weeks.

The petitioner had contended that an RO plant was illegally installed in a residential building in North Nazimabad. According to the petitioner, the plant was not inspected nor was permission sought from any relevant agency.

Trial records sought

Meanwhile, a bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Zulfiqar Ali Sangi sought trial records of a case pertaining to corruption in the Fishermen's Cooperative Society (FCS) and a report from the accountability court.

The bench was hearing a petition filed by former FSC vice chairperson Sultan Qamar Siddiqui, an accused in the case.

The trial against former FSC chairperson Nisar Morai, Qamar Siddiqui and others has entered its final phase with counsels of the parties presenting their arguments, said the National Accountability Bureau prosecutor.

The court sought details of the trial from the accountability court by November 4.

Contempt of court

Separately, the high court reserved judgement on a contempt of court petition filed against the police and others for failure to vacate the premises of Islamia College.

According to the petitioner, the Supreme Court had ordered the college building be vacated and handed over to the trustees. The Sindh government and the police were not implementing the apex court's orders, argued the petitioner, praying the court to take contempt of court action against the relevant officials.

Sindh Advocate-General Salman Talibuddin maintained that the petitioner had not filed any application with the competent authority till date. He requested an immediate hearing of the review petition in the apex court.

The court reserved its verdict after the completion of arguments.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 07/10/2020)

Years without water for Mauripur's Hindu mohalla

Despite living in the sprawling metropolis of Karachi which is considered the hub of economic activities in the country, many citizens still do not have access to drinking water.

Heer Bai strives hard to get potable water and expends all of her energies to fetch it from different areas every day.

"The last time we received water in the pipelines of our house was almost 12 years ago," she recalls. "Now, I have to go to other areas to fetch some water each day, which is an arduous task. We do not even have brackish water available in our houses."

It is not only Bai - all Hindu families living in old Khursheed Quarters in Mauripur have been suffering from the unavailability of drinking water for years. Resultantly, female members of the community are compelled to leave their houses and walk to different areas of the city in search of water daily.

Almost 250 Maheshwari families have been living in the quarters for years without the basic necessities of life.

"We have been living here for generations. Our ancestors dwelled in this area before the partition of 1947," says Mohan Lal, an elderly person of the community, explaining that the neighbourhood was one of Karachi's villages.

"We left for India during partition but came back within a few years. Our lives have become quite difficult now," he recounts.

Maheshwari Panchayat Mauripur's president, Sham Lal, tells The Express Tribune that neither public representatives nor the government officials pay any attention to the issues of his community.

"They [the community] know how to survive without other necessities but fetching water from other areas every day by crossing busy roads is not easy for our women. If nothing else, the government should at least do something about the provision of water here," he decries.

Area residents say that the people living in nearby neighbourhoods are being supplied drinking water regularly.

Lal and other elders of the Hindu community have approached officials and public representatives about the restoration of water supply scheme in their area several times, but the appeals have fallen on deaf ears.

"No one listens to us," Lal says with a sad smile. "Only those who are rich or have political support can afford this 'commodity.'" A resident named Abdullah Shah, who lives in a nearby mohalla, says that the Hindu community in Mauripur has been denied basic rights for years.

"I often visit them and always feel very disappointed to see their condition," he explains. "Their houses are damaged and the streets are so narrow one can hardly cross them. There is nothing for them here."

Shah proclaims that the Hindus, especially those belonging to lower castes, have been living in a deplorable condition in the city's suburbs. "There is an acute shortage of water in other parts of Mauripur but the Hindu mohalla is in the worst condition," he adds. "I have never seen any influential person ever visiting these destitute people. No one cares about their problems."

Lal, on the other hand, says he does not demand anything from the government except for water. "We don't want any jobs. We don't ask the government to renovate our streets or reconstruct our homes, but we earnestly request the authorities to at least provide us with water."

When approached, area MPA Liaquat Askani, who belongs to the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), says that most areas under his constituency have a shortage of water and the Hindu neighbourhood is no exception.

"The Maheshwari mohalla receives water after every 10 to 12 days; other areas do not even get water for a month at a time," he claims. "An 18-inch water supply pipeline will resolve the water scarcity issue in all the areas of Mauripur."

The pipeline scheme is part of a mega-development project approved by Sindh's ruling PPP government. "PPP chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has announced this scheme to bring relief to the people of his constituency," adds Askani. (By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 13/10/2020)

Damloti's wells — an asset in mothballs?

Damloti, located in Gadap Town in Karachi's suburbs, is home to 16 wells that constitute the metropolis' first water supply system. Yet the area faces water shortages and its residents, mostly farmers, have to drill boreholes into the ground to fulfill their water needs, laments Haji Ahmed Baloch, an area resident.

This is even after the groundwater level rising in Karachi and its suburbs, replenishing the historic wells enough to supply large quantities of water daily, according to a Karachi Water and Sewerage Board official who has requested anonymity. "This can alleviate the water crisis in the city," he points out, while claiming that the wells' revival has been put on the backburner for years by the Sindh government and KWSB, both of whom deem the undertaking "unprofitable".

From the pages of history

The age-old conduit system was built by the British in 1881 to supply water to what are now collectively called Karachi's old city areas. Initially, a few wells were constructed for supplying 5 million gallons of water daily (MGD) and the capacity was later enhanced to 20MGD.

By then, it comprised 16 wells alongside the Malir River, a 32-kilometre-long pipeline connecting the Damloti wells to Lines Area and filtration galleries - structures built to expedite the transfer of water to and from the soil.

In 1970, though, the supply from the wells dropped to 16MGD, before they were eventually made non-functional in 1980, reportedly due to illegal sand mining at the Malir riverbed as well as the lack of rain.

What went wrong?

While illegal sand mining on the Malir River's bank had been a common practice since 1960, it was prohibited near the filtration galleries, says the KWSB official. However, he claims, with the backing of the police and influential persons, scores had started sand mining around the filtration galleries by 1976.

As a result, the groundwater level began to fall, affecting the water supply from the pre-Independence conduit system, he explains. "Sand mining continues to be menace in the area, while law enforcers play the role of silent spectators."

Presently, just one of the wells is functional, supplying 5MGD of water to a nearby KWSB staff colony. Of the rest, eight wells are flooded and seven remain non-functional.

Little hope

But the groundwater level has risen noticeably following heavy rains in the city, and you can get water by just digging 60 feet deep, according to Baloch.

Baloch explains that most residents there practice agriculture, with farmers mostly relying on drilling boreholes or installing water suction pumps to irrigate their fields.

"There is no water supply system here for a population of 16,000. Without constructing wells on our own, what option do we have other than to drill boreholes?" he questions.

Baloch demands the KWSB revive the wells so that water can be supplied for all purposes to Damloti's residents.

On the other hand, a KWSB engineer, who has asked not to be named, maintains that a project for utilising groundwater to meet Damloti and Memon Goth's water needs has been under consideration for years.

According to him, they had drilled holes in the ground for the initiative in 2006 but found the water level below 500 feet back then.

"And now, due to the lack of rain and sand mining, it seems near impossible to revive the conduit system," he maintains. "The groundwater level only rises when there are heavy rains; otherwise it remains well below the required amount."

He further points out that farmers installing water suction equipment as much as 400 feet to 500 feet in the ground have added to the problem, adding that the KWSB had once approached an international consultant on the matter who, too, deemed it unprofitable.

The Express Tribune tried to approach KWSB managing director Asadullah Khan multiple times but he remained unavailable to comment on the matter.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 02/11/2020)

Water pollution

Both air and water, the basic elements on which all life depends, are alarmingly polluted in Lahore, the capital of Punjab province. Research has revealed that 24% residents of Lahore are consuming water contaminated with arsenic, exposing them to grave health hazards. The same research has established that 82% Pakistanis have no access to safe drinking water.

Contaminated water kills 1.1 million people, including 250,000 children, every year in the country. Thousands of factories in the Punjab metropolis, many of them set up in congested residential areas, are functioning in violation of environmental laws and laws pertaining to public health as they have not installed water treatment plants to prevent contamination of drinking water. The untreated water discharged from these factories has contaminated ground water in all localities. Worn-out old water pipelines are adding to the problem. Due to these leaking pipelines, drinking water gets mixed up with the untreated water making potable water unfit for consumption. The consumption of toxic water is causing many dangerous diseases.

Unfortunately, the problem has been worsening by the day due to official lethargy. The authorities say they are unable to take strict action against factories violating legal requirements due to shortage of staff in the environment protection department. This lack of manpower, obviously resulting from lack of financial resources, is not going to convince many. People are conversant with the way government departments work. Even officials have admitted that a sizable number of factories are operating without obtaining NOC and factory owners are not taking the issue seriously. What the relevant department is there for, why they are acting as mere spectators when people are contracting dangerous diseases? It is common knowledge what prevents officials from taking action. People have become so used to consuming unsafe water that now they might fall ill if they consumed safe water. Things change with time.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 08/11/2020)

Sindh seeks PQA's support in water scheme

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah requested Federal Planning and Development Minister Asad Umar on Friday to direct the Port Qasim Authority to cooperate with the provincial government for a water supply scheme for Karachi's South district.

Shah also informed the federal minister of 319 structures constructed along the embankments of Mehmoodabad nullah, which would have to be razed as part of the drain's remodelling design.

The CM was briefing Umar during a meeting of the Karachi Coordination Committee held on the day to review progress on various on-going projects including cleaning of drains, garbage lifting, water supply and construction of roads.

The planning minister represented the federal government and other members on the team include Karachi Corp Commander Lt General Humayyun Aziz and Inter-Services Intelligence Director-General Lt General Faiz Hameed.

Provincial representatives included the local government minister, Karachi administrator, planning and development chairperson and others.

Water supply

During the meeting, Shah informed the federal minister that the provincial government has initiated a scheme to supply 30 million gallons of water daily (MGD) for the South district but the PQA is reluctant to give passage. Umar assured the CM that the issue would be resolved.

The Karachi Water Supply Scheme (K-IV) was also discussed during the meeting, with the federal and provincial representatives noting that the Centre has taken up the work to complete the much awaited K-IV project and all relevant documents have been handed over. The federal government has tasked the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) with completion of the project, said Umar, assuring that the project will be completed on priority basis.

Storm water drains

Besides, the CM informed that the remodelling design for Mehmoodabad nullah has been submitted for approval. The nullah is sixmetres deep at Korangi and its depth reduces as it runs further down, finally shrinking to one-metre in Defence Housing Authority and till it ends. "This is a serious problem [regarding] discharge [of] smooth flow of water," said Shah.

The CM pointed out that in the proposed remodeling design, 319 structures encroaching on the drain would be affected. "In the proposed remodelling design, these defects have been pointed out to remove them."

The work on the nullah should begin at the earliest, said Umar, adding that the Centre has authorized the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to utilise Rs7 billion for cleanliness works for drains and related tasks.

The CM further informed that the NED University of Engineering and Technology would be completing the design and survey of Gujjar and Orangi nullahs by January 15.

Solid waste management

Besides, Shah stated that amendments were being made to the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board's law to devolve it to the city level. The port city will have a separate solid waste management board to carry out cleanliness work, said Shah.

Elaborating further, Sindh Local Government Minister Nasir Hussain Shah said that the sweeping of roads, door-to-door garbage collection and subsequent shifting of garbage to the Garbage Transfer Stations (GTS) and then to the landfill site would be done by the new authority.

However, the meeting was also informed that the contracts for cleanliness works in Central and Korangi districts are being auctioned. Private firms will be awarded these contracts by end of February 2021.

The CM further informed the meeting that he would be launching mega projects - Malir Expressway and ICI Bridge remodelling - on the public private partnership model. Both of these schemes will reshape traffic flow in the city, he said, adding that funds have also been released to construct dilapidated roads from Gulbai to Y-junction and the roads in SITE Area.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 05/12/2020)