

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

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## URBAN SERVICES



## Urban Resource Centre

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## The horrid state of Karachi's public toilets

This terror tale chronicles an urban metropolis, throbbing with a seismic population of more than 20 million people, all of whom are forced to rely on a total of 17 public toilets for their excretory needs.

However, the ghost of this story is not the abysmal number of lavatories in the city, but rather the gruesome state of existing toilets that can make anyone's blood run cold on sight. Too filthy and too broken to operate, these spaces of public convenience have slowly turned into congregational spots for heroin addicts, while the city's many walls take the spraying fallout. "KMC toilets remain open from 8:00 AM to 10:00 PM," said Muhammad Sabir, who looks after a public latrine located at Jail Chowrangi.

"But caretakers don't receive any salary, the sewage lines have been clogged for several months and it is only the men's toilets that work," he added. Similarly, according to Former Ranchor Lane Union Committee Chairperson Asif Siddiqui, public toilets in the Ranchor Lane Meat Market have also been left to languish in dire straits. "The sanitation system is very poor which often leads to piles of dirt and filth, and turns into a grotesque sight," he told. Per Siddiqui, the abysmal state of Karachi's public latrines is a problem carved into the city's flawed masterplan.

"No government agency, including the Sindh government, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and especially the district municipal corporation, has any data on the number of public toilets. Which is because their construction was never taken into consideration during any of the master plans," he added. The lack of planning in this case is event from the fact that agency has yet bothered to survey the city's government buildings, schools, hospitals, playgrounds, parks, shopping centers, petrol pumps, mosques, or major highways to compile data on the number of public and private toilets in the city.

According to a privately conducted investigation however, a comprehensive plan was drawn up twice in view of the need for public toilets in Karachi. On the direction of Sindh Government, a task force on municipal services was set up in 1999 under the leadership of Katchi Abadi Director General Tasneem Siddiqui, which formulated recommendations on traffic management, solid waste management, cemeteries, public toilets and other local government issues. In the light of these recommendations, the Citizen Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) had constructed some 54 public toilets along major highways, in government institutions, hospitals and public parks till 2013, without any funds from the government and solely from philanthropic assistance.

At present, these public toilets are operational in 31 places under the control of CPLC, while 17 of them were razed due to developmental projects and other reasons. The concerned government agencies eventually rebuilt toilets in eight places with their own funds, while nine remain missing to date. According to Karachi Development Authority Traffic Engineering Bureau's former Director Saeed Akhtar, the former city government had constructed bus shelters equipped with public toilets at four places along Shahrah-e-Faisal in 2004.

However, these latrines, built under agreement with a private company, could never be made functional and were transformed into warehouses. "These warehouse stores were ultimately sealed in 2016, on the instructions of Administrator KMC, but the case is still pending in the court on the private company's appeal," the erstwhile director revealed, while talking to The Express Tribune. (By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 18/10/2021)

## Pakistan accepts costliest-ever LNG cargo amid gas crisis

Pakistan on Saturday accepted an LNG cargo at the highest-ever price of \$30.6 per Million British Thermal Units (mmbtu) from Qatar Petroleum on the grounds of averting a possible gas crisis in the upcoming peak winter month.

The Pakistan LNG Limited (PLL) had floated emergency bids for two cargoes to be supplied in November, as the firms involved, Gunvor and ENI, had defaulted on their commitments.

The PLL has short- and long-term agreements with Gunvor and the ENI for one LNG cargo each every month, but both suppliers refused to honour their part of the agreements. As a result, the state-owned firm had to call a tender on emergency basis for two LNG cargoes for the months of December and January.

While the bids were called for cargoes to be supplied between Nov 19-20 and Nov 26-27, the PLL decided not to entertain the first bid for the middle of November.

*PLL floated emergency bids for two cargoes after Gunvor and ENI defaulted on their commitments*

For the delivery in the last week of the current month — Nov 26-27 — the lowest tender was filed by Qatar Petroleum Trading at \$30.65 per mmbtu, followed by Total Energies at \$30.96 and Vitol Bahrain at \$31.05 per mmbtu.

Sources in the Petroleum Division said the first tender for supply on Nov 19-20 was scrapped as the country was facing gas shortage in December.

Therefore, the lowest bidder for the supply on Nov 26-27 was Qatar Petroleum at \$30.65 per mmbtu, as re-gasification and supply of LNG into the system would be done in December, the sources added.

The PLL has been facing criticism for lacking proper strategies and ensuring LNG supplies when its prices were low in the international market. At the same time the state-owned entities had restricted the private sector from importing LNG as it could challenge the monopoly enjoyed by the public sector.

"The government has already floated the policy to allow the private sector to import LNG for their consumption and sale to various industries and sectors, but some government departments are creating hurdles in the implementation of this policy," said All Pakistan CNG Association Chairman Ghiyas Paracha.

He said the Petroleum Division and the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) had to take notice of this situation because the national economy and most importantly consumers were suffering due to expensive imports.

"We fear that the price of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) will go up by Rs8-9 per kg in December because of the single cargo being brought at the cost of \$30.65 per mmbtu," Mr Paracha added.

Though the impact would be faced by industries, it is unlikely that the government may increase gas rates for domestic consumers.

The move to allow the private sector to import LNG independently had been on the cards since 2011. After passing through various stages, Ogra, in December 2018, approved the gas network code for use of pipelines of the Sui Southern Gas Company and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited by any third party. However, the third party would have to obtain licences from the regulator and other relevant authorities and pay the pipeline use charges to the companies.

In November 2020, the Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE) had stressed on creating competitive market in the gas sector to end the monopoly enjoyed by both the state-owned gas utility companies – SNGPL and SSGC – and called on the private sector to perform an active role.

However, the idea could not materialise due to lack of planning and approvals by the state-run gas utility firms.

Meanwhile, the PLL has recently floated a tender to allocate idle capacity of LNG terminals on short notice for the supply of LNG equivalent to 385 million cubic feet daily (mmcf) gas for December, 240 mmcf for January 2022 and 275 mmcf for February 2022.

The last date to file the application to obtain idle capacity at the existing terminals is Nov 18. At the same time, the PLL has said the available regasification capacities may vary both on a daily and a month-average basis based on the available berthing slots and requirement of the PLL's own customers.

Replying to the query about the offer by the PLL to utilise idle capacity at LNG terminals, one of the private sector-licensed importers said the time to respond was too short.

On the other hand, analysts believe that the whole system needs revamping as it is not easy to determine the demand on a long-term basis to assess the idle capacity at LNG terminals.

"There is a continuous demand from the power sector and there are other long-term customers, therefore, determining the idle capacity for a period of four to six months in advance seems difficult for the PLL," Head of Research and Development at Pak-Kuwait Investment Company Samiullah Tariq said.

Pakistan LNG Limited (PLL) is a public-sector company and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Government Holdings (Private) Limited (GHPL) which is 100pc owned by the Government of Pakistan (GOP).

The PLL imports LNG at the LNG terminal located in Port Qasim and supplies regasified LNG (RLNG) into the network of gas utility companies. (By Kalbe Ali Dawn, 01, 07/11/2021)

### Girl-friendly toilets

SAMREEN Ijaz, studying in Class 8, joined the Noor Kubra Elementary School for girls in Muzaffargarh two years ago and what a relief it has been for her. "I don't have to miss a single day of school because of my period," said the 16-year-old waving towards the pink girls' toilet past the school's backyard.



Today, Ijaz is able to manage her monthly cycle safely, hygienically and with dignity, and even talk about what she termed a "natural process" with confidence. But that was not always so.

She was among the unquantified number of school-going girls across Pakistan who are completely unprepared for the onset of menstruation; it is exacerbated by not having girl-friendly toilets (GFTs) in their schools. A 2017 poll by Unicef targeting 4,000 females between 10 and 35 years of age found 49 per cent girls had no prior knowledge of menstruation and 44pc did not have access to basic menstrual hygiene facilities at home, the workplace or school.

The reality for many teenagers is that along with stomach and body cramps, many miss school when they have their period, for fear of leakage. Ijaz skipped school on the first day of her cycle for the same reasons.

*Pakistan has failed to own the menstrual hygiene challenge.*

But that is all behind her now. Just having that pink toilet has brought a sea change in her.

And it is no ordinary toilet. This one is specially designed keeping in mind the needs of women and girls. It is well-lighted, airy, with a door that can be locked from inside, has water, soap, a mirror over the sink, another long one for looking at the back of the shirt for any stains, a washing area to wash soiled clothes, and an incinerator to dispose of the menstrual waste material.

WaterAid is an INGO that works on WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene). It built the toilet in Ijaz's school and has built 49 more toilets in different government girls' schools in Muzaffargarh, 60 in Swat, 70 in Islamabad and 30 in Thatta. In addition, it has a booklet with the design for construction, waste management, operation and maintenance of female-friendly toilets.

This toilet cost a little over Rs400,000 with the recurring cost calculated to come to Rs14,000 every year that the school must budget for. In addition, because it has a septic tank that would require yearly cleaning, a small sum needs to be set aside for that. The teachers in Ijaz's school have hired a cleaning woman and pay her Rs2,000 from their pocket as they use the facility too.

Since 2019, WaterAid has been training teachers across schools in Sindh and Punjab on WASH, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and menstrual hygiene and health (MHH) to inspire behaviour change, through a specially designed government-approved teacher-training manual. But training teachers and teenage girls about MHM is not enough; it must be backed by gender-sensitive toilets and the task cannot be carried out by NGOs and INGOs alone. It is the job of governments.

This year's theme on World Toilet Day (today) is about 'valuing toilets' and finds resonance with GFTs. It means when the government approves and consents to international conventions on WASH, it must follow through with its pledges at home. The government must be held accountable to put its money where its mouth is. For young women like Samreen Ijaz, this translates into investing in a sanitation system that caters to MHH needs.

Thirteen policies — three on health, four on education and six on WASH — have brief mention of MHM and MHH at the federal level for Islamabad Capital Territory, but nothing on the plan to bring the issue to life.

At the provincial level too, there are 12 policy documents — Punjab six, Sindh three, Balochistan two and KP one — that make a brief mention of GFTs, but without a comprehensive roadmap on how it can be implemented without any specific allocation for GFTs.

Even where there are plans, such as the Punjab WASH Development Plan 2014-2024, the Sindh Strategic Sector Plan and the Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020-2025, that do specify the need for integrating MHH into health, education and reproductive health programmes, these are not thought through and seem half-hearted attempts. The apathy can be observed in the complete disconnect between different government departments — the women development department, the local government and the planning and development departments — designated to carry out those plans.

Pakistan adopted the 17 SDGs in its domestic legal and policy framework, yet it has failed to own the menstrual hygiene challenge and has not taken the responsibility to address it. MHH is relevant to Goal 6 (on WASH), Goal 3 (health), Goal 4 (education) and gender-equality (Goal 5). To achieve these, it needs to speed up and ensure not just toilets for all, but gender-sensitive ones by 2030. By investing in menstrual hygiene management Pakistan can bring girls back into the classroom.

(By Zofeen T. Ebrahim Dawn, 07, 19/11/2021)