



PAKISTAN MAHIGEER TAHREEK

The Movement of the Indigenous Coastal Fisherfolk Communities of Pakistan

Natural Resources on Sale

(Brief Report on sale of two islands of Sindh)



DRAFT

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Background

The Federal Government has allotted 12,000 acres land on two islands of Sindh namely Bundo and Buddo (locally called *Bundaar* and *Dingi* respectively) to a UAE based construction giant the “Emaar Group” to construct a model city near Karachi. The deal was kept so secret that initially the Chief Minister of Sindh Dr. Arbab Ghulam Rahim himself stated that the Federal Government has not taken Sindh Government in confidence on any such decision therefore his government will take up the matter with the federal government. However the Sindh Cabinet in its meeting held on 3rd October decided to support the mega project on the two islands and the Chief Minister taking u-turn said that “land” is not superior than “development” so the project will not be opposed. According to newspaper reports the project has been approved by the Economic Coordination Committee of Cabinet and the Prime Minister has formally approved the project.

The Project

Now Port Qasim Authority and Emaar Group are at advance stage of finalizing the modalities to initiate this mega joint venture to convert these islands into a modern city with 15,000 housing units along with a number of commercial plazas, leisure points, industrial parks, free trade zone and port terminals. The islands will be connected with Karachi Defense Phase-8 through 1.5 kms long bridge costing a hefty sum of US\$ 50 million (approx. 3 billion rupees). According to the plan the Emaar Group would invest about 43 billion dollars (about 2,600 billion rupees) over next 13 to 16 years. According to the Prime Minister’s adviser on finance, on completion it will be just like another Dubai. Although the official name of the new city is not yet announced however it is being named as Diamond City, Sky Land, Model City.

According to background of the project, the Port Qasim Authority had invited bids in April this year as a result four groups expressed their interest in joint venture out of which Emaar Group fulfilled the required criteria. The bidder of the project was required to have at least five billion dollars worth assets, one billion dollars annual income and technology to reclaim land from sea and Emaar Group was the only bidder that met these major requirements.

The Emaar Group

Emaar became a familiar name to people of Pakistan when over last few weeks leading national dailies carried a series of full page advertisements on its housing project in Islamabad. In May 2006 Emaar announced three real estate developments in the cities of Islamabad and Karachi in Pakistan. The projects, with a total investment of US\$2.4 billion will include a series of master planned communities and all three projects are expected to be completed in the next four to five years.

Two projects in Islamabad included The Highlands and Canyon Views with 1,500 acres between them, offering 9,000 luxury single-family town homes and villas. The Highlands development is located within the Defense Housing Authority Islamabad (DHAI) Phase 1 extension and Canyon Views within the DHAI Phase 2 extension. According to the official website of the Group, the proposed project for Karachi is named as Crescent Bay, Karachi. It is a 75 acre development featuring high and mid-rise towers for residential and commercial use, a shopping centre and a five star beachfront hotel. The towers will contain 4000 residential apartments. Crescent Bay is located within Karachi’s DHA Phase 8 and in close proximity to the DHA golf course. In addition to that this new project is also in offing.

The business power that Emaar Group possesses is obvious from the fact that it is implementing huge scale projects in about 20 countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, India, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan and Tunisia. The company recently announced record revenue and net

profits of US\$1.383 billion and US\$0.831 billion respectively, for the half year ended 30 June 2006. The revenue and profit for the second quarter of 2006 (April to June) were US\$0.773 billion and US\$0.418 billion respectively. The company has witnessed tremendous growth since its inception in 1997.

The Sold Islands

The two Islands on sale are actually the two ends of one long island, locally named as Dingi on west and Bundaar on east. According to the “COMPENDIUM REPORT OF HIGH PRIORITY AREAS – Pakistan Component” developed by IUCN, the Island is actually the part of Bundal/ Khipranwala/ Muchaka Islands Complex, which is included in High Priority Areas of Pakistan by IUCN. The island complex is located at the western end of the Sindh Coastal Zone bordered by Korangi, Phitti and Jhari creeks. Bundal Island is one of the biggest and highest of all the islands along the Sindh Coast, with a length of about 8km. The width of the island varies - it is about 4km wide in the north and 1km in the south. There are shifting sand dunes on the island, some of which gain heights of up to 3m. A portion of the northern area of the island is covered at high water and has a thick growth of mangroves at the extreme northern point. The eastern coast, covered by sand dunes, is steep and easily approachable by boat. In the south of the island, the shallow patch of drying sand has developed into a new island namely Buddo (Dingi) Island, which is the outermost island of this series. The sandy part of Bundal Island is under the influence of the monsoon winds.

Ownership of the Sold Islands

The ownership of islands is still disputed as Sindh Government claims that the area was leased to the Port Qasim Authority for port development purpose and it can not be used for commercial purpose. However the Prime Minister Mr. Shoukat Aziz during his visit to Karachi on 14th October 2006 decreed that the land belongs to Port Qasim Authority; enough message for Sindh Government. Interestingly City District Government of Karachi has also claim over the islands and according to reports the City District Government also signed a MoU with a Thai firm in October 2002 to set up a technology city on the islands. Hence except the historical heirs of islands, the poor fishermen, every one else has claim over the islands.

According to renowned legal expert Barrister Zamir Ghumro, the Federal Government does not possess any land in any province and all land within jurisdiction of any province belongs to the province only. However federal government can request provincial government for acquiring land for any purpose, which will not change the ownership status of the land. In this context Port Qasim Authority can not be the owner of the land, since it acquired area from Sindh province for port related activities only. It is strange that the Authority has now become claimant of the land and the Prime Minister is also publicly supporting the claim, without seeking legal position of the matter. No one from the local communities was ever consulted to understand historical rights of fishermen, who existed long before the country came on the world map.

Ecological Significance of the Islands

Although the Chief Minister of Sindh claims that only dogs roam on the islands and the Prime Minister says seventy percent of island was destroyed, the ground realities are entirely different. Recognizing immense ecological significance of the islands IUCN included them in the list of High Priority Areas. According to the “COMPENDIUM REPORT OF HIGH PRIORITY AREAS –

Pakistan Component” developed by IUCN, The following are the significant ecological aspects of the Islands.

- The area has great potential for eco-tourism since it has a higher elevation and offers extensive sandy beaches.
- The total area under mangrove cover on these islands is 10,000 ha, which represents the habitat for juvenile fish and shrimp in the area. The mangroves stabilise the island and serve as nurseries for shrimp and fish. Large expanses of blank areas/ mudflats are available for further plantation.
- Bundal Island is the breeding ground of the Green Turtles. The sandy beaches of these islands are the only areas where the endangered Green Turtles visit the east coast of Karachi for breeding purposes. Turtle conservation programmes may be developed along these beaches with egg-laying enclosures for Green Turtles.
- Since the islands constitute the breeding grounds of Green Turtles and several bird species, research on related issues may also be undertaken here
- The ancient Rattoo Kot Fort on Muchaka Island (located closer to the two islands) can form a tourist attraction. It is part of the ancient history of Sindh and if rehabilitated could serve as an interesting historical landmark and attractive place for tourists.
- Maximum subsistence fishing, the main source of livelihood of the local population, is conducted in these areas. Out of a population of 25,000 of the coastal villages, 80% fish in these waters.
- Bundal/ Khipranwala/ Muchaka Islands complex is also home to a wide variety of fauna. A large population of jackals lives on this island in the groves of the mangroves. The islands also provide a habitat to several snake species such as boas, vipers and sea snakes.
- The surrounding waters serve as feeding grounds for two varieties of dolphins (humpback and bottlenose).
- The area lies along the Indus Flyway and as such serves as an important breeding, roosting and feeding ground for migratory and resident bird species. The migratory birds include pelicans, flamingoes, cormorants, cranes and resident species comprise of herons, waders, terns, egrets, kites etc.

Threats to Islands

The IUCN document outlines the following threats to the islands

- Bundal Island is experiencing constant wave erosion due to frontage of sea. The frequency of waves approaching the island is 10 to 14 per minute and hit the coast at approximate angles of 20⁰ to 35⁰. Due to this phenomenon, the fine sand and mud roll along the beach is causing erosion. The eroded material is probably being deposited at Kunni swamp, north of Bundal Island.
- The Port Qasim Authority does dredging on a regular basis throughout the year. The dredged material is dumped locally but some of it is also dumped around the islands. The average quantity of this material amounts to 3 – 5 million cubic meters per annum.
- About 10 – 15 million gallons of municipal waste along with sludge and solid waste from Karachi is washed down to this area daily. Hence pollution forms a major threat to the Islands

- Surveys are being conducted for oil exploration and in the event that off-shore drilling is conducted, the islands will be very appropriate for the establishment of base camps of oil companies. This will place even greater stress on the fragile ecosystems of the coastal zone.

The Issues

- Sell of the two islands was a clandestine deal done without doing any consultation with local communities, not even with the provincial government.
- Land of the two islands was leased to Port Qasim Authority by Sindh government for port related activities and not for commercial development
- With this development local small fishermen will loose their vital passages to open sea through Korangi and Phitti creeks. This will potentially restrict the movement of more than 4,000 fishing boats of Thatta and Karachi coast into deep sea. They are already prohibited from fishing on the western side of the coast after development of PAF Base and luxury clubs (Golf club, Marina club, Boat club etc) by DHA. With these developments they were deprived from rich fishing grounds in the area and with this new development they are bound to loose the remaining fishing grounds located near mangroves along the islands as well as access to open sea through Korangi and Phitti Creeks. It can ruin Ibrahim Hyder, the largest fishermen settlement of Karachi. Almost whole population of more than 120,000 people in Ibrahim Hyderi depends on fishing business, who will loose their market and many may abandon the area in the wake of blocked access to the open sea.
- Since greed knows no bounds among the decision makers of the country, this development-phobia is also likely to spread its tentacles on neighboring islands, depriving small fishermen from their fishing grounds near shallow water of other islands in the area.
- Karachi coast will be deprived of rich mangroves nurseries and cyclone barriers in the shape of sand dunes and mangrove forests. It may be recalled that the mangrove forest in Indus Delta reduced from 263,000 hectares in 1977 to only 80,000 hectares in 2002.
- Poor fishermen of the area would loose their sojourn places. They use these islands as their sojourn place when they return from long voyages of open sea. Numerous small huts are present on the Bundal Island, which are used to take rest.
- Local fishermen also use these islands as fish drying and net repairing yards since they don't find enough space on mainland areas. These are vital activities of their fishing related livelihood, which they will loose.
- Local fishermen will also loose a place of cultural importance i.e. shrine of Yousif Shah, located on Bundaar island where thousands of devotees throng during two-day annual mela. The event locally called "Bundaar waley Jo Melo" is celebrated with great fervor and fishing communities anxiously wait for this event every year.
- IUCN has declared the area among High Priority Areas of conservation interest. Indus Delta is also enlisted on Global 200 Eco-regions of WWF. Therefore its environmental significance is well established and no such development can be justified on the islands being part of Indus Delta. In spite of all these facts no Environmental and Social Impact assessment has been carried out before announcing this project. There is a possibility that the government may conduct a cosmetic environmental study to justify the scheme, however environmental sensitivity of the area is too obvious and does not need any studies.
- The country has a large homeless population, who deserve development more than any other. According to official statistics urban areas of Sindh need at least 135,000 new housing units each year and to meet the backlog, each year 200,000 residential units are required over next ten years. These mega projects will only add money in the lockers of rich people rather than providing roof to shelter less.
- Renowned expert of urban development Mr. Arif Hassan refers to four planning principles to gauge the overall effectiveness of urban development projects. (i) planning has to respect the ecology of the region in which the city is located (ii) land use has to be determined on

the basis of social and environmental considerations and not on land value alone (iii) development must cater to the needs of the majority (iv) the tangible and intangible cultural assets and heritage of the city have to be protected. Even a cursory look can prove that the proposed model city on islands does not comply with any of the four planning principles.

Global Experience

The development wizards have also forgotten the recent lesson of Tsunami disaster, which unleashed hell over the coastal patches denuded of mangroves. They also don't bother to remember that the frequency of dangerous cyclones along Sindh coast is very high that is one per quarter of a century. Systematic elimination of mangrove barrier will not only deprive poor fishermen from their livelihood but also nurture greater danger of exposing coastal areas to deadly cyclones. Removing mangrove and sand dune shields is serves nothing but invites the wrath of nature in the shape of tidal and cyclonic disasters.

After the disastrous Tsunami which hit Asian coasts in 2004, The World Conservation Union (IUCN) compared the death toll from two villages in Sri Lanka that were hit by the devastating giant waves. Two people died in the settlement with dense mangrove and scrub forest, while up to 6,000 people died in the village without similar vegetation. In these areas many forests in the past were felled to build prawn farms and tourist resorts. Research has shown mangroves are able to absorb between 70-90% of the energy from a normal wave. Another study was conducted by Global Environment Centre in Malaysia. Five of the villages examined in the study include two on the coast and three behind mangroves. The villages on the coast were completely destroyed, whereas those behind the mangrove suffered no destruction even though other areas unshielded by vegetation at the same distance from the coast were damaged. The study concluded that the forested areas protected the villages from tsunami damage by reducing the energy of waves.

There are numerous stories to learn about the fact that how development projects on islands impact the human life and nature. A famous story of Mexican Cancún Island would be pertinent to cite here. Before its development, Cancún Island was a barrier island, 17 km long and 100-400 m wide. It faced the Caribbean Sea and enclosed a shallow lagoon and was an important nesting site for seabirds and sea turtles. There were several openings to the mangrove lined lagoon in which there was a variety of marine life.

In order to create a tax base for the newly created state of Quintana Roo (1973), it was decided to create an upscale resort for the wealthy. Quarries were developed and causeways constructed linking the island to the mainland and restricting the flow of fresh water into the lagoon. Sections of the lagoon were filled for golf courses and amusement parks. Sewage treatment and the disposal of other wastes became a major problem, eventually the exhausted quarries were used as rubbish dumps, polluting the groundwater supplies. The creation of marinas in the lagoon added to the problems so that now the smell and appearance of the lagoon is unhealthy. Added to the ecological impacts is the demographic impact resulting from thousands of unskilled workers moving into the area and living in barrios with no running water or sewer services, where disease is a constant problem. Many of these workers, having few skills, turn to crime to survive, resulting in a frightening clash of cultures. After 15 years of development, Hurricane Gilbert hit Cancún in 1988, resulting in considerable destruction and hardship. It was a category 5 hurricane and a devastating blow. Many of the beaches disappeared, there was no water, no food, no electricity. Although Cancún Island is not the only case to refer, there are several others but who cares for the disasters till they unfold and have taken their toll.

What to do?

Here are few recommendations on the follow-up course

- Civil society should mobilize all resources to launch a campaign against this anti-people development.
- A network of civil society organizations need to be formed to take collective action on this issue.
- A comprehensive study may be conducted to cover various aspects of the project such as historical rights, legal position, environmental dimensions and socio-economic effects on local communities.
- International and national fora such as Friends of Earth, Green Peace, IUCN, WWF should be mobilized on urgent basis to halt this development, which will deprive thousands of poor fishermen from their livelihood and destroy remaining tracts of pristine eco-system in Indus Delta.
- Public interest litigation should be filed to seek historical rights of fishing community.
- Meetings should be held with Parliamentarians to sensitize them on the matter and motivate them to raise the matter in Parliament
- Leading non-parliamentarian political groups should be approached to voice against the ill conceived project
- Coastal communities should be mobilized to resist this project, which is likely to be extended to other islands of Pakistan coast, depriving fishing communities from their historical rights and sources of livelihood for their generations to come.
- Emaar Group and the government of UAE should be approached to share concerns of civil society of Pakistan



Community Fishing near Buddo (Dingi) Island



Sand dunes on Bundaar (Bundal) Island



Fish drying on islands



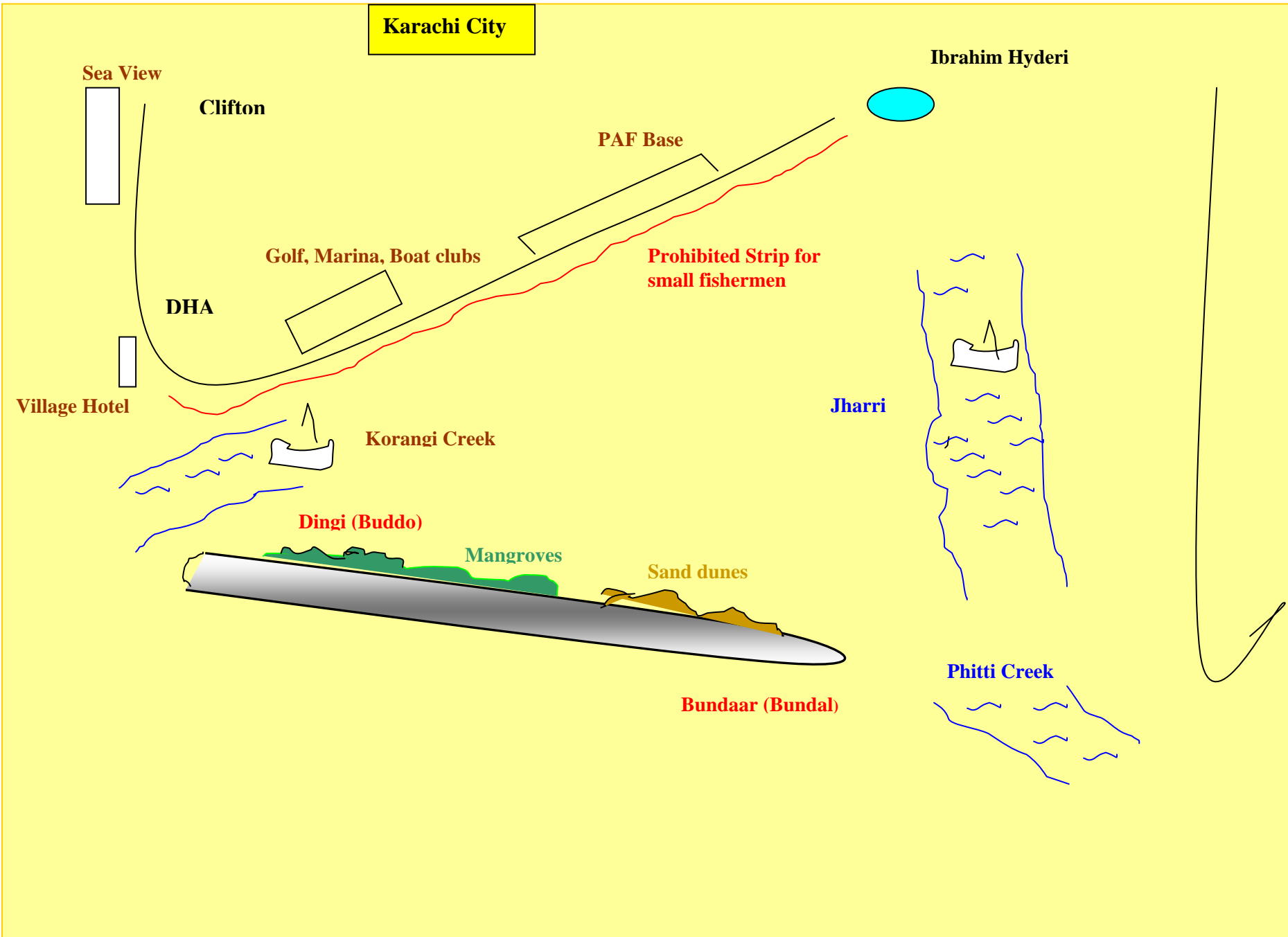
Birds flying over mangroves on Buddo (Dingi)



Sojourn place for voyagers on Bundal (Bundaar) Island

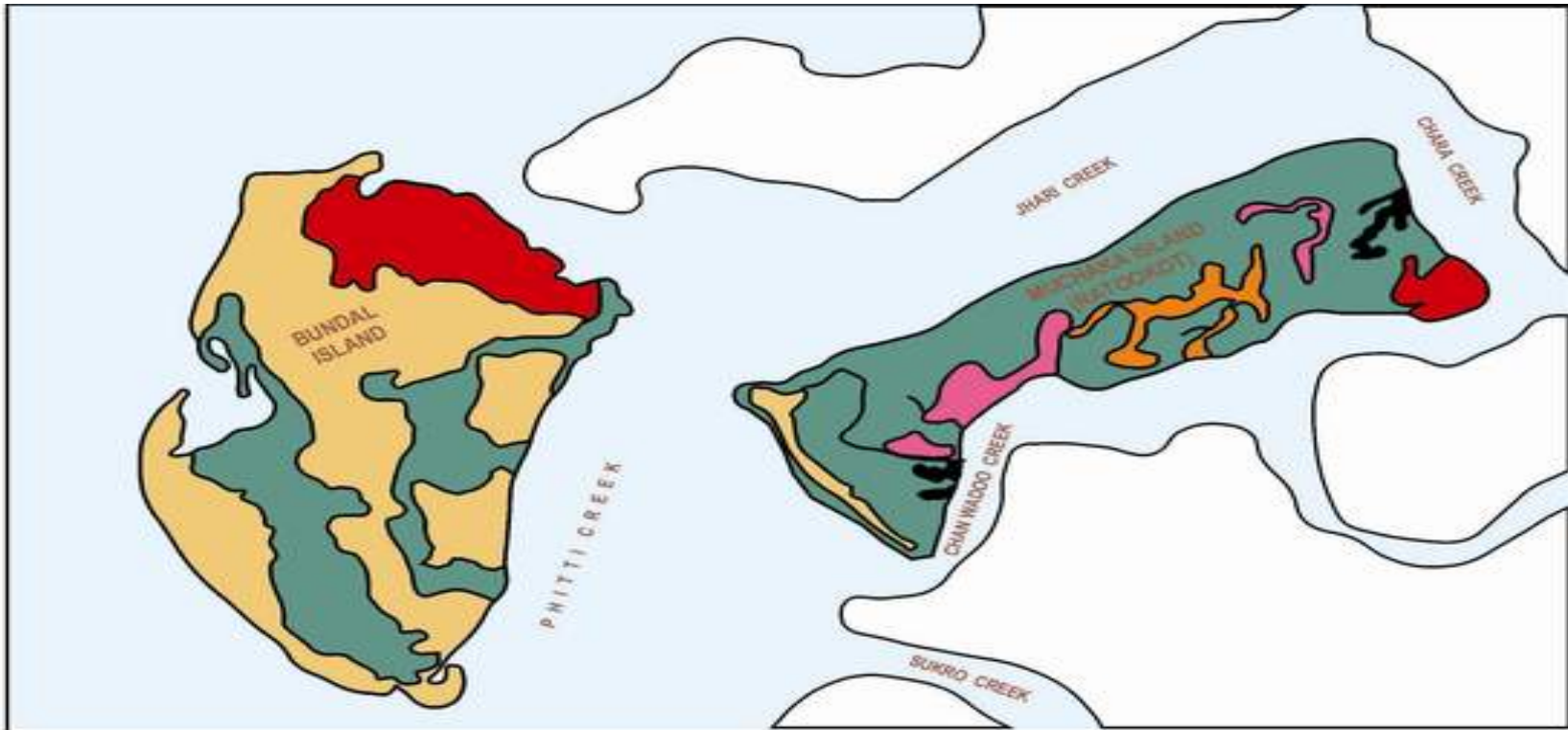


Passage to open sea on the east of Bundaar (Bundal) island



A rough sketch of the area

Bundal/ Khipranwala/ Muchaka Islands Complex



Scale:
1" = 3.3 km

Source: COMPENDIUM REPORT OF HIGH PRIORITY AREAS – Pakistan Component