Planning a city for the people
Unplanned Karachi
Policy and Planning
Noman Ahmed

A compilation of news stories
Content

Rs460bn question Noman Ahmed March 28, 2019 04
Accessible housing Noman Ahmed March 18, 2019 06
Building collapses Noman Ahmed March 01, 2019 08
Does Karachi benefit from the 18th Amendment? Noman Ahmed Feb 20, 2019 10
Fire hazards Noman Ahmed January 17, 2019 13
Too many planners Noman Ahmed January 02, 2019 15
Lives of the poor Noman Ahmed December 11, 2018 17
The ‘clean-up’ of Empress Market doesn’t have to be this way Noman Ahmed November 16, 2018 19
Beyond the glitz Noman Ahmed November 07, 2018 23
A ‘naya’ hope Noman Ahmed October 16, 2018 25
Housing demand Noman Ahmed September 14, 2018 27
City challenges Noman Ahmed August 12, 2018 29
PTI must work with PPP if it wants to bring tabdeeli to Karachi Noman Ahmed August 01, 2018 31
Policy & planning Noman Ahmed July 05, 2018 35
Water woes Noman Ahmed June 08, 2018 38
After the verdicts Noman Ahmed May 15, 2018 40
Sindh youth policy Noman Ahmed April 26, 2018 42
Urban infernos Noman Ahmed April 12, 2018 44
Higher education Noman Ahmed March 29, 2018 46
Home sweet home Noman Ahmed March 04, 2018 58
Day Zero Noman Ahmed February 16, 2018 50
Karachi’s anomalies Noman Ahmed Updated February 04, 2018 42
Karachi’s land use Noman Ahmed January 24, 2018 54
Karachi’s trash Noman Ahmed Updated January 14, 2018 56
Capital politics Noman Ahmed Updated December 13, 2017 59
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Updated Date</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expensive talk</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>November 24, 2017</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A broad canvas</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>October 17, 2017</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census realities</td>
<td>Nausheen H. Anwar</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>September 13, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Karachi</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>July 21, 2017</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned Karachi</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>June 11, 2017</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating culture</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>May 16, 2017</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-rise tide</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>April 23, 2017</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance through judiciary</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>April 03, 2017</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of step</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>February 14, 2017</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrupt ways</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>January 24, 2017</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics of urban water</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>December 30, 2016</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule by contract</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>December 11, 2016</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPEC’s territorial impact</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>November 22, 2016</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micromanaging Karachi</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>November 08, 2016</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where the poor live</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>October 20, 2016</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fractured city</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>October 02, 2016</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the mayoral polls</td>
<td>Noman Ahmed</td>
<td>September 03, 2016</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE Supreme Court’s acceptance of Bahria Town’s Rs460 billion offer has brought relief and joy to several stakeholders. The super realtor views this verdict as a victory for the path it adopted with this mega scheme and similar ventures.

Collusion with authorities capable of disposing state land, employing retired but still influential top brass, winning the public perception battle by tapping into the self-interested aspirations of the middle class, developing a commercial stakeholder force in the form of estate agents and go-betweens, and stretching the development to such a scale as to effectively silence critics without effort were some overt strategies.

Unprecedented as this retroactive legalisation of a monumental fraud may be, there are still several crucial questions to answer.

The land in question was meant to be used to develop an incremental housing option for the poor. This format has been found to be most effective to reach the underprivileged, bypassing the procedural rigmarole of application, computer balloting and allotment. Small land parcels of 60, 80 or 120 square yards are demarcated according to a proper land sub-division plan by the concerned authority. Bare minimum infrastructure such as basic water supply (often through non-piped formats) and transportation are provided to keep the land affordable.

Where does the fate of low-cost housing now stand?

Households wishing to avail this scheme are invited to begin living in a reception area with their belongings to prove their need, and are then moved to an identified plot and allowed to construct with the means and material they can afford, with technical and financial assistance from organisations.

As a consequence, the urban poor and low-income groups access housing without falling into the trap of speculation, time delays and overpricing. The model, which has acquired finesse since it was first implemented in Hyderabad in the 1980s, is internationally recognised for its effectiveness and has been successfully piloted in Karachi, Gharo, Lahore, Peshawar, etc. While it has no subsidy at any stage, the model requires land allocation by the land-owning agency to make it happen. With a huge chunk of land now usurped by the mega realtor, one wonders how the urban poor in this region will ever have access to affordable housing.

Usually, when an attempt was made to occupy state land for any private purpose of profiteering, the judiciary would spring into action to prevent it and uphold the public’s interest. The construction in 2009 of a superstore on a playground in Karachi’s Lines Area is an example. As maintained by the Supreme Court, the
building had to be demolished and the land restored to its original amenity status. Despite review petitions, the honourable court maintained its original position.

However, if misconduct in land management is done on a massive scale, and supported by thousands either as catalysts, cronies or covert agents, can the legal outcome be different? It may, in fact, create a major incentive for many dormant real estate adventurers to emulate the path adopted by Bahria Town. In the final analysis, land — the most important resource for housing — will simply become inaccessible to those who are still without shelter. In other words, targeted attempts to dispose urban and regional land for housing will become next to impossible.

At its present value, the sum offered by Bahria Town would make up over 68 per cent of the expected public development programme of the forthcoming federal budget. Many inferences can be drawn from this number, not least of which is that there are individuals and business conglomerates whose financial clout is commensurate with that of national development budgets. But, somehow, the dubious and semi-documented nature of this wealth is not netted by our taxation bodies.

The court has yet to decide about the coffers into which this sum shall be deposited. If it goes back to the same institution or tier of government that colluded to make the real-estate scheme a reality, it will be tantamount to a ‘big win’ for the abettors of this malpractice.

One option could be to create an endowment fund to support housing for the urban poor — the actual intended beneficiaries of this land before it morphed into the present fiasco. The endowment could have the mandate to support, develop, dispose of and manage low-cost housing access through professionally established procedures.

Manned by an independent board of directors with proven records of acumen and honesty in the housing sector, such an institution may be empowered to acquire land, develop and dispose of housing by following the refined process of incremental development. It may also be allowed to enhance its capital base by various available financial options. After all, it is the responsibility of the state to provide the underprivileged with access to decent shelter.

Published in Dawn, March 28th, 2019
ONCE again, Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed his resolve to facilitate housing for low-income groups. Mr Khan recently stressed the significance of easy credit for enabling the poor to benefit from various housing options. The promulgation of effective foreclosure laws, controlling the urban sprawl, encouraging high-rise development and ‘upgrading squatter settlements with apartments’ were some ideas he put forward.

The intention is praiseworthy. It aims to address a major issue that past governments largely ignored. The number of urban dwellers is increasing fast. The majority of the new numbers belong to the lowest economic strata.

Research and evidence show many examples establishing a link between homelessness, crime and terrorism. Low-income groups in urban and rural settings in Pakistan face a major challenge. The numbers and types of vulnerable groups are escalating. The access to housing is denied on account of religious beliefs, ethnic origins, social orientation and even cultural preferences.

*The poor pay for every service, but to the informal sector.*

According to The State of Pakistani Cities Report 2018, 54 per cent of the total urban population live in the 10 largest cities namely Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Peshawar, Multan, Hyderabad, Islamabad and Quetta. It may be useful if the naya Pakistan Housing Authority, in consultation with the provincial governments, prioritises tasks essential to delivering housing to the urban poor. Stock-taking of suitable publicly owned land and its realistic pricing, planning for urban basic services, effectively targeting poor households in urban areas and instituting a workable mechanism for implementation at the district level are core considerations.

Katchi abadis require a careful review. Often the status and entity of katchi abadis is not understood. Katchi abadis are a response to the failure of the state to arrange housing for the low-income segments. The late social activist Perween Rahman called such locations ‘people’s settlements’ as they extended the right to exist to all. The absence of choice to live and work in cities has left the poor with no option but to build on any available piece of land.

Interestingly, when Pakistan was created and millions of new citizens from various parts of the subcontinent opted for urban housing, the resulting settlements were not termed katchi abadis despite their rundown appearance. The government of the time planned and delivered several schemes for rehabilitation. However, it could not keep pace with the huge influx of refugees searching for basic living options.

Meanwhile, over the years, economic compulsion has forced millions to move towards cities in search of jobs. State institutions, especially under military rule, never
responded to the acute problems of housing faced by the new urban citizens, who had no choice but to help themselves, albeit in a disorganised manner. Haphazard squatter settlements sprang up in different locations. Government agencies attempted to bulldoze these but soon realised that it was an impossible task. Thereafter, the government took little notice, allowing the people to consolidate their living arrangements.

The process became technically sophisticated with the passage of time. Learning from earlier examples, katchi abadis adopted a grid iron rectilinear layout. Once the more favourable locations were saturated, desperate settlers swarmed the vulnerable ones. The phenomenon has continued.

It is often claimed that poor people need subsidies in housing which the state can no longer provide. This is not accurate. The poor pay for every service depending on where they live, but to the informal sector. Housing is acquired through payments to illegal entrepreneurs, building material providers and contractors. Security is accessed by giving money to musclemen of various profiles. Water is acquired on higher costs from vendors. In many cases, the poor end up paying more than the middle- or upper-income groups. The state, though aware, continues to do nothing.

Housing can only be delivered through efficient land markets under robust regulatory regimes. The proper governance of land and its transparent and judicious disposal are prerequisites to ensuring access of housing to the poor. Land cannot be regenerated. Its inappropriate usage must be checked. An effective means to deal with this issue is to institute an information base which provides facts that cannot be disputed. This would help streamline transactions, land use planning as well as preparations for overall development in urban contexts. It will also lessen corruption.

Modern-day markets require up-to-date information to create a level playing field for all stakeholders under a regulatory framework. Such an information base could be made available, initially, in a few cities such as Islamabad and Lahore, with right of free access given to all. It would help raise much-needed awareness.

*Published in Dawn, March 18th, 2019*
Building collapses
Noman Ahmed March 01, 2019

NTIAL building collapsed in Jaffar Tayyar Society in Malir, Karachi, a few days ago, killing four people. It seems the building was self-built by the owner without any proper structural or architectural design, and not examined by any building regulatory authority.

However, there are plenty of such shoddily built structures in the country, particularly in Karachi, that are death traps for their occupants. The creation and management of a safe and secure built environment is one of the government’s primary responsibilities.

Despite legal prescriptions to ensure precisely such an environment, several factors act as impediments. Among them are inefficiency and inadequacy of building control agencies; adulterated construction materials; lack of technical know-how; errors and discrepancies in the supply chain of materials/building services; and indifference of user groups in reporting the defects.

Recent demolitions in the name of removing extensions and illegal constructions have been executed unscientifically. Due to reckless use of demolition machinery, remaining buildings have become weak. Such structurally unstable buildings are nothing short of a ticking bomb. And the numbers of such structures may run into hundreds, if not more.

Structurally unstable buildings are a ticking bomb.

Close observation of some building collapses reveal recurrent patterns of violation of fundamental zoning principles and incomplete construction. Informal settlements have a history of gradual expansion and growth. Land development, usage and control are affected by the local power structure.

For example, in settlements close to affluent neighbourhoods, the conversion of single-storey construction is being swiftly replaced by eight- or even nine-storey buildings. Constructed without technical advice on plots ranging between 80 to 200 square yards, these structures are inherently flawed. Poor quality foundations, inferior contracting practices, construction in many stages, shoddy plumbing and electrification fixtures and installations make such buildings unfit for human habitation.

Most of them are built with a tripartite partnership of landowner, contractor and investor. The three determine the internal distribution of rentable space after construction is completed. To maximise profits, the contractor resorts to cutting costs in inputs such as design or construction material while the investor lends less capital to earn maximum on his share. The landowner turns a blind eye in anticipation of additional accommodation to rent out for extra income.
Since more and more folks from working classes wish to reside close to the city centre or populous neighbourhoods, the rental demands of such buildings remain substantial. These practices are common in many Karachi neighbourhoods. It is only after a disaster that some regulatory exercises are carried out — which soon end.

Planned neighbourhoods also face such problems. The mayor and other local functionaries have been critical about divided responsibilities of development control in the city. More than 13 agencies that own and manage land in Karachi claim to hold that prerogative without any coordinating mechanism.

The Sindh Building Control Authority is a major agency for the bulk of neighbourhoods under local and provincial jurisdictions. Federally controlled and constituted bodies such as cantonment boards are independent of the local authorities. Similarly, other autonomous landowning agencies such as port authorities are not controlled by the conventional building control practices.

The intentions of agencies vary. One authority discourages tall buildings for some time; the other issues permits for their unabated development. In the same neighbourhoods, different building profiles are found which create anomalies in real estate development, management and transactions.

A safe built environment can only be ensured if a trained and competent cadre of built environment regulators is inducted in these public agencies. Sound understanding of building design, execution processes, construction/structural design codes, by-laws/regulations and construction are common essentials. From building inspectors and building controllers to the chief executive, a specific type of background know-how and qualifications is essential. Architects, civil engineers, town planners and diploma holders in the relevant field are normally suited for the job after some kind of basic training.

Documenting and reporting mechanisms are also non-existent in terms of land and development control. Despite improved satellite photography/imagery and GIS, there is no annual report/study on land use change, encroachments, densification or infrastructural situations. If one asks for a comprehensive map of the recently executed building demolitions, the concerned agencies may find it difficult to produce it. Unless departmental capacities are developed, ensuring a safe living habitat for all will remain an elusive goal.

*The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, March 1st, 2019*
Does Karachi benefit from the 18th Amendment?
The Sindh government has always ensured that key affairs related to Karachi’s management remain under its tight control.

Noman Ahmed Feb 20, 2019 12:42pm

For most liberal and democratic folks in the country, 19 April 2010 had a special meaning. It was on this day that then-President Asif Ali Zardari signed the 18th Constitutional Amendment Bill that had far reaching legal and administrative impacts.

Among many changes, the Amendment empowered the provinces to a significant extent in financial and administrative terms. For many, it was synonymous to restoring the federation to its desired form.

It was also believed that once the provinces acquire greater financial autonomy, the devolution shall continue down to the tier of local government. Article 140A was inserted in the Constitution under the 18th Amendment that allowed political, administrative and financial authority to be devolved to the representatives of the local governments.

Editorial: Who controls Karachi?

Sadly, the provinces did not show the desired level of maturity in distributing the powers and resources to municipal level. Holding local bodies elections was not considered a priority.

It was under the Supreme Court's orders that elections to local councils were held during 2014-15. While elected councils are in place, negligible powers and resources now lie at municipal disposal. The case of Karachi deserves a special mention here due to some extraordinary characteristics of the metropolis.

A city apart

Karachi comprises six administrative districts. If one holds the 2017 census results to be valid, the city possesses 16.5 million inhabitants, which is about a third of Sindh’s population.

This means that Karachi accounts for 8 per cent of total national and 20pc of national urban population. The metropolis contributes 15pc of Pakistan’s gross domestic product, 25pc of federal revenue, 50pc of bank deposits and 68pc of issued capital.

It comprises inhabitants from almost everywhere in the country and many other parts of the region. As Pakistan’s largest and most developed city, Karachi merits an extraordinary governance arrangement, especially after the 18th Amendment.

It is, however, interesting to note that Karachi has seldom enjoyed political harmony with the rest of Sindh. For instance, in the 1970 general election, most of Karachi’s seats were won by opposition parties including the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jamiat-i-Ulema Pakistan while Sindh was ruled by the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP).
**Karachi notebook: Is a ‘Naya’ Karachi possible?**

Election results in 1977 showed the same trend, with the PPP winning with significant margins everywhere in the province except Karachi. Nine out of 11 seats in the National Assembly were won by the Pakistan National Alliance (coalition of main opposition parties).

Later, after the meteoric rise of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the city voted for them in overwhelming numbers in successive elections. Even when the MQM was pressured to keep away from elections in some instances, the PPP or any other mainstream party never succeeded in winning the majority of the votes in Karachi.

It was only in 2018 that the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf rose to prominence with smaller number of seats going to the MQM.

**Acts of control**

For a very long time, the provincial government has successfully attempted to outfox the parties and leaders who won the elections and represented Karachi in national and provincial legislatures. The Sindh government has always ensured that key affairs related to Karachi’s management remain under its tight control.

Let’s review matters related to the built environment. The *Sindh High Density Board Act of 2010* empowered the provincial government to assign fresh zoning to any designated parcel of land or adjust the floor area ratio of existing buildings. As a consequence, there are many tall buildings that can be found replacing the smaller structures purely due to commercial gains.

Those familiar with the covert wheeling-and-dealing that is done to strike deals between the government functionaries, builders, developers and investors for realising such lucrative deals can make near accurate estimates about monetary gains by each in this sure marriage of convenience.

**Quick read: Sindh local government set-up explainer**

Dozens of bungalows and low-rise buildings in Serai Quarters, Bath Island and other high-end locations are being replaced by tall structures. Many sleeping building permits have already been issued to various builders and developers, under the tutelage of their political cronies, who wait for the opportune time to convert these permits into reality.

This entire enterprise is under provincial control with no link to local government in any respect.

The functions and responsibilities of development control, building construction management and urban planning for the city are also converged under the Sindh Building Control Authority.

Similarly, for years the management and control of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) has been under the local government department of the Sindh government.

The efforts of various national and international agencies to reform the vital water utility have failed to materialise due to indifference of the provincial authorities.
While the KWSB is a financially weak organisation, Karachi’s water sector is a lucrative enterprise for sure. According to some estimates, water worth Rs57 billion is stolen annually in Karachi.

To completely take away the onus of any municipal performance from the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and other tiers of local government, the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board Act was passed in 2014.

This shifted responsibility for street cleaning, garbage removal and solid waste management from municipal agencies to the newly-created provincial entity.

**Bribes and shortages: Karachi’s burgeoning water mafia**

The board had been delivering these services through private contractors in four out of six districts in the metropolis. Its performance has been less than desirable.

The Supreme Court-mandated commission on water and sanitation issues in March 2017 came down hard on the board and even recommended its dismantling.

Similarly, transport, health, education, environment and housing are some of the other sectors where the provincial government reigns supreme. It is another story that the overall performance of none of these sectors matches the desired level.

**Building trust and consensus**

Several reasons can be found for this complete disconnect between the Sindh and local governments.

The chequered relationship between the PPP and the MQM (and now the PTI) is a cause of concern. It appears that the Sindh government is suspicious of the behind-the-scene links or influence of the establishment on these two parties.

It seems to jealously guard all legal and administrative privileges to bolster its bargaining position in any political negotiation. Its adversaries point out that PPP’s hold over these sectors is only for rent-seeking.

The second major issue is the limited capacity among the municipal ranks. For more than a decade, the MQM is alleged to have made thousands of political appointments in the lower and middle ranks of the various institutions under their control, which has weakened these institutions.

**Special report: What does the future hold for Karachi’s historical Saddar area?**

There is a definite need to have a working dialogue and consensus on translating the benefits of 18th Amendment-led devolution to the local level. This can only happen when the federal government takes the lead and engages the Sindh government in an open dialogue.

With the MQM part of the federal coalition, a broad dialogue on matters related to power and responsibility sharing can prove effective. Without compromising on the stand that Karachi is an integral entity of Sindh, the provincial government can be made to share power and resources with the lower tier under the broad contours of Article 140A of the Constitution.
But to move ahead on this, genuine political skills and viable actions are required.

Daily Dawn Karachi


**Fire hazards**  
Noman Ahmed January 17, 2019

**THE number of fire incidents in the country, especially in the cities, appears to be on the rise. A horrific fire in Rawalpindi a few days ago claimed the life of a bride-to-be and four other young women. The tragedy is not an isolated one. Last month, a fire damaged a garment factory in Karachi.**

In the aftermath of such incidents, inquiries are ordered. But little is achieved. Homes and production and storage spaces continue to be engulfed by preventable fires. A permanent solution is needed to ensure the safety of human life.

The recent tragedy in Rawalpindi may have been the result of unsafe internal or external wiring, leaking gas or a short circuit. In commercial buildings, warehouses and factory structures, the periodic assessment of the premises, including electricity and gas supply systems, are seldom undertaken. Owners and managers want to spend as little as possible so that they can optimise their returns; workers are asked to continue in the midst of leakages, sparks in wiring or malfunctioning of worn-out conduits.

Many premises — established in commercial or residential areas — do not even bother to acquire power connections commensurate with the actual load of consumption. Similarly, layouts and placement of work stations do not guarantee safe evacuation in case a fire erupts. The absence of exits can cause people to be trapped, or lead to a stampede. Lack of ventilation causes suffocation.

*Durable solutions must be worked out to prevent fire tragedies.*

Mechanic shops, garment factories and embroidery and stitching outlets abound in Pakistani cities. These enterprises usually function in non-purpose-built accommodation in densely populated commercial and residential areas. With poor wiring and substandard electrical appliances, fire risks increase manifold. It is the responsibility of regulatory bodies to carry out regular checks and ensure compliance with corrective advice.
Fires in our cities should serve as a reminder to plan and implement measures to ensure home and workplace safety. A basic task is to update the data on production, retail and warehousing spaces. The federal and provincial bureaus of statistics have previously carried out several surveys that could serve as baseline studies. 

Firefighting is essentially the local government’s responsibility, municipalities in cities and towns can build and update a database related to fire prevention. Building information parameters, especially related to safety, is a must. Existing building by-laws and regulations should be revisited. Most have provisions for safety that only need to be effectively applied.

After a long exercise under the supervision of experts, the government of Pakistan notified the Building Code of Pakistan — Fire Safety Provisions, 2016. It contains useful knowledge that can be readily employed by provincial and local agencies. Most building regulations enforced in our cities lay down a basic framework for fighting fires in the building design. The documents also focus on the provision of standpipes, automatic sprinkler systems, manual fire-extinguishing equipment, fire alarms, signal stations, overhead water tanks, protected shafts, fire-resistant doors, etc. Enforcement is needed.

A checklist-based evaluation of existing building stock can help identify inappropriately constructed buildings for the purpose of retrofitting. Specialised teams can be mobilised to design and facilitate these tasks. The cooperation of all stakeholders is necessary. Trade and commerce bodies, political parties, building control authorities, labour unions, technical universities and the media would have to work together.

Complex urban areas such as Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi have many types of buildings that require safety and security audits through the collaboration of state agencies, professionals and even ordinary people. Warehousing and basic manufacturing activities in old town quarters, squatter settlements near railway lines and high-tension wires, manufacturing units, godowns containing hazardous items, petroleum installations, etc are some of the sites where people live and work in precarious conditions. Labourers can be spotted sleeping on pushcarts, pavements, traffic islands and under flyovers, who are all at risk in case of an accidental fire.

In the public sector, national and provincial disaster management authorities must be asked to assist in revamping risky construction. Devices such as surveillance cameras, and control centres, are being set up by different layers of administration with duplicated functions. But basic inventories must also be prepared. A safety survey may be conducted in locations where fire complaints and hazards are rife. Causes of fire and combating capabilities, route planning for hazards and setting up emergency reservoirs of water could be the starting point. Fire departments must be bolstered by adding hardware, rescue equipment and free access to hydrants.

The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, January 17th, 2019
RECENTLY, the commissioner Karachi issued a notification dividing the city into three zones: downtown, uptown and old town. Prima facie, it appears to be an attempt to redefine the city’s administrative arrangements, however, it doesn’t provide any details or schedules to identify the neighbourhoods and peri-urban locations that may have been included in this attempt.

It’s also incomplete, as Karachi is much more than the aforementioned zones. While the commissioner may deem it worthy to eventually elaborate on these matters, it provides an opportunity to review the jurisdictional arrangements of this complex metropolis.

Present-day Karachi has a fragmented administrative setup. Despite being one city, different land development and management agencies control its affairs with overlapping functions and jurisdictions.

**Karachi and its residents deserve better.**

Immediately following Independence, many new residential locations were outlined and developed in various peripheries of the city by the central rehabilitation ministry. Starting in the late 1950s, more neighbourhoods were developed and allotted by KDA, while the present-day DHA acquired land from the provincial Board of Revenue to carve out plots for its allottees.

The Lyari and Malir Development Authorities and the newly reincarnated KDA similarly develop and manage land. KPT and Port Qasim Authority, besides managing ports, develop and manage lands. Pakistan Railways and SITE develop lands for operational as well as general urban purposes.

In its present state, Karachi’s urban locations within the municipal area are jointly managed by KMC and six district municipal corporations. For the same responsibilities in corresponding military locations, the city has six cantonment boards.

Each organisation functions through its own set of statutes and hierarchies, leaving little room for a coordinated effort in urban planning, development and management. The city’s various master plans emphatically stressed the need for a steering committee with representatives from each agency to harmonise key decisions and development — to no avail.

Post-18th Amendment, the grip of provincial administration has further strengthened, with the city’s affairs being closely controlled by different organs of the Sindh
government. It now possesses more financial space and hence exercises tighter control. Karachi’s peculiar political equation is an important factor that must be examined objectively. The provincial government and city administration rarely shared the same political alignment. Whereas Sindh has usually been ruled by the PPP, a few interludes notwithstanding, Karachi’s citizens have elected representatives from a wide gamut of political parties. Yet the Sindh government wields tight control over service delivery, and, with regard to land management, tilts decision-making powers in its favour.

For instance, a few years ago, the Master Plan and Environmental Control Department, then under KDA, was made part of the Sindh Building Control Authority. While the Sindh government appoints the heads of both, the earlier arrangement was technically and managerially appropriate. The military establishment exercised exclusive jurisdiction on their residential estates through DHA and respective cantonment boards. The provision of essential services such as water supply, sewerage, solid waste management, constructing roads, removing encroachments, developing parks, etc now fall in the hands of the provincial government. The presence of large-scale real estate developers further complicates the situation as they exert influence on development for their commercial interests.

Citizens and city suffer alike when administrative squabbles result in a breakdown of services, maintenance and repair of infrastructure.

Different government agencies devise jurisdictional organisation of territory under their control to suit functional and often political objectives. For instance, the ECP divides the city into electoral constituencies; KWSB by its service delivery and revenue collection zones; the police according to zones and limits.

Perhaps the commissioner’s order has some functional significance. But the more important need is for a consensus formula to manage Karachi as one urban entity. With over a third of Sindh’s population residing within it, and accounting for a large portion of national revenue, Karachi deserves a better administrative and technical response.

A Karachi planning agency must be created as the main forum for analysing development and management issues, and recommending planning proposals for its various neighbourhoods. Legal cover must be accorded to this arrangement as suggested in the city’s master plans. A formula for smooth financial allocations to municipal and local agencies must be devised. The establishment and federal government must also participate in this process, given the primacy of the city in national affairs.

*The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, January 2nd, 2019*
Lives of the poor
Noman Ahmed December 11, 2018

THE past few weeks in Karachi have seen an anti-encroachment drive that has affected livelihoods and living. Those spearheading the drive justify their actions, saying they are legal, and those using the spaces are painted as land grabbers. Meanwhile, another cause for concern is the intended clearing of land along the route of the moribund Karachi Circular Railways.

The underprivileged in Karachi require a comprehensive plan so that they can have a legal right to exist and operate, with the city benefiting from their services.

The foremost issue is land for housing. About half a century ago, land was distributed by city authorities to various categories of urban dwellers according to their need. Land use was determined on the basis of individual and collective social requirements. Today, land is acquired through clout, capital and clandestine coercion of the institutions concerned.

The poor cannot acquire land through purchase or force as they possess neither surplus capital nor political influence. The state institutions have a responsibility to ensure the poor can access the land market. Existing legal instruments such as the fair implementation of Sindh Katchi Abadis Authority (SKAA) Act, 1987, is an option.

Karachi’s poor must have the legal right to live and operate.

This law was promulgated during the tenure of prime minister Mohammad Khan Junejo. The objective of the law was to regularise those squatter settlements which had come up and evolved till March 1985 (revised to June 1997), that existed in ecologically safe locations, had acquired the approval of the land-owning agency/department concerned, and comprised over 40 households. By implementing the law, more than 300 squatter settlements were regularised. The past few years have seen the work of regularisation slowing down due administrative reasons.

As migrations to the city have continued unabated, survey and subsequent regularisation of squatter settlements must be undertaken along scientific lines. With advanced digital mapping tools available, the exercise can be done with greater accuracy.

In the absence of an institutionalised option of accessing shelter, Karachi’s poor developed settlements on left-over and marginal land. An elitist view of such neighbourhoods — referred to as katchi abadis — is that they are breeding grounds and safe havens for criminals and the inhabitants are not deserving of social interaction with the rest. In other words, katchi abadis are looked upon with contempt and as an eyesore. They are viewed as a part of the problem, not the solution.
In fact, katchi abadis are not built with criminal intent, isolated cases notwithstanding. They emerge from unusual sites as there are no alternative locations. When the residents of settlements along the KCR were interviewed recently, they said as much.

The right to run hawker stalls, small- to medium-sized shops and other services also require serious review. The poor do not have the means to purchase or rent shops and commercial spaces that are formally available. But their services and merchandise are needed in shopping areas, transport terminals, business districts, railway stations and traffic junctions.

In many parts of the world, open public spaces are made available to hawkers according to land-utilisation plans. These plans demarcate the limits and conditions within which vending activity is allowed. In India, the Street Vendors Act, 2014, is an important legislative tool that regulates this activity in urban areas. A town-vending committee, with representatives of street hawkers, is constituted to oversee the management of vending activity. Matters relating to space adjustments, vending licences and extortion and bribery are dealt with by the committee. Similar laws and provisions exist in the UK, the US and many other countries.

Sindh can consider introducing an amendment in the existing local government laws to make provisions for vending activity to exist on formal and legal grounds. The affectees of various anti-encroachment operations should be documented and accommodated in formally created places to save them from financial destruction.

The provincial government and KMC must identify locations for setting up temporary bazaars to facilitate vendors and retailers in areas where a greater number of shops and stalls have been razed. The design and construction of stalls should ensure both functionality and aesthetics. Women entrepreneurs and sales staff must be encouraged. The same support should be extended to the disabled.

Image lifting and communication is another strategy that can help in scaling up the operations of such bazaars. Innovative ads and campaigns can be designed to boost commercial potential. Introduction of banking kiosks and provision of credit card facility can enhance the performance of bazaars. Similarly bazaars can also become tools for stretching target subsidies in underprivileged localities.

The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, December 11th, 2018
The 'clean-up' of Empress Market doesn't have to be this way

Noman Ahmed Updated November 16, 2018

Neither compensation nor any alternative location has been offered by the authorities so far.—Urban Resource Center

**Removal of illegal construction has been ongoing in Karachi since the past few weeks under the directives of the Supreme Court.**

The most prominent and visible exercise in this respect was carried out in **Saddar**. Shops, hawker stalls, extensions of commercial spaces, semi-mobile enactments along the roads and footpaths were demolished.

According to municipal officers, information related to the demolitions was extended in advance to all the prospective affectees in a bid to minimise losses.

Related: *Encroach if rich*
Evicted hawkers at Empress Market.—Urban Resource Center

'Economic genocide'

Amjad (all names have been changed) had a kite and accessories shop along the backyard of the Empress Market. He had been paying rent to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) since 1988.

He told me that shopkeepers were confident they would be given enough time to pack their goods and dismantle the fixtures.

But he got no clear answer from KMC officials, the ones who used to come collect the rent. Contrary to official line, the ‘clean-up’ began without any prior notice, during the dead of the night.

Also read: Where’s Empress Market?

Heavy machinery was used to remove an illegal signboard in Saddar on Friday November 2.—White Star
Amjad’s shop was bulldozed; he lost fixtures worth one million rupees and merchandise to the tune of Rs0.6 million. He hasn’t been allowed to retrieve whatever remains from the rubble.

Arshad, who also used to sell kites, recounted to me how the shovel operator wouldn’t even stop for 30 minutes to allow him to salvage his belongings despite repeated pleas.

Neither compensation nor any alternative location has been offered by the authorities so far.

Rajab, a tea seller, had to lay off four young men who worked at his shop. For Arshad, this is an “economic genocide” of Karachi’s poor.

**A tale of official incompetence**

What has happened in and around the Empress Market is a tale of incompetent city management. It needs a careful review on many counts.

Around 1,800 shops that existed were, in fact, illegal since they did not operate under any valid lease. Despite that, all the previous mayors expanded the breadth of the market.

The municipal staff were charging rents (between Rs5,000 to Rs8,000 from each shop) without any legal authority.

**Read more:** *The lament of a heritage manager in Pakistan*

KMC authorities backed by heavy contingents of police and Rangers brought heavy machinery to the Empress Market on Saturday night.—Urban Resource Center

But since they were being charged and even provided with receipts in certain cases, the shopkeepers considered their installations as ‘legal’.
There is an Empress Market precinct development plan, which will now be implemented. Not only the building shall be renovated, but there will be a new commercial complex and multi-story car park. KMC will put out a call for allotments for these commercial spaces.

Rehabilitate and revitalise

The shops lost recently constituted the collective life of Saddar. The demolitions have come at a time when employment and livelihoods for the poor and lower-middle classes are hard to come by.

KMC would do well by constituting a rehabilitation committee to examine the scale of the loss and devise solutions.

Many professionals and support groups can be invited to join the effort in order to address the grievances of the affected communities.

Explore: Karachi — a case study of an unsustainable city

Hawkers at Empress Market during the ongoing operation against encroachments. — Urban Resource Center

As a long-term measure, support can be extended to street hawkers and small shopkeepers, who do not possess the means to purchase or rent expensive spaces in upscale markets.

Insight can be drawn from laws such as the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act of 2014 in India which attempts to safeguard street vendors.
The Empress Market and its precincts still have an important status in the city centre as well as the overall urban space.

Demolished encroachments near Empress Market.—Urban Resource Center
The area needs to be upgraded through an integrated approach. Its use should be retained as a traditional market place with all the necessary frills that made it vibrant and lively.

The structure and space of the market must be restored under the guidance of qualified restoration architects.

Revitalisation of bus terminal space along Preedy Street, parking lots in assorted locations at single/multiple levels, organisation of properly earmarked hawker zones in the front and backyard of the Empress Market should be considered.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1445973/the-clean-up-of-empress-market-doesnt-have-to-be-this-way

**Beyond the glitz**
Noman AhmedNovember 07, 2018

**NEWS reports reveal that the cost of the Karachi Bulk Water Supply Project (K-IV) has climbed to Rs75 billion against the initial estimate of Rs25bn. The rupee’s falling value, change in route and other technical details related to the project have been cited as reasons.**

If and when all the three sub-phases of K-IV are completed, it will add 650 million gallons of water to the city supplies each day. It may be kept in view that the water supply problems faced by citizens are not limited to quantity alone. Rundown
distribution lines, erratic frequency of supply, low and uncertain quantities, poor quality, errors in billing, and many management issues are faced by consumers on a daily basis.

Often when a mega project and its details are discussed, it is believed that by merely hefty spending through project mode, all problems related to the sector will be resolved. This is incorrect. There are many expensive large-scale projects at different stages of planning and execution, but each is likely to have limited impact, despite budgeting billions of rupees.

For instance, all the six main corridors of the BRT project in Karachi will cost around Rs170bn, but handle less than 10 per cent of all passenger trips. The Greater Karachi Sewerage Scheme (Phase III) or S-III is estimated at Rs28bn, despite limited impact on overall waste water management. The Lyari Expressway cost Rs23bn and the Malir Expressway has a price tag of Rs42bn. None of these and other mega projects will address the full challenge.

The huge focus on mega projects is often attributed to biased minds.

A mega project is a development enterprise of scale and magnitude and cost overlays running into billions of rupees. Government officials, politicians and departmental heads are generally keen to initiate such projects despite technical, financial or managerial challenges. It is important to note that high-visibility mega projects are considered indicators of successful development. In cities, flyovers, transit interchanges, elevated corridors for automobiles, bridges and pylons are seen as the physical manifestation of development. In the rural sectors, power plants, waterways, canal ways and highways are image-boosting entities.

A major reason for overemphasis on mega projects is the bias of technocratic minds. Architects, engineers and financial experts normally support such mega projects.

First, consultancy and supervision rates increase to the benefit of consultants. Second, it satisfies the professional ego of consultants when they construct large and visible projects. Third, it creates opportunities for obtaining more projects. And since the consultants are only concerned about execution, they seldom care to look into the future worth and sustainability of such projects. Such a lamb trot has given rise to many isolated stand-alone projects that were not necessarily beneficial for the people.

Mega projects normally see sizable operation and maintenance costs. As the number of projects increase, maintenance costs rise proportionally. The government finds it difficult to raise adequate funds to carry out periodic repair and maintenance due to a limited budget. Thus projects start deteriorating. Often, irreparable damage appears, causing loss of precious funds and effort.

The KMC has a budget outlay of about Rs27bn. Much of this amount is spent on staff salaries, while only a fraction is invested in the maintenance of existing systems. The
planning and design of mega projects are often inaccurate. For instance, storm-water drains in Karachi are almost entirely converted into regular sewage outlets, delivering large portions of raw waste directly into the sea. Instead of realising this fact, large treatment plants are being constructed, which are neither geographically congruent nor technically integrated to collect the sewage for treatment.

Mega projects should possess a corresponding link with small and medium-scale works. This will create a sense of initiative amongst individuals, small groups and even local bodies to address their respective developmental issues. If a sewage treatment plant is to be built, it should be rationally connected to the disposal channels at tertiary, secondary and primary scales.

Socially, the creation and development of such projects should evolve from an understanding of the need of the concerned segment of the population. Wherever improved roads with a modernised fleet of buses can perform the task of urban transportation adequately, the need for elevated mass transit does not arise.

Often the expanded costs of mega projects are borne by loans from IFIs. This can be greatly curtailed by accurate planning and careful budgeting. Administratively, the cross section of society for whom the project is intended should be made to participate in each and every stage of the execution and running of the project.

_The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi._

_Published in Dawn, November 7th, 2018_

---

_A ‘naya’ hope_

_Noman Ahmed_ October 16, 2018

ON Oct 10, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced the creation of Naya Pakistan Housing Authority (NPHA) in line with PTI’s manifesto promise of constructing five million houses. Reportedly, the authority is mandated to develop policies and facilitation mechanisms for housing projects across the country. The prime minister has declared he will personally oversee the working of this authority to monitor progress and remove any obstruction that may arise in inter-departmental coordination.

The creation of NPHA raises a number of questions about the legal and administrative framework within which it will operate, its relationship with the existing set of authorities, its conceptual alignment with the devolution of power, etc. The performance of earlier national housing authorities and their fate also needs to be
analysed. Besides, housing is a provincial subject as per the 18th Amendment, and the role of federal and provincial departments and their working relationship may also emerge as thorny issues.

Retrospective analysis reveals that the federal government, for many reasons, reduced its role from a direct player in the housing sector in the early 1950s to a catalyst in the recent past. Firstly, housing is a capital-intensive sector. With its shrinking financial resources, the government cannot directly participate in housing development. Secondly, land which is the most valuable resource for developing housing is becoming scarce and expensive. State land is in limited supply and mostly controlled by provincial boards of revenue. And lastly, housing loans are a risky business as per banks’ perception.

In a country where tenant-landlord relations in the housing sector are generally riddled with disputes and conflicts, kick-starting a mortgage based finance programme for housing needs a cautious review. Those most lacking housing choices/options in society are the urban poor. They are constrained by market economy practices which have reduced land from a collective asset of the society to a marketable commodity.

**The urban poor must be provided land purchase loans.**

One of the best options is to empower the urban poor to have appropriate access to land. Ironically, existing credit mechanisms only favour those who already own land and need credit to build. Unless the poor are consciously targeted for provision of land purchase loans through a carefully devised mechanism, they will remain without housing. Credit disbursement must take into account the documentation handicaps of daily wage earners and labourers.

Land records are in gross disarray throughout the country. Similarly, new schemes, packages and programmes are announced through communication strategies unfamiliar to the poor. Breaking the information barrier can benefit the poor. For example, in the Khuda ki Basti project in several cities in Pakistan, the staff directly approached low-income areas, informed residents about the project and explained its various benefits. This also helped identify the truly needy. It is vital that the government understand the usefulness of such approaches and promote them accordingly.

It has been found that credit for housing without technical advice is misutilised and unable to generate the desired result. At present, the local masons and building component manufacturing yards are the only outlet for technical advice. By strengthening their technical capacities and linking them to their clientele, sound housing stock can be generated with cost-effective output.

Action research and extension of appropriately developed solutions can certainly resolve such contextual problems. But such approaches can only work if assigned a flexible time and management option. Experiences in Orangi in Karachi are a case in point.
The federal government must understand its resource limitations and shortcomings of outreach. It should create a favourable environment where the private sector can enter into fruitful partnerships for housing development. Unfortunately, there is no past precedent of this particular concept in Pakistan with respect to housing. While the concept of public-private partnership is still valid and has great potential, it requires political will and scientific business plans by the government to involve the private sector in gainful housing enterprises.

The government must enact effective foreclosure laws to safeguard allottees’ ownership rights which will also prevent mortgage defaults as people will take caution in paying the loans back. Tax relief and incentives to the producers of building material are also desirable. Unless this is done, housing will remain largely unaffordable for the majority of the people.

Besides this, effective measures are required to prevent speculation in these initiatives. Plots and houses in past schemes were mostly appropriated by investors. The implementation of housing programmes should also be locally administered. Centrally dominated housing packages normally crash without achieving the desired objectives.

*The writer is chairman of the Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University.*

*Published in Dawn, October 16th, 2018*

---

**Housing demand**

Noman Ahmed  September 14, 2018

PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan has created a committee to explore options for implementing his five million houses initiative — expected to benefit those without shelter, slum dwellers and other urban and rural low-income groups. It is rare for a national leader to swing into action, implementing the promises in his party manifesto so early on. It is also encouraging that housing is being accorded high visibility on this government’s list of priorities. Given that the provision and facilitation of housing is one of the most complex social development undertakings, many are looking forward to seeing how this unfolds. Nevertheless, the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of housing must be carefully examined.

The demand for housing — especially for apartments in large cities such as Karachi, and single unit villas in various other urban locations — is intensifying due to
changing sociological dynamics. For example, the joint family structure in cities is breaking down and nuclear families are growing. Another important contributor to the swelling housing demand is the expanding housing backlog. According to some studies, a backlog of more than 11m housing units exists as per current estimates. About 450,000 formally built units are constructed annually with a predominant focus in urban areas, and the backlog continues to mount.

Housing demand is also affected by migrations to the cities for better healthcare, education, employment, and safety and security reasons. Social dislocations caused due to geopolitical factors and terrorist and anti-terrorist campaigns during the past three decades also need to be studied in order to evaluate their impact on cities. Replacement of housing stock is an important demand factor in the context of urban Pakistan. Census figures of 2017 shall reveal the actual status of the housing demand.

The ‘why’ and ‘how’ of housing must be carefully examined.

In the past, land was considered a social asset. Now it is traded as a saleable commodity. Urban land has become a product attracting investments in exponential proportions. Hence its prices rise to high limits where its availability and access become impossible for housing, particularly for a low-and-middle-income clientele. Political interests define and determine land supply and distribution, while social and development-related demands become a low priority factor.

The allocations of land to various political favourites at less than market price in Karachi, creation of large real-estate developments in suburban locations, unapproved land subdivisions and development of housing schemes by realtors in Lahore and Islamabad are some examples of this.

The rise in informal living and overcrowding in Karachi’s low-income residential areas is a visible reality. The emergence of katchi abadis in Islamabad also reflect the fact that better controlled and managed cities have not been able to extend affordable options to the urban poor. The struggle of the Awami Workers Party to find a solution to this issue in Islamabad must be supported by the centre.

Housing finance is an important subsector. Studies indicate that at present, not more than two per cent of finances are arranged through formal housing finance institutions. About 10pc lending is facilitated through informal sources while the remaining is facilitated through personal savings and other related means. State Bank reports have lamented the fact that the total housing finance mortgage market is around 1pc of GDP, one of the lowest in South Asia. High risks in transactions, poor governance and a breakdown of law and order on a routine basis impacts the scenario.

Some solutions have been recommended by experts in the past. Establishing housing resource centres at the district levels is one option. These institutions may be empowered to gather and package up-to-date information about public and private sector housing options. Pilot projects may be launched for developing housing on
cooperative basis for low-grade government employees, public organisations and formal private organisations.

The House Building Finance Company must undertake innovatively designed packages to enhance clientele and expand access of housing to more needy groups.

Feedback can also be drawn from the experiences of other countries in South Asia. For instance, Sri Lanka launched a Million Houses Programme some three decades ago. Its key components included provision of small loans, ensuring community participation in housing development ventures, revision of technical standards to conform to needs of the poor, technical assistance by the implementing agencies, extension of subsidies for local infrastructure provision and capacity building of the administrative and technical staff. Despite challenges, this initiative became a useful milestone in addressing the housing issues in Sri Lanka.

The writer is chairman of the Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University.

Published in Dawn, September 14th, 2018

City challenges
Noman Ahmed August 12, 2018

IT is well established that Pakistan is urbanising quickly and that the urban population will be 50 per cent by 2030. It is therefore necessary for stakeholders to be informed of its various challenges.

Prepared by a group of national and international professionals, specialists and sector experts (including the writer), and managed by UN Habitat and the Ministry of Climate Change, the State of Pakistani Cities (SPC) report launched last month covers urbanisation, urban economy, governance and transport, basic services, housing, environment and safety, and heritage and tourism. By analysing Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Faisalabad, Peshawar, Quetta, Hyderabad and Gujranwala, where about half the urban population lives, it provides a snapshot of current urbanisation trends.

Let us start with urban economy. Ninety-five per cent of federal tax revenue is collected from these 10 cities, with Karachi contributing 55pc, from key sectors like telecommunications, finance and insurance, transport and manufacturing. Average per capita income in urban areas is Rs46,000; Rawalpindi has the highest at Rs82,000 while Quetta has the lowest at Rs37,000. The poverty rate in Quetta is 46pc, Multan
35pc, while Karachi (4.5pc) and Lahore (4.3pc) have the lowest poverty rates, apparently due to a high scale of populist philanthropy.

**Pakistan’s rapid urbanisation presents many issues.**

Urban infrastructure is in dismal condition. While Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad and Multan have a bus rapid transit system, with Karachi and Peshawar to follow, overall, public transport is in disarray. The rising number of private vehicles, limited public transport options, almost nonexistent options for non-motorised transport and pedestrians, poor traffic management and a weak regulatory environment are key detriments to proper urban mobility.

About a third of households lack access to piped water, and supplied water is almost always not fit for drinking. Sewerage and solid waste management systems are grossly inadequate in most cities, affecting the water quality in rivers, canals and waterways, lakes and sea into which untreated waste water is dumped. Municipal waste in large part is partially disposed at certain sites without a scientific landfill system. Power supply is also in acute disorder. Whereas the government contends that connections are available to over 85pc of households in these cities, the transmission and distribution network is in shambles. More than 18pc of electricity is lost before reaching consumers.

Then there is the dilemma of the housing situation. For real estate and upper-income groups, housing developments are lavish and wasteful, while schemes for lower-income groups have not been prepared in a long time.

Traditionally, the existing pattern of land ownership has a direct bearing on its transition in the urban scenario. Clan influences, appropriation and possession of land are important factors that govern the direction of development. When land is in private ownership under traditional landlords, they lobby with the public-sector officials to devise the policies/priorities to maximise their own benefits — often at the fringes of large cities. Karachi’s north-western outskirt is one of the main locations where local landlords have benefited from the city’s growth.

Urban lower-income groups have constrained access to housing credit, a key prerequisite to home ownership. As commercial financial institutions do not have credit lines for these groups, public credit agencies become the sole point of hope. A revamped House Building Finance Company can deliver this much-needed service desired by our urban poor communities.

Heritage and cultural tourism is also important for cities to focus on, since the survival of heritage is directly proportional to its commercial potential, rather than its cultural significance. Many of our cities evolved from a historic, old city fortress. The modern city later emerged during colonial times. There is enormous potential to turn historic monuments and old city walls into hubs of planned cultural activities. Some work has been done in Lahore, Multan and Peshawar, but more effort is needed to build upon our immense cultural capital.
The report suggests many policy and plan responses to the identified problems. Connecting national and local policies and plans with the Sustainable Development Goals is one way to reconcile international efforts to improve cities. Capacity building, including that of local bodies, is another important step. To achieve this aim, there is a need to revisit existing laws and statutes that make administrative and financial powers converge in the provincial government. Creating participatory and evidence-based territorial and urban planning is also needed to help improve our cities in their functioning and sustainability status.

*The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, August 12th, 2018*

**PTI must work with PPP if it wants to bring tabdeeli to Karachi**  
*Noman Ahmed Updated August 01, 2018*

*July 2018 witnessed an unprecedented euphoria amongst the masses in Karachi. With utmost certainty and assurance, folks were found rallying around the green and red banners of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI).*

A casual conversation with many on the street would turn into a passionate debate with hope and optimism at the centre.

“Yes, the captain will win and shall be our new prime minister. He shall end all our miseries, especially poor governance, dilapidated urban services, lack of representation in the main echelons of power, lawlessness and insecurity, rampant corruption and all the ills that exist in Karachi,” a young lady in a university department beamingly remarked.

She was surrounded by many young girls who had affectionately painted the PTI flag on their faces a day before the elections.

The sentiments of the middle-aged and elderly were also not different:

“Yes you will see. He will reform this city like no one else had done before….like the way he led his team to lift the Cricket World cup in 1992,” an elderly gentleman at a newspaper stall replied to my question as to whether he believed in Imran Khan’s leadership with special reference to Karachi.
Supporters of the PTI chant slogans during a sit-in demonstration at the Teen Talwar roundabout in Clifton in 2014.—Online
I tried to start an argument by laying down some of the stark realities related to the structure of our administrative system, allocation of powers and resources amongst the various tiers of government, and more serious and factual stuff.

No one was interested to go into details. When he will win, he will find a way!

And indeed, the sentiments translated into electoral reality. Out of a total of 21 national assembly seats, the PTI won 14.

It has also emerged as the second-largest party in the Sindh assembly with 23 seats.

Read: Cities, climate change and Pakistan’s extended urbanisation

The hitch in PTI’s game plan
But the present reality of our administration and governance is such that most matters related to everyday life of common citizens are managed by the provincial government.

Some residual services and tasks are also dealt by local government institutions.

For instance, water supply and sewerage in Karachi is under the control of Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) — which is directly placed under the Local Government Minister of Sindh. The Sindh Solid Waste Management Board is also under the same provincial minister.

Construction activity, development of residences and other physical facilities are regulated by the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA).

Development works are done by Karachi, Lyari and Malir Development Authorities, all under government of Sindh.

Read next: Karachi needs revenues of the size of a country, not of a municipality

Healthcare, management of environment, police, schools, colleges and public universities, fisheries, housing and women welfare, social development and population welfare, heritage and culture, labour and livelihood, land allocation and control, and many other sectors of performance are under the control of Sindh government.

Interestingly, the elected local governments bodies in Karachi function under the close tutelage of the provincial government. And the provincial government in Sindh is where no change has appeared.

With 77 seats from a total tally of 130 general seats, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is all set to continue its third consecutive term since 2008.
Two questions arise: how will the Karachi voters — who overwhelmingly voted the PTI into an effective position to form government at the centre — benefit from their choice?

And how the much needed development, governance and representation needs of the metropolis shall be addressed, given the fact the Sindh administration may continue with its water-tight control on decision making and financial allocation prerogatives?

Karachi’s many woes
Let us first look at some of the most pressing needs of the city. A comprehensive road repair and maintenance project is a foremost priority.

Daily experience of commuting shows that various categories of roads have been damaged to a serious extent.

Whether Nishtar Road, Shahrah-i-Pakistan, Shahrah-i-Noor Jehan or major roads in Orangi, Baldia and Qasba colony, the destruction is to the extent where even stronger vehicles get damaged to a non-functional level.

Lack of periodic maintenance, poor design and quality of construction, frequent road cutting and adjustments for other forms of buried infrastructure, overlapping of new development schemes such as ongoing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project and frequent spills of fresh and sewage water have been some causes that led to the present dilapidated conditions.

— Zofeen T. Ibrahim
Despite the Supreme Court-mandated judicial commission on water and sanitation issues in Sindh, the status of trash collection in the city is far from satisfactory.

Physicians and health care professionals inform that the scale and intensity of infectious diseases has increased manifolds during the past few years.

Karachi produces more than 12,000 tonnes of solid waste every day. The weight and volume is rising due to growing consumerism.

A tiny fraction of this waste is lifted and disposed away in an unscientific manner. The remaining portion of this vast volume is either left unattended or burnt from time to time — causing more health hazards.

Sindh Solid Waste Management Board, the provincial body for this task under Sindh government, has been severely criticised for its less than desirable performance.

Karachi requires many simple but firm strategic interventions. The increase in the number of CNG-fuelled green buses on city arterial roads can facilitate commuters to a great extent.
About 450 million gallons of untreated sewage per day is discharged into the sea. Development of small and medium-scale sewage treatment plants at the discharging ends of city nallahs can safeguard marine environment.

This enterprise shall also help produce recycled water for horticulture and irrigating public landscape.

Related: Lifting 10 years of garbage in Karachi, a gargantuan task for solid waste board

The drains are unable to carry to water as they are choked and their size capacity reduced.—Amar Guriro

Water management must be improved to enhance efficiency and control theft and wastage. A water loss reduction project is desperately needed by city dwellers.

It is common knowledge that many of our water mains have completed their designed life and are impacted by water leakage and organised theft.

Proper fixing of the leaks shall help Karachiites benefit more from the already available water.

Rehabilitation of footpaths all along the major thoroughfares is a key intervention that must be done without delay.

Education and health care facilities, especially in the public sector, need complete overhaul.

The list can go on and on.

But almost all the tasks mentioned above fall under the control of the Sindh government, which shall act on its own accord, not at the behest of PTI legislators.

Healing the rift between Karachi and Sindh government
Will it mean that the entire frenzy and enthusiasm of PTI buffs shall go to waste?

A lot shall depend upon the political equation that evolves between the incoming federal government under Imran Khan, his affiliates and cronies and the Sindh government, aka the PPP leadership.

Many possibilities remain open to the PTI legislators from Karachi to make their presence felt in Sindh and Karachi affairs.

It may be worthwhile to study what their predecessors in the federal government — the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz administration — did in Karachi.

The spearheading of the Karachi operation in 2013 with political consensus of all the parties in the province was perhaps the most important initiative by the Nawaz administration.

Ably supported by the armed forces and the provincial government, the operation was able to efface extortionists, terror outfits and a hoard of criminal gangs — within and outside the ranks of many a political party.

While law and order was the top problem of Karachi in 2013, water supply and urban transportation are two significant woes faced by all and sundry in the metropolis.

Now read: For a democratic Pakistan, more power needs to be given to local governments

A construction site for Green Line in Karachi.—White Star

The PTI will do well if it negotiates the timely operation and management of ongoing initiatives such as the BRT along with all its connecting and feeder services, the Circular Railway with extensions to designated neighbourhoods and construction of intercity bus terminals on the Super and National Highways.
But if the PTI legislators and their party are sincere to resolve Karachi’s issues, they must bear in mind that it cannot be done without a strong working relationship with the incoming Sindh government.

If these politicians are able to articulate their own bargaining points, it shall prove to be useful to establish this bond.

As the PTI is perceived to enjoy better links with the establishment and its leader is on a high horse through this cumulative advantage, it can serve as a useful bargaining asset when they sit down to crease their relations with the PPP-led Sindh government.

While a mutually beneficial, cooperative spirit could serve everyone well, including Karachi, any condescending attempt to preponderate the PPP leadership in Sindh may prove futile and ineffective.

Besides, the presently muted Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan mayor and his local government tier must also be kept on board in all such interventions.

Khan has been talking about directly-elected mayors for large cities during his political discourse.

Whereas some of the more drastic measures may prove difficult, the PTI can consider becoming a bridge between the Sindh and local government.

The metropolis and its hapless citizens cannot afford any further divisive politics for sure.


**Policy & planning**

Noman Ahmed July 05, 2018

As proceedings on mega real estate schemes continue in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s May 4 verdict, the debate in the media on its possible impacts is inadequate, and lacklustre economic indicators means that most stakeholders re-subscribe to land and real estate as their only reliable investment options. From an urban planning and environmental management view, this is highly damaging. Land is a finite asset that can only be used for public benefit, which is best determined through a professionally and socially appropriate planning process.

A sustainable urban life cannot be contemplated without a proper land utilisation policy with detailed master plans outlining proposed functions in relation to existing
constraints and potentials. Given Karachi’s on-going infrastructure, governance and urban management crises, it is crucial that any new venture be examined for its operational viability and sustainability in the short and long term. Right now, the caretaker government (though constrained in terms of time, powers and mandate) may consider certain steps to correct the course of land management.

The first step is to empower the planning process. The city needs an autonomous planning agency with jurisdiction over the entire Karachi division. All the city’s past master plans called for such a body. Ironically, previous governments have made the planning department subservient to the building control authority, which is against standard norms. Building control bodies follow the prescriptions of master planners — not the other way around. All major institutions of federal and provincial governments, military authorities related to land management, infrastructure management bodies, private sector and civil society should be represented on its steering committee. It is certain that a potent planning agency, with the authority to supervise execution of its plans, will be able to effectively address many issues.

Corruption and malpractice in land management schemes arise from a number of factors. The provincial government’s centralised control over land, with no accountability to its people, is one reason. Historically, chief ministers allot and allocate lands to benefit cliques among their parties or extended affiliates. Attempts to research and highlight land issues are met with strong-arm tactics. Nisar Baloch, who campaigned to protect public land in SITE, was murdered in broad daylight in 2009. Perween Rahman of the Orangi Pilot Project was killed in 2013 for her work on the urban poor’s land access challenges. Many other activists, journalists and researchers face intimidation and threats when they work to survey and analyse our land disposal dynamics.

There is no sustainable urban life without land management.

A useful solution to some of these problems is to have a public online land repository, containing data on land ownership, dimensions and area, transaction history, revenue and taxation, as well as current status. The provincial government made a similar but inadequate attempt; it must be comprehensively updated. Experts believe that public access to land and property information can substantially reduce corruption and malpractice.

Our land policies do not reflect a range of quasi-legal situations between formal and informal housing. Land or housing that is formally registered through registrar offices, and that can be accepted for mortgage financing, are recognised as legal properties. Spot field studies show that there are many lacunae where units fall short of meeting these two conditions.

Plots floated in a development authority scheme, legally constituted cooperative societies or any other land-owning agency are termed as formally titled land. The legality of such land parcels is only accepted when the leasing conditions of the concerned neighbourhood/locality are fulfilled. Some types that cannot be compared
with normally leased land include: katchi abadis that have been approved for regularisation but await initiation of the leasing process; neighbourhoods that await notification of amelioration plans; localities where change of land use has taken place; and areas that have a change of status or jurisdiction.

Owners and prospective buyers suffer due to the indifference of planning and development agencies, while powerful groups acquire such properties at lower prices and harass stakeholders (including legal heirs) to submit to their demands. Delivery mechanisms are so designed that speculation automatically evolves in the process, as civilian and military land development agencies allot land at a very low selling price. Regulatory controls, such as non-utilisation fees, are either unenforceable or too miniscule to bother property owners. A capable and independent planning agency at the metropolitan level has the potential to tackle many of these issues on a sustained basis.

*The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, July 5th, 2018*

---

**Water woes**

Noman Ahmed

June 08, 2018

KARACHI’s raging summer has exposed intrinsic shortcomings in the overall water supply, with ordinary folks, especially in remote peri-urban areas, most affected. Long queues at designated and non-designated hydrants showed a largely dysfunctional piped water system. The city’s centre and affluent south rely heavily on exorbitantly priced tankers. This state of affairs is not sustainable in the short or medium term. That Supreme Court-mandated water commission has been inquiring into Sindh’s water and sanitation affairs proves the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for solutions.

The status of water supply cannot improve unless relevant institutions undergo reform and capacity building. In March 2017, the Supreme Court advised on reforms for the Sindh government, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and other public bodies. These included: revising the water quota for Karachi, having civil society representation in KWSB, fixing existing water plants, recovering pending water charges from public departments, limiting water hydrants to emergency use, installing water meters for bulk consumers, instituting a geographic information system for scientific monitoring, prioritising completion of the first phase of the K-IV project, and revamping distribution lines all the way to tail-end users.
The then provincial government submitted a comprehensive report to the court, pledging compliance with the directives. The caretaker government must consider revisiting this task to ensure that Karachi’s citizens get timely relief.

Supply lines at the bulk and neighbourhood level must be examined for their performance efficiency. Many of them have outlived their utility or become defective due to organised thefts. For a comprehensive picture, this should include an assessment by third-party experts. A programme may then be prepared to repair leaking pipes and joints, starting with remote residential areas. Supply standards and specifications must also be updated to reflect current lifestyles and urban densification.

What will it take to fix Karachi’s broken supply system?

It is also important to revisit revenue collection from retail and bulk consumers of the service. While water from tankers costs around Rs3 per gallon, the normal bills charged to consumers are 10 times lower than this. A realistic tariff, backed by solid financial analysis, must be worked out to enable the utility to sustain operations and maintenance of the network. A ‘willingness to pay’ also needs to be promoted through campaigns targeted at consumers. In my research, I found that many users simply refuse to pay their bills, believing that water is nature’s gift to them.

Some years ago, in Orangi, Baldia and Surjani, the communities constructed collective tanks to manage and distribute water to less privileged households. These were constructed on public spaces and could store about 2,000-4,000 gallons. Once water was procured through tankers purchased with pooled funds, it was then distributed under joint management of the areas’ people. Efforts must be made to revive this option, which became ineffective several years ago when people were made to believe that piped water will soon be available in abundance.

The Indus river, from where Karachi gets the bulk of its water, is a highly contested source. It is safe to predict that acquiring additional quantities of water in the future may prove nearly impossible. Alternative options, such as desalination, must be explored. There are examples around the world for us to learn from to generate large quantities of water with fewer costs and investments.

One of the most efficient large-scale desalination plants was set up in a Middle Eastern territory in 2013. It is capable of generating 160 million gallons of fresh water from the sea, at a cost of Rs0.25 per gallon or $0.58 per cubic metre. Desalination experts believe that this is a much lower cost compared to the normal $1 per cubic metre elsewhere in the world. This plant costs around $500m but is able to prove its worth by accounting for 20 per cent of the input to that territory’s water supply.

Karachi possesses a spread-out coastline and can certainly benefit from desalination after undertaking proper feasibility studies, reviewing past attempts that did not work, and implementing appropriate engineering improvements.
Nowadays, technologies are also available that can harvest water from the atmosphere. As Karachi maintains a high rate of humidity for most of the year, it may be useful to install low-tech solar- and wind-powered atmospheric water generators of small and medium scale.

It is, however, important to remember that such solutions need to be attempted by cutting through bureaucratic red tape. The sooner we embark on approaching out-of-the-box solutions, the better it will be for improving the quality of life of millions living in Karachi.

The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, June 8th, 2018

---

**After the verdicts**

Noman Ahmed May 15, 2018

THIS month, the Supreme Court delivered three important verdicts. Since all three relate to land and its lawful distribution, some optimists expected a policy stance from the judgements.

One perspective is that the verdicts raise more questions than they answer. Why did the Malir Development Authority (MDA) ignore the prescribed incremental housing scheme in favour of a private real-estate enterprise? How is the venture so conveniently benefitting from uninterrupted water and power supply while the rest of Karachi suffers? Is such ruthless acquisition of agricultural lands administratively or morally justified?

And, most importantly, is public land a communal and social asset, or a marketable commodity to be sold to the highest bidder?

These questions of public policy and planning have been adequately answered in Karachi’s earlier plans drawn up by myriad experts. The Karachi Development Plan 1973-1985 covered population projections, housing demands, land-use allocations, corridors of growth, job creation, etc. It originated from well-meaning objectives such as adequate employment, infrastructure, food supplies, potable water, environmental sanitation, flood protection and basic institutional changes. The plan emphasised that the peripheries of the metropolis would only be used for agricultural, forestry and other green land uses.
Is there a desire for transparency in Karachi’s land allocation?

The Karachi Development Plan 1986-2000 focused on intensively utilising urban lands, enhancing densities and maintaining appropriate infrastructural services. It warned against the disastrous consequences of urban sprawl.

Both these and later plans envisaged the state as a benevolent facilitator of land and housing for all. But, in the recent past, land was procured, developed and sold through priorities and conditions laid down by public-sector agencies in liaison with powerful interest groups. Both attempted to maximise profits by shaping decisions in their own favour. Thus, affluent neighbourhoods are closer to the city centre compared to large katchi abadis like Orangi and Baldia. Meanwhile, the unprivileged have to fend for themselves in informal locations as per availability of land.

The innovative concept of an incremental housing option, discussed in one of the verdicts, refers to targeted supply of urban land to the urban poor. It was steered by the Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) in Gulshan-i-Shahbaz in the 1980s. To avoid speculation, plots were carved out on designated but semi-developed land. Through social mobilisation and careful identification, needy households were invited to begin occupying the plots and pay off the cost in incremental instalments.

The HDA staff assisted the residents, while many NGOs and support groups provided health, education and social welfare services. Since land delivery procedures were simplified, poor and lower-middle income groups benefited across the board.

The innovation received the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1995, and was incorporated in the 2002 National Housing Policy. The approach was replicated in Gharo, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, etc. The Sindh Disposal of Urban Land Ordinance was promulgated in 2002 to adopt incremental housing as a key option for delivering small urban residential plots. Sadly, it was repealed in 2006, but many other administrative arrangements retain the mechanism of incremental housing.

History shows that land development schemes generally emerged as a clandestine marriage of convenience rather than a transparent, equal opportunity enterprise. Political interest is a prime factor when determining the procedure of land supply; it supersedes urban and regional planning considerations, objectives and policies of the administration, fiscal limitations and even legal liabilities.

While provincial government functionaries are allegedly involved in this, political bosses play a key role. Bypassing the laws, regulations and norms thus became a routine exercise, thereby preventing any mechanism from functioning. In brief, land parcels have been allotted due to political pressure from influencers, party bigwigs and bullies of various kinds — with political bribes often given in the form of land.

The Supreme Court has attempted to set right the course as per the scope of cases that were filed; the larger questions must be addressed by the provincial government. If it
desires transparency and fair play, it must document and make public the land assets that it owns.

Access to information is the best deterrent to corruption. Categorising land according to type of ownership must also be completed. To make efficient use of available developed lands, a substantial non-utilisation tariff must be imposed to check the unnecessary holding of land. The moribund Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020 must be updated, with scientific input, to transform it into a guiding tool for urban development.

*The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, May 15th, 2018*

---

**Sindh youth policy**

*Noman Ahmed April 26, 2018*

Near the end of its tenure, the Sindh government announced a new youth policy. It has many outputs, including creating a youth commission, information system for documenting youth, placement bureaus, incubation centres at universities, assistance in skill development, options in seeking financial assistance for entrepreneurship and more. It also promises a possible revival of student unions. With scant time left for the present government to implement it, many vital matters require an objective appraisal.

Fifty-two per cent of Sindh is urban; a sizeable number constitutes the young. For obvious reasons, they have very different needs compared to other demographics. Sindh’s youth rightfully demand opportunities for their education, health, personal development, recreation and (above all) a prosperous future. Yet it is disappointing to observe, as of late, that progress in each sector related to youth affairs has declined sharply.

Universal quality education is the foremost need. There are no more than 60 institutes of higher learning in Sindh; thus, a mere 5pc of youth have a chance at enrolment. Even within this narrow opening, the guarantee of a ‘quality education’ is limited. Institutional infrastructure for technical and vocational training is also subpar; while there is an overseeing authority, it has done little to overhaul moth-eaten training centres.

*Youth is a resource that we have squandered.*
Many years ago, some polytechnics were established with help from developed countries to not only set them up but to also send senior staff to manage them for a while. Some of these foreign managers were killed and not replaced for obvious reasons. General performance has declined ever since. With improved law and order conditions, European countries may now be interested in extending help — should the relevant government departments make appropriate preparations to effectively acquire it.

Sindh has more than 10 million young women. They are among the most deprived and vulnerable of its constituencies, suffering from lower literacy rates, growing intolerance, shrinking safe spaces, reduction in social status by design, malnourishment and wilful neglect of essential healthcare, and governmental impotence in ensuring their rights — even to live. Alleging ‘morality’, reactionaries have conjured many taboos to enslave women in Sindh. Despite hypocritical claims to the contrary, women are suffocating in this political and social environment.

Many of Sindh’s youth are affected by abject poverty, and held back by a lack of social mobility driven by low productivity, and absence of resources, support services, and monetary and knowledge capital. This cycle of poverty generates feelings of helplessness that, exacerbated by materialism and hyper-marketing, lead to immense frustration and dire outcomes. As they lose faith in a system that cannot meet their basic needs, social anarchy intensifies, leading to antisocial behaviours, crime and extremism.

It is also a major loss of talent, which most young people inherently possess. Our government announces job-creating programmes, but such an approach has severe limits of scale and reach. Instead, concerted attempts are needed to channel human and capital input, create enabling environments, remove barriers to access, reduce regional disparities, counter corruption (to restore public trust), and sustain law and order.

Youth is a resource, which this country is substantially endowed with. Many countries have taken effective measures to manage problems faced by this vibrant constituency, and have come up with simple but far-reaching strategies. For example, Cambodia launched a volunteer service to help rural youth increase food productivity by learning appropriate agricultural techniques. Many other countries have followed similar approaches.

To ensure early productivity, they are provided multiple choices to acquire skills while in school. Technical and vocational education in relevant trades, apprenticeship programmes, small-scale entrepreneurial mentorships, consolidation of work opportunities in informal sectors, incentives to prevent dislocation from hometowns/settlements, gender-specific policies to support young women, and creation of financial products by banking sectors have all proved useful in helping youth realise their potential and scale the ladder of social mobility.
Unabated development and sustenance of physical and social infrastructure is also vital to help marginalised and disadvantaged youth utilise its capacity for economic productivity. Besides, the youth must be engaged in policy/decision-making in the real sense, and not for cosmetic renderings. If we fail to act now, the resulting social ramifications may be too entrenched for any future leadership to handle in Sindh — or elsewhere in Pakistan.

The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, April 26th, 2018

Urban infernos
Noman AhmedApril 12, 2018

EARLIER this month, a department store in Multan was gutted by fire. While a detailed probe will unveil the cause, images of the burnt-down structure show that various electrical appliances were perched haphazardly atop the building elevation. This is not an atypical incident. Fires routinely impact hutments, commercial complexes, bazaars, small- and medium-scale industrial enterprises, etc in our cities.

Only yesterday, a fire broke out at a mal khana in Karachi’s City Courts, while last October, a plastics factory in SITE was burnt down. This February, a fire in a Faisalabad bazaar left two people dead. This needs a far-sighted approach to evolve a permanent solution for an issue that directly hurts human lives, especially the poor and working classes.

Disasters such as these occur for many reasons. Unsafe storage of flammable articles like textiles is one factor. Arson is another, and can only be ruled out through scientific inquiry. Various electrical and plumbing defects are seldom repaired. Many owners and managers, interested only in financial returns, make workers overlook faults such as leaks and worn-out conduits. Many premises do not even acquire power connections commensurate with actual load of consumption.

As our cities grow, we must be prepared to tackle fires.

Similarly, poor workstation layouts hamper safe evacuation. Few exits risk people being trapped or trampled on, while lack of ventilation can lead to suffocation.

Yesterday’s fire should serve as a final reminder to plan and implement workplace safety measures. The foremost task is to update data pertinent to production, retail and storage spaces.
The federal and provincial bureaus of statistics have conducted several surveys that can serve as a baseline. Municipal projects may be formulated to update and enhance this database. Building information parameters, especially related to human safety, must be included. While existing building by-laws and regulations may be revisited for initial scale application, most have safety provisions that need only be applied. The myth that this requires large investments is absolutely baseless. With intelligent planning and design (and some common sense) effective methods of combating fires and other hazards can be enacted with minimal expenditure.

On a national level, the Pakistan Engineering Council, National Disaster Management Authority and many experts proposed fire and life safety provisions for the Building Code of Pakistan that were approved last year. In Karachi, the Building and Town Planning Regulations, 2002 (amended from time to time) has many useful provisions. Among its relevant clauses are appropriate provisions of stand pipes, automatic sprinkler system, manual fire-extinguishing equipment, fire-alarm system, signal stations, dimensions of overhead water tanks, structural provisions for fire-resistant construction including doors, separating/fire walls, protected shafts, etc. But these await strict implementation.

A checklist evaluation of existing buildings can help identify those that require retrofitting to remove structural hazards. A few specialised teams can be mobilised to facilitate such a task on an emergency basis. However, cooperation from all the stakeholders is a prerequisite. Trade and commerce bodies, political parties, building control authorities, labour unions, technical universities and the media shall have to work together to approach this vital objective.

Complex urban regions such as Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad have many types of buildings, requiring safety and security audits through collaborative administrative agencies, professionals and even ordinary people.

Warehousing and basic manufacturing activities in old town quarters, squatments along railway lines, high-tension wires, highways, busy roads, manufacturing units, godowns, petroleum installations, oil depots, power stations, nullah banks and garbage dumps are some sites where people live in a fairly organised albeit dangerous manner.

The Civil Defence Department, which is virtually invisible, has many important roles to play such as training, conducting drills, maintaining and operating a basic warning system, and proper record-keeping of its outposts. It needs revitalisation. National bodies such as disaster management authorities must be asked to assist in its revamping and upscaling.

A few basic inventories also need to be prepared. A fire safety audit may be conducted in locations where fire complaints are recurrent. Identifying fire causes and combating capabilities, emergency route planning and water reservoirs, and mapping flammable materials’ storage could be some starting variables. Fire departments must be bolstered by being provided more and better equipment, training and hindrance-free
access to hydrants. Education institutions must conduct fire safety awareness sessions and mock drills to ensure emergency evacuation.

The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, April 12th, 2018

Higher education
Noman AhmedMarch 29, 2018

THE Sindh government recently began the legislative process to change the way the province’s public universities are managed and administered. The selection of vice chancellors (VCs) is already routed through the Sindh government, though the federal Higher Education Commission (HEC) foots the bill. While the teachers’ representative bodies are part of this ongoing process, present and prospective students — ostensibly vital stakeholders — are completely absent.

With student unions nonexistent, alternative ways of seeking their input are not devised. In this apparent power struggle between the federal and provincial governments, issues of quality of education, equitable access (especially for the poor), autonomy (or lack thereof), medium- and long-term human resource needs assessment in higher education seem absent from the debate.

Public universities have so far functioned according to laws that lay down a clear mandate, academic structure, nature and extent of operation as well as the jurisdictional framework. From departments to the institution, an overall administrative and academic skeleton is normally prescribed. Boards of studies, faculties and research bodies, academic councils, finance and planning committees, university development working parties, syndicates and senates are the organs that typically run routine affairs. Almost all are managed either entirely or by a majority of professors and staff/officers.

Until recently, the VC was appointed by the governor, who is also the chancellor. As the chief executive, the office of the VC used to be autonomous and powerful. Not even the governor could directly exercise control — the only dire action he could take was to sack and appoint a new VC. Now, a committee and the chief minister are to interview aspirants and make recommendations to the governor. While the VC generally used to be a senior professor, professionals, bureaucrats and even military personnel have also been appointed.

Is Sindh throwing the baby out with the bathwater?
This approach has generated mixed results, whereas universities with competent and forthright VCs have shown remarkable progress. As such, no visible lacuna that merited a legal and administrative overhaul appears to exist. Yet thoughtless revamping in the name of ‘reforms’ is a prevalent practice; institutions are created without feasibility and later dumped without justification.

The approach proposed for managing universities is a case in point. While many assumptions are cited about their dysfunction, no scientific study of management and outputs has been carried out. Neither are there valid criteria for ranking universities’ performance. In contrast, most progressive developing countries have created a monitoring mechanism to help raise academic standards.

Structurally, decision-making in universities is reasonably democratic. Representatives of teachers and other cadres are elected through established procedures. If there is any shortcoming, the procedure can be looked at, but fiddling with a working system without premise is illogical. It may also be useful to note that, in some public universities, senates/syndicates have convened regularly. While this reflects a serious failure of those administrations, it also makes the case for testing the validity of the working of a body before drastically altering it.

As university funding and grant disbursement keeps all under the strict tutelage of the HEC, universities were left with no choice but to follow the prescriptions of a federal agenda. Although provincially-governed, financial control created a sizable niche for federal intervention, which obviously led to academic and even administrative subservience. One can observe that administrations are overloaded with paperwork in the name of quality assurance, as teams from Islamabad frequently descend to ‘monitor’ the universities’ functioning. While quality assurance is desirable, endless paperwork simply reduces options to achieve it.

It may be appropriate for the Sindh government and legislature to reconsider its move to alter the governance mechanism of the universities. As long as the HEC remains the main provider of funds, it may be incorrect on the part of the provincial government to completely eradicate its role in decision-making processes.

If the Sindh government really wishes to make a difference, it should make efforts to help develop endowments that can be managed independently by the syndicates. In this way, universities will also acquire working independence. Almost all the prestigious universities around the world are structured in this manner. Additionally, the composition of existing syndicates and senates should also draw extended membership from society, industry and businesses relevant to a university for enhancing their effectiveness and outreach.

*The writer is a professor and dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, March 29th, 2018*
IN Karachi, only three katchi abadis (squatter settlements) have been regularised in the recent past. On Oct 13, 2016, the Sindh chief minister directed the concerned department to transform 100 katchi abadis in the city into model settlements of urban living. There is no evidence of any such work in the more than 700 squatter settlements in Karachi.

Not long ago, the Awami Workers Party had filed a petition in the Supreme Court related to evictions in Islamabad’s I-11 sector. The court directed concerned government departments to prepare policies and guidelines for upgrading the status of katchi abadis as per constitutional provisions. Again, nothing much happened.

The bigger question that needs to be addressed is, are katchi abadis the only choice of housing for the urban poor and lower income groups?

Are ‘katchi abadis’ the only housing option for the poor?

After food and clothing, shelter and housing is the third most essential human need. With urban population on the rise, the need for housing increases at an exponential rate due to several reasons: joint family living is dwindling, thus increasing the number of households; high rate of in-migration from rural to urban areas and from smaller to larger cities also adds to accommodation needs.

However, the need remains unmet. Private developers build housing options smaller in number than the demand and unaffordable for the actual needy. On average, a 1,200 square-foot apartment comes with a minimum price tag of Rs12 million or more in a planned neighbourhood of Karachi. Instalment payment plans usually extend no more than three years. Even a well-paid professional would find it impossible to meet the conditions.

No affordable housing option for the underprivileged in urban areas has been offered since the past three decades. Karachi’s total annual housing need is over 80,000 units. With the exception of a few self-built houses and apartments delivered by builders, the remaining need is either filled through adding more rooms in the existing housing stock (legally or illegally), or surviving in congested, sub-human conditions. Surveys by housing experts have found 12 to 15 occupants to a room in some inner city settlements.

Against this backdrop, katchi abadis continue to increase on available public or private lands in our large cities. Cities that take care of only the rich are bound to fail. Healthy cities are those where the poor have decent access to basic amenities of life.
Regrettably, the ruling elite has not given enough importance to this very significant issue. The Junejo government had announced March 23, 1985, as the cut-off date for regularisation of katchi abadis. The idea was to survey the katchi abadis to determine the merit of their existence and grant legal ownership, services and amenities to settlers. It was also assumed that creation of new katchi abadis would be prevented by absorbing people in the newly announced five-marla and three-marla housing programmes.

However, delayed delivery of plots did not allow the bulk of the poor to benefit from these and later approaches to land distribution. The cut-off date was later extended to June 30, 1997, that is still valid.

Open access to booking of plots enabled the rich to buy land actually allocated for the poor. Hindered occupancy, locational disadvantages, cumbersome paperwork, high prices, and uncertain distribution of land were some of the reasons that led to the failure of public housing schemes in cities.

More than half of Karachi’s population resides in katchi abadis and more than 150,000 vacant residential plots. It is often claimed that poor people need subsidised housing which the state can no longer provide. This is not true.

The poor pay for every service in the context of where they live, though to the informal sector. Housing is acquired through payments to illegal entrepreneurs, building material providers and contractors. Security is accessed by doling out ransoms to various musclemen. Water is acquired at higher rates from vendors. In most cases, the poor end up paying more than the middle- or upper-income groups.

To begin with, a housing needs assessment survey must be carried out to gauge the scale and type of housing requirements, especially for low-income groups. Concurrently, a land management study must be done to examine the availability of land for housing low- and middle-income groups. Modified delivery mechanisms, such as incremental housing development, may be adopted to ensure targeted delivery of housing to the needy only. This approach was devised by housing expert Tasneem Ahmed Siddiqui in the 1980s. Demonstrated successfully in Gulshan-i-Shahbaz (near Hyderabad), Karachi, Gharo, Lahore, Peshawar and other cities, the concept has the potential to be adopted as an option for our cities.

*Published in Dawn, March 4th, 2018*
CAPE TOWN is experiencing its worst drought in a century and, consequently, an unprecedented water crisis. Despite severe water rationing, the city is inching towards ‘Day Zero’ i.e. when the city’s authorities will cut the running water supply to all but essential services.

Residents have responded with remarkable collective responsibility. Long queues can be observed around the drinking water distribution points. By limiting showers to 90 seconds, swimming in the sea rather than pools, and washing cars with non-water-based options, the people have drastically cut down on water usage. Tourists of all backgrounds are also cooperating by limiting the use of fresh towels, flushing toilets as little as possible, using a cup of water while brushing teeth, and limiting the use of laundry services. As a result, consumption is down from about a billion litres per day to about 550 million litres. Earlier predicted to occur on May 11, Day Zero has now been pushed forward to June 4.

Water scarcity can hit any region, including Pakistani cities, given the precarious climate change regime. One needs to become ‘water wise’ to ward off risks associated with any such scenario.

While most major urban settlements here are aligned along the Indus or other rivers, the risks of a climate change-induced water shortage can affect us any time. It is frightening to consider that if such a water crisis were to hit our cities, there would be serious repercussions due to our unpreparedness, lack of planning and communication disconnect between the water supply utilities and consumers. Besides, in many locations the water supply status is already stressed. Such a crisis could severely exacerbate existing issues if not addressed scientifically.

What can we learn from Cape Town’s water crisis response?

Water conservation under ordinary circumstances is an effective way to manage potential shortages. This includes strict monitoring of pipes, faucets and other gadgets related to water use. It is commonly observed that little care is given to fix leaking taps and pipes in public places or dwellings. Studies show that one leaking joint or tap can cause a loss of about 6,000 gallons per month. A sensible way to optimise water access is to curtail undesirable losses. Nowadays, monitoring equipment that can trace the existence of leaking pipes buried underground is easily available.

In Karachi, more than 10 per cent of the city’s water supply is consumed in washing vehicles. Estimates show that about 60 gallons are spent in a normal car wash. With exponentially rising numbers of vehicles, this quantity will increase and cause greater pressure on existing resources.
Similarly, with over 200,000 mosques in Karachi, a sizable amount of water is utilised during ablutions in each establishment. Experiments have shown that, after very basic treatment, this water can be directly used for gardening and horticulture support purposes.

There is also much potential for smart approaches to store and reuse rainwater during monsoons and other rain spells. This can even be achieved at the single dwelling unit level. With a slight alteration in roof design and adjustment in house plumbing, substantial water quantities can be stored and used for various non-drinking uses by the households.

Similarly, waste water management in our cities also needs careful reappraisal. Previously, sewerage disposal was aimed at discharging in a few, centrally located treatment plants. Examples from most Pakistani cities show that this did not work. In Karachi alone, about 500 million gallons of waste water is directly discharged into the sea without any treatment. This seriously impacts the marine life and our coastal environment.

Lessons may be derived from countries that have decentralised waste water treatment at the neighbourhood and house levels for better monitoring, operations and system maintenance. Japan’s cities display many worthwhile examples of using bioreactors — devices and systems for waste water treatment using biological and chemical processes — to efficiently reclaim used water. Given that we are so fond of automobiles from that country, surely we can also benefit from learning about its scientific solutions.

There is a huge need to bring about attitudinal change regarding our relationship with water. We need to devise strategies to sensitise all categories of water users about methods of its conservation and careful usage. From semi-literate domestic help workers to chief executives in the corporate sector, each one needs to be informed about how to use water prudently. The Supreme Court’s recent verdicts in related cases have also directed concerned government departments to initiate water education on a comprehensive level. It is our collective responsibility to protect Earth — the water planet.

*Published in Dawn, February 16th, 2018*
Karachi’s anomalies
Noman Ahmed Updated February 04, 2018

THE Sindh government has decided to build the 38 kilometre-long Malir Expressway connecting the M9 (read Bahria Town, DHA City and more upcoming neighbourhoods) to the city centre. Even a man on the street can recognise who benefits or is affected by the consolidation of low-density, low-rise development along our highways.

The 16.5km-long Lyari Expressway, inaugurated on Jan 28, has seen hundreds of thousands of people displaced. Many of the earmarked affectees are still struggling to receive compensation.

As the financial year comes to a close, there will be feverish efforts to propose new development projects for the next budget. Recommendations from influential persons, party henchmen and the like usually constitute this politically motivated shopping list, leaving many important projects still awaiting the decision-makers’ and bureaucracy’s attention; projects that would enable Karachi to function as an efficient and equitable metropolis.

Read: Karachi — a case study of an unsustainable city

Urban roads and highways function well when they are planned and developed through an integrated approach. An all-inclusive road repair and maintenance project is a foremost priority. Any commuter will attest to the fact that various categories of roads have been seriously damaged.

Whether connector roads in Gulistan-i-Jauhar and Gulshan-i-Iqbal in the east, or streets around Lea Market in the south, the destruction is to such an extent that even heavy vehicles sustain damage.

The city is undergoing major development, but for whose benefit?

Lack of periodic maintenance, poor design and construction quality, frequent road cutting and adjustments for other buried infrastructure, overlapping development schemes such as the on-going Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, and water and sewage spillage are some causes of the present dilapidation.

A survey of road conditions with accurate geographical and performance parameters is needed, followed by a repairs schedule according to scientific criteria. The design and specification should be optimised to make such repair work last longer. Shaheed-i-Millat Road, rehabilitated not too long ago, is functioning reasonably well due to vigilant supervision by the municipal staff.
A sizable chunk of Karachi’s population resides in new and old squatter settlements, the urban poor’s sole housing option when the state-led supply of land is almost non-existent. These locations need upgrading, a gradual process of planning and supervision. With rising urbanisation and high costs of planned and formal housing, this phenomenon is likely to intensify, even as such settlements witness new changes: the replacement of low-rise housing with informally developed high-rises in the city centre, and increasing costs of water, electricity and gas supplies.

Whereas some believe the poor enjoy free services, the reality is that they pay many times more than residents of planned neighbourhoods. But these transactions are done in an informal manner with little formal evidence. The Sindh Katchi Abadis Authority should prepare a cumulative rehabilitation programme for responding to the emerging requirements of such neglected settlements.

One reason for rampant densification of inner city, low-income settlements is poor public transport. Karachi has evolved in such a manner that high-income groups live close to the city centre or major work locations. Thus lower-income groups, left with limited options, live far away from their workplaces. A sizable part of their meagre income is spent on bus fares.

A low-paid employee living in Landhi spends half his salary on transport simply to maintain his job in the city centre, while a multinational head who resides in DHA and works in Clifton spends a fraction of his income on transport.

Such anomalies merit urgent review. Intelligently worked out financial management solutions can be of relevance. Specialised fuel outlets for public transport vehicles, fare rate adjustments, tax exemptions for public transport vehicles and cheap loans to procure buses are some options.

Raising tax on private cars so that the rich may balance the cost of their luxury with the poor must also be considered. Imposing congestion taxes in certain locations may be an answer. But taxation tools must only be applied after increasing the options, scale, level of service and number of public transport vehicles. The strategically located intra-city bus terminals must be made a hub of urban public transport through public-private partnerships given that, when the BRT and Karachi Circular Railway become functional, there will be much need to link them through connecting feeder buses.

To initiate such programming, fresh institutional arrangements may be evolved between the provincial government, local government bodies, local agencies and federal institutions. A working group may be notified comprising the representatives of these agencies, professionals and civil society organisations to oversee such initiatives.

The writer is a professor and the dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, February 4th, 2018
KARACHI’S infrastructure and services management is constantly on the judiciary’s radar. Many issues have come to light during these deliberations; poor drinking water quality, absence of universal household services (especially to the urban poor), untreated waste being dumped into the rivers and sea, and the dismal performance of both older and new institutions that manage these perennial problems.

The Karachi Water and Sewerage Board has a listed consumer base of over 1.5 million retail customers, with a growing demand to expand its services to new developments along the suburbs and what were once agricultural lands in eastern and western locations. But KWSB may not be able to immediately extend its services to the many low-density, low-rise housing estates emerging along the M9 and N5 highways.

It goes without saying that no city can manage its services and infrastructure if it does not plan for future challenges, based on a dispassionate analysis of the present situation, and commit to follow through. One immediate task for Karachi’s urban planning team is to articulate the city boundaries and service jurisdictions for effective land management and provision of adequate infrastructure and services.

Public land is a social asset, not a commodity.

Almost all the previous city plans emphasised articulating urban territory, service provision networks and jurisdictional demarcation in a scientific manner. In the 1920s, A.E. Mirams came up with physically verifiable zoning for what is now called Karachi’s historic quarters. One of the main reasons that led to this initiative was a land adjustment dispute between the then Cantonment administration and the Karachi Municipality. Subsequent development plans addressed articulating the city boundaries and projecting land uses according to the respective times in which they were prepared. But trends show that these plans were overlooked and compromised in favour of ad hoc decisions that still haunt us.

Land transactions in Karachi and its environs are marked by poor decision-making, without scientific analysis. For instance, the provincial administration granted more than 12,000 acres to a military housing authority in suburban terrain predominantly for agriculture. Soon thereafter, a private realtor acquired huge tracts of land along the M9, thus creating immense pressure on already fragile water, sanitation and waste management mechanisms.

The limits of the Karachi metropolitan area, which previously extended to Toll Plaza, now stretch many more kilometres ahead. Distinctions between Karachi’s urban and rural territories are diminishing. The Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020 has no provision for expanding city boundaries to such unmanageable limits. Once
developed, the managers and developers of new housing estates then exert pressure on infrastructure agencies to provide services.

Karachi has suffered immensely due to impotent land use controls, resulting in poor infrastructure provisions. According to the Karachi Development Plan 1986-2000, the city comprised 46,000 acres, with a sizable percentage of this land reserved for future usage. Current dynamics suggest that not only this but also adjoining lands have already been put up for sale through different real estate ventures, mostly low-density and low-rise in nature, which tend to accommodate fewer residents per acre.

Many negative types of fallout emerge from this peculiar approach. Truly needy households find it impossible to access affordable housing. Land use conversions are done without any land use plan, which is yet to be prepared and notified. Infrastructure/utility agencies are neither properly consulted nor informed about future schemes.

We can learn from better-managed cities. Many observers find that London stretches far beyond its conventional limits due to services, transportation links, economic potential, residential convenience and a distinct city sense that it generates for residents. However, in governance and management, the Greater London Authority and other stakeholders exercise scientific control on development trends and expected levels of services (all the way up to 2065).

Reinvigorating city centres, enhancing quality of life in suburbs, addressing housing deficits, modernising green belts and bolstering linkages with surrounding areas are key tenets of this urban planning attempt. Its mayor recently visited Pakistan to market London as a globally desirable choice for upmarket economic and commercial enterprises.

Land is an asset, not a commodity. Its utilisation must have social justice as its guiding principle, with government departments that own land acting as trustees of this asset. In order to promote transparency at all levels, agencies must endeavour to publish land records with all necessary information. Karachi needs a capable, independent and legally strong urban planning agency to manage its land and services issues.

The writer is a professor and acting dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, January 24th, 2018
Karachi’s trash
Noman Ahmed Updated January 14, 2018

THE Sindh administration is negotiating with a Chinese enterprise for a waste-to-energy unit that could generate about 200 megawatts of electricity at one of Karachi’s landfills. Given the fact that 88 per cent of residents believe cleanliness is the city’s biggest problem, this move may appear positive. But much more is needed from the administration and whatever is left of the local government to manage the city’s mounting waste issue.

With a rise in consumerism and changing lifestyles and production processes, waste generation has become fairly diversified. Proliferating private healthcare facilities generate hazardous medical waste. Growing use of gadgets has given rise to electronic waste. Rubber, plastic, paper, industrial and biological waste of different volumes and characteristics is a natural outcome. Typical municipal waste is hardly ever removed, and new forms of waste generation are virtually unattended to.

As a result, epidemics such as chikungunya have recently spread across the metropolis. Folks in suburban areas continue to experience bouts of viral and bacterial diseases. The lack of proper waste management is obviously a key factor in these crises. This amounts to a human crisis that should be addressed holistically.

The lack of solid waste management has reached crisis proportions.

The situation of solid waste management (SWM) is grave. Districts east and south are managed by a Chinese contractor under the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board (SSWMB), while the remaining four are under the District Municipal Corporation (DMCs), which possess negligible capacity and financial strength. The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) is assigned to look after the two garbage sites at Jam Chakro near Surjani Town and Govind Pass near Hub. Household garbage collection, street cleaning and transferring waste to secondary collection points is assigned to union council administrations.

But observations show that this arrangement is not working. At the union council level, it was found that sanitary workers were mostly involved in private work. Absence of basic equipment, supervisory staff and designated collection points were key issues. While DMCs complain of the lack of vehicles, staff and funds, a Supreme Court order states that the total staff strength of the six DMCs is 10,392 with a total salary of over Rs540 million per year. KMC has also not developed the two existing garbage sites into sanitary landfills with proper specifications.

Research has shown that recycling is an established enterprise, organised and managed at an informal scale. Street scavengers, waste-pickers, collectors/
contractors, recycling plant operators and recycled goods buyers are key actors in this process. Paper, glass, metal, rubber, clothing, dried bread, bones and used cans are the main articles that feed into the recycling stream, generating livelihoods for an estimated 65,000 households. It also helps to reduce un-removed waste in neighbourhoods. But due to its informal nature, limits on expansion and threats from state institutions, this enterprise is operating below its potential.

Private SWM operators have been contracted previously, with disappointing results. The SSWMB was severely criticised by the Supreme Court in its order. It observed that more than Rs46,000 per truck, per trip is spent in foreign exchange through the Chinese contractor, with negligible impact. Nor has a scientific garbage transfer station been established in the city. The court went so far as to recommend the SSWMB’s closure due to its dismal performance.

Due to its peculiar nature of service, waste management is a restricted occupation as far as primary collection, street sweeping and nullah maintenance is considered. Many local Hindu, Christian and scheduled castes families have been involved in this trade for generations, and many Afghans have also joined this work, albeit in informal enterprises. Over time, the sociological strength of this community has improved considerably. They act as a strong lobby to safeguard their livelihoods. It is, however, vital to consider that if offered to properly participate, they can be motivated to improve productivity. Their performance potential has been analysed in depth since the 1990s; these reports are still relevant.

Some SWM steps must be launched without delay. The Sindh administration must evolve a working relationship with KMC, take stock of the situation, set priorities and devise a monitoring mechanism. Rapid institutional changes have dispersed SWM-related staff to a great extent. From coolies to engineers, a rigorous exercise must be undertaken to reorganise and retrain staff cadres.

Public-private partnership options can be explored for specialised domains such as hospital waste management. Such attempts must essentially involve local private entrepreneurs in a bid for capacity building. A Karachi that is full of filth may not be a good omen for those who aspire to win the upcoming elections.

The writer is a professor and acting dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, January 14th, 2018

Judges everywhere
Noman AhmedUpdated December 21, 2017
THIS was a busy year for our learned judges. The range of their legal engagements has included the usual disputes and cases related to the conduct of politicians, infrastructural planning and delivery of water and sanitation services. While many
would consider these proceedings as normal in the administration of justice, some outcomes have seen important policy and operational changes.

The country finally carried out a census after 19 years due to a Supreme Court order. In a constitutional petition related to clean drinking water and a safe environment for the people of Sindh, the court imposed tough conditions upon the Sindh government, while sessions court officials in the province went around checking educational and healthcare institutions.

The verdict in the case of the Orange Line in Lahore allowed the Punjab government to carry on with the project, albeit with strict safeguards.

The Islamabad High Court and the Supreme Court also intervened in the matter of the Faizabad sit-in.

**Prime institutions have lost credence in society.**

Where people doubt the honesty of purpose of the executive, the courts have emerged as monitors and judicial observers in the public interest. The judiciary even assumes the role of policymaking in matters traditionally dealt with by the executive — matters that have a direct bearing on the welfare of the common people. The declining ability of the executive to deliver on basic matters of governance is one of the core reasons for such enhanced judicial roles.

Is this a desirable approach towards governing the country and managing complex matters related to administration? How can the equation be reversed in favour of the executive again?

Much of the rot in the service delivery apparatus is by design, not by default. Almost every provincial government has made the regulatory apparatus under its control toothless. A Supreme Court order has imposed restrictions on the construction of multi-storeyed buildings in Karachi, due to the limited availability of water. This has caused anxiety amongst the ranks of builders and contractors, who are still pursuing the matter in court. The provision of adequate urban services, regulation, monitoring and control of construction practices is an important area of public management.

The existence of legally valid and technically appropriate building solutions for various facilities is a prerequisite to healthy lifestyles. In reality, private interest with the active support of the various agencies and tiers of government facilitate illegal development. Acting on petitions and even exercising suo motu jurisdiction, the superior courts have taken action on several occasions, apparently with the intention of setting technically and legally correct precedents. Sadly, the reverse has continued to happen. It is neither the responsibility nor mandate of the courts to micromanage affairs related to urban service delivery.

The political will to correct the ills in the executive machinery is simply non-existent. In many cases, the interest of the political leadership coincides with the conduct of corrupt officers/functionaries. Many of these officials become very successful in
service cadres. Meanwhile, the interference of the political class continues. The present IG of Sindh Police was working well to stem the rot in his department. Obviously, he ruffled the feathers of those in power, who had him sidelined. He was finally saved from abrupt transfers by the Sindh High Court, though his sphere of command and performance capacity has been greatly clipped by the political bosses.

The message received by his subordinates is quite clear. The staff tends to spend its energies on following the directives of political bosses. In return, it receives favours that even the judiciary cannot straighten out. The result is the breakdown of the service structure, little motivation amongst honest cadres and the overall collapse of institutional capacity. No wonder prime institutions such as the police have completely lost credence in society.

The backbone of the executive used to be the officer cadres. Extraordinarily strict and demanding procedures were adopted to fill these slots. The bureaucrats of yore managed very challenging assignments. There used to be a clear distinction between the political leadership and bureaucracy, and the judiciary used to work closely with the bureaucracy. The political process allowed coexistence. The objective was to facilitate the common folk. The effectiveness of the staff/officers lay in their unstinted attention to their respective tasks — not on pleasing the higher bosses.

Unfortunately, the deep (and probably irreversible) penetration of political interference has eroded the capacity and moral fibre of working bureaucracies. Much improvement can be achieved by ring-fencing the mandate, capacity building and empowering the cadres of the civil service. Some assistance from the judiciary could be useful in this respect.

The writer is a professor and acting dean, Faculty of Architecture and Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, December 21st, 2017

Capital politics
Noman AhmedUpdated December 13, 2017

PRESIDENT Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and his decision to move the US embassy in Tel Aviv there was a foreign policy statement. A move likely to inflame the entire Middle East, Trump’s decision has boosted the Israeli regime’s controversial claim on Jerusalem.

In other parts of the world, the choice of location of administrative capitals has been a complex issue for other reasons. Turkey under Mustafa Kamal decided to move away
from the centuries-old imperial city of Istanbul to the little-known Ankara. The choice was justified through technically valid arguments. Ankara was closer to the geographical centre of Anatolia. It offered better accessibility to people from Turkey’s lesser developed eastern regions. Its construction offered a trend in urban development away from the Istanbul-Izmit region and was useful in creating a balance between the rural east and the more urban west in the Turkish republic.

In the southern hemisphere, president Juscelino Kubitschek of Brazil successfully led the planning and development of Brasilia as the new federal capital in the late 1950s. The city was inaugurated in 1960. Rio’s resource monopoly was shifted towards a more central location.

Julius Nyerere, founder of modern Tanzania, led the shifting of the capital from coastal Dar-es-Salaam to the more centrally located and newly planned Dodoma.

**Not everything has gone according to plan in Islamabad.**

After losing Lahore to Pakistan as per the Partition plan, Jawaharlal Nehru decided to build a new capital city for eastern Punjab. Chandigarh was developed under the famous architect Le Corbusier.

The planning and development of each of these cities cost a fortune for the cash-strapped governments initially. And some decisions ignored public sentiment, as in Islamabad’s case.

When the subcontinent was partitioned, Mr Jinnah decided to relocate administrative establishments to Karachi where he wished to retain the seat of government — Karachi was accessible to the people of East Pakistan by sea. It had a reasonably developed urban infrastructure to support capital functions.

For the Muslims migrating en masse from India, Karachi was a desirable choice thanks to better education and employment prospects. Later, the government prepared plans for developing a new capital complex some 25 kilometres from the city. The precedent was Old and New Delhi, seen as a workable example. Thereafter the military-bureaucracy nexus started looking for options to shift the capital out of Karachi.

Student and labour riots in the following years unnerved the government. In the mid-1950s, it was decided to move the capital away from Karachi. C.A. Doxiadis, a Greek advising the government on physical planning and resettlement, was invited to take up the task. After a series of studies, he proposed a site at the foot of the Margalla Hills which was accepted by the military government.

East Pakistan residents were unhappy with the decision to shift the capital from Karachi to Islamabad as it meant increased travel time and cost, besides inconvenience. The government came up with a fantastic idea, and decided to have two capitals — one administrative, the other legislative. There was a complex proposed and eventually built in Dhaka to calm down the Bengali masses. The Dhaka
Assembly Building designed by architect Louis I. Kahn is a reminder of this initiative. The scheme was named Ayub Nagar.

While Islamabad was being given shape, many believed that the city and its natural surroundings would forever be pristine and that the green belt and mulberry trees’ plantation would provide the perfect conditions for the top leadership and bureaucracy to work in. This expectation has fallen apart. The number of vehicles plying the roads of Islamabad is rising. Many heavy vehicles enter the city from the Kashmir Highway to bypass the GT Road congestion while moving around Rawalpindi.

Contrary to the prescription of master plans, many industries function in Islamabad Capital Territory. Visible categories include steel furnaces, acid works, marble cutting, metal melting, cement plants (in the suburbs) and others. The city does not have a suitable sewage treatment plant nor possesses a proper sanitary landfill.

Islamabad was supposed to be a capital for the people at large, and not just a city for the privileged. The options of housing for the working classes are very few. There are a few squatter settlements that exist without the security of tenure and with the absence of essential services; the Capital Development Authority is quick to remove the others. There are no designated locations for housing the urban poor. No such scheme appears to be in the pipeline either. Thus ordinary folks have some justification to label Islamabad as a city for the rich. The vision of its founders was different from what it has become.

Published in Dawn, December 13th, 2017

Expensive talk
Noman Ahmed Updated November 24, 2017

WHETHER it is government departments, ministries, especially created government outfits or multilateral and international institutions, there is growing consensus that conferences and moots must be held — and they are termed important milestones of success.

True, expos, moots, symposia and seminars around specific themes and topics are an important tool for bringing concerned participants together. International development agencies, too, consider holding regular moots an almost sacred ritual.

But it may be useful to revisit the descriptions of the different types of moots held in the country and understand what is common to them all. For instance, a conference is
a meeting of individuals invited to engage in a discussion on a certain topic. Its aim is to accomplish an identified task within a certain time frame.

A seminar is a small gathering of scholars under the stewardship of a professor or academic peer, ie it is a conference of specialists. In the domain of higher academics, a seminar is the procedure by which a candidate aiming for a research degree presents his or her findings to a body of scholars working on similar themes.

**Moots have become an enterprise unto themselves.**

A symposium is a convivial meeting to discuss a philosophical problem. It generates a collection of well-formed opinions or a series of articles on various aspects of a particular subject. A workshop is a session for discussion, study, training or experimentation on a specified topic. A colloquium is an academic gathering often used for piloting ideas.

Moots are convened for a wide variety of purposes. In some cases, meetings are summoned due to statutory reasons or official requirements. More often than not, these are only convened when a powerful member/participant has a direct stake. Getting a project fund sanctioned, a programme launched or a budget approved, are the normal excuses.

However, the frequency, nature and continuity of these otherwise important meetings depend entirely upon the whims of the controlling official or authority. For instance, public hearings for environmental impact related to major developmental projects are held in a hush-hush manner to fulfil a formality. A conference or a series of them may be held to extend the agenda of a regime, agency or organisation that wishes to initiate them. Memories of a former military dictator’s ‘Islamisation conferences’ are still fresh. He presented his own version of religion in these moots to justify his prolonged stay in power.

But however diverse their purpose, all these events are normally extremely expensive. The high-profile conferences held under the aegis of international agencies normally run up huge costs that include air travel, board and lodging, consultancy services and media, meals, local transportation, and mailing and correspondence during the preparatory phases. Thus, in a two- or three-day event for about two dozen outstation participants, the cost runs into millions of rupees.

Later, post-workshop/conference assignments include the publication of workshop proceedings and brainstorming for the next event. For this, new consultants are hired. In sum, moots have become an enterprise unto themselves.

English is commonly used as the medium of communication, even in places where local folk are not proficient in the language. Often, low-income local people clap at the end of each speech, totally overwhelmed by the five-star hotel. In some cases, even a vote for consensus on a crucial strategy is drawn from these simple communities, exploiting their poor English skills. The moot reports may land up on
the tables of government officials who, without reading them, display them for a few
days and finally relegate the documents to the side table.

It is not that moots and meetings are futile endeavours, but that some aspects of them
must be reviewed. For instance, they should be held only when there is a need to get
the collective input of important stakeholders; yet they must remain modest, low-
budget affairs. The five-star hotel culture must be eliminated as it tends to shift the
focus of the whole event. Instead, they can be held at low-cost venues such as the
auditoriums or halls of campuses, training institutions or not-for-profit communal
facilities.

Organising such events must be efficacious and purpose-oriented — even if they
involve preliminary discussions. Efforts should be made to organise these events
relying on local sources of funding. This would enable the organisers to maintain their
independence, which is impossible when international stakeholders cover local issues
and impinge on local deliberations. Lastly, record-keeping and documentation must be
done in a meticulous manner.

*The writer is a professor and acting dean at the Faculty of Architecture and
Management Sciences, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, November 24th, 2017*

---

**A broad canvas**

*Noman Ahmed* Updated October 17, 2017

TODAY marks the 200th birth anniversary of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. His invaluable
contributions towards the Muslim renaissance in the subcontinent are well
acknowledged — particularly his founding of Aligarh Muslim University, which
trained generations of youth from the late 19th century onwards. The university’s
students are seen as having played a major role in propagating the All-India Muslim
League’s core message throughout the subcontinent. This voluntary electioneering
campaign turned the voters’ opinion in favour of the Pakistan scheme.

But Sir Syed was also a gifted scholar and researcher, and his canvas was broad. From
questions in natural sciences to comparative studies in religion, Sir Syed explored
many topics and left invaluable treatises for posterity. Asar-us-Sanadid is a seminal
work on the social and cultural life of Delhi, with a focus on its heritage monuments.
Based on exhaustive original research, the book outlines the rich flavours of the high
civilisation that Delhi was able to exemplify, drawing upon the concept and meaning
of architecture in the formative years of Muslim civilisation.
The debate around ‘Islamic’ and ‘Muslim’ architecture has been scientifically dwelt on by Sir Syed. He categorically established that ‘Islamic architecture’ refers to the bare bones of the built structures, absolutely devoid of frills and embellishments. The public and private edifices were designed and executed in basic forms and finishes. However, the spread of the faith, the conquests of caliphs and sultans, as well as expanding trade linkages exposed Muslims to diverse cultural influences. Their passion for architecture was informed by their admiration of the architectural marvels they encountered within their territories.

**Sir Syed’s talents included a gift for research.**

Sir Syed also provided a synopsis of the architectural characteristics of major periods — Umayyad, Moorish, Fatimid, Mamluk, Ottoman and Persian — and a chronological account of the subcontinent’s various dynasties and their contributions to art and architecture. He drew analytic comparisons in the various rulers’ inclinations and achievements, arriving at logical conclusions about the preconditions that led to architectural divergence in succeeding times.

Thus, Qutub Minar and Masjid Quwwat-ul-Islam by Sultan Qutbuddin Aibak and his successors reflect many hybrid elements from pre-existing Hindu building complexes. He concluded that the grand scale of the minar actually shows the dominance that Muslim conquerors had attained after scores of hard-fought battles. Sher Shah Suri, during his brief stint on the throne, took extraordinary initiatives regarding public works, infrastructure and communication systems; the sketches, charts, maps and plans of which Sir Syed included in the book.

Architects, archaeologists and the general readership may also find valuable information about the construction techniques, decorative works and landscaping preferences in different periods.

Sir Syed delved deep to unearth the enticing secrets of Delhi’s buildings. Gateways to the forts; verdures and informal gardens; palatial residences; baths; tombs; canals and canal banks; minarets and even window openings have been described with flowing diction, factual references and visual representations. He sifted carefully through all available drawings; wherever references were found lacking, he commissioned artists and draughtsmen to create them.

He applied the same effort to scripts and the calligraphic excellence found along various facades and interiors. Wherever Sanskrit, Hindi and other languages are documented, Sir Syed provided translations for the reproductions of the original inscriptions.

The information gathered in this exhaustive tome came from multifarious sources. In-depth reviews of literary texts were followed up with fieldwork. In Hayat-i-Javed, Altaf Hussain Hali wrote that Sir Syed developed a special hanging trolley and pulley set, taking undue risks in scaling minarets and parapets, so that he could read inscriptions high up on buildings and structures. Structured and unstructured
interviews, populist anecdotes, folk references, and interviews with prominent scholars and administrators were also meticulously documented. Where relevant, Sir Syed included the actual transcripts of such valuable original accounts.

The cultural life of the Delhi of yesteryears resonates throughout Asar-us-Sanadid. Sir Syed discussed, in detail, people of importance and their backgrounds. Using a scientific classification method clad in an attractive writing pattern, he portrays the characters that filled that wonderful city with life. Sufi saints have been described with reference to their saintly orders, linkages, lineages and socio-cultural influences. Religious scholars, aaris, huffaz, hakeems, poets, calligraphers, artists, painters, musicians and elites of all sorts, as well as artisans and common folk, are all included in the treatise. Sir Syed is well known for the merits of his multifaceted personality; to this, we must credit him with being a seasoned researcher who made invaluable contributions to cultural studies.

The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, October 17th, 2017

Census realities
Nausheen H. Anwar | Noman Ahmed Updated September 13, 2017

WITH Pakistan’s population at 207.8 million and an annual growth rate of 2.4 per cent, alarm bells must be ringing for policymakers.

A key issue is how census managers have handled Pakistan’s urban question, its impact on basic services management and urban planning to adapt to the effects of climate change. Numerous studies show that temperatures in South Asia will exceed habitable levels by the end of this century. Disruptions in agricultural outputs and economies will trigger deepening vulnerabilities at every level, from the individual to the country.

Climate change is already palpable in Sindh’s cities: coastal storm surges, rising sea levels, hotter summers, unprecedented floods and unpredictable precipitation. Pakistan’s expanding urban ecological footprint is most visible at the rural-urban interface where we find spaces of intense marginalisation, and exacerbated by decades of poor planning, incompetent engineering and avaricious development — compromising local ecologies that could withstand the shock of natural disasters.

The provisional census results show urbanisation at 36.4pc. The 1998 census determined urbanisation at 32.5pc, a figure that drew censure from various groups,
with critics arguing that the conventional definition of ‘urban’ (confined to notified municipal limits) was inadequate for understanding the ground realities of rapid urbanisation.

Conventional census methodology does not consider the extensive transformation along the peripheries of large- and medium-sized cities, clustered urban locations along diverse types of mobilities and water bodies, enterprise-based urban locations around major industries and other establishments.

**The definition of ‘urban’ needs to be revisited.**

Indubitably, debates will continue as the statistics bureau discloses the conclusive results in April 2018. Political parties, community groups and civil society, including demographers have all voiced concerns about the partial results.

Misgivings stem from concerns about the handling and compilation of data in Islamabad rather than at the provincial level as was previously done. Additionally, dynamics like displacements and migrations from KP to large cities (especially Karachi), in-migrations to urban Sindh, horizontal population movement and consequent densification of cities have hardly surfaced in the partial results. When Sindh’s growth rate is less than that of Balochistan and KP, it raises concerns about how the census was undertaken. If Sindh’s urbanisation levels are deliberately understated, it will have grave, long-term consequences for planning and governance to mitigate climate change.

High population growth in our cities has generated many challenges that the state has never addressed, particularly the need for social housing. Instead, with state land abundant in several cities, katchi abadis proliferate. But the ‘guardians’ of agrarian land in peri-urban locations have also contributed to the expansion of informal settlements, real-estate developments and gated communities. Urban land, once considered a social asset, is now a commodity. Affordable housing has vanished — exacerbated by burgeoning land prices, high construction costs, low savings/capital accumulation among disadvantaged groups and lack of housing credit.

As in-migration to Karachi grows, migrants find shelter in katchi abadis that act as shock absorbers, mitigating certain kinds of risks for low-income groups. But this is hardly a solution. Uneven settlements, fragmented infrastructures, and environmental and social hazards constantly endanger lives in katchi abadis.

The census is more than an exercise in counting and recording basic information about everyone in Pakistan. It is also the first step in assessing the social, demographic and economic status of populations and the contexts they inhabit — which has a bearing on poverty, development, resources, budgets, constituencies, etc.

It also assesses the impact of past public investments in health, education, welfare and infrastructure. Hence, the census paves the way for various policy interventions. But this does not remove a key problem: just because you have sampled and measured
populations doesn’t mean you can manage them. Nevertheless, numbers and calculations are important in policy agendas, and census methodologies underwrite concrete policy outcomes.

The definition of ‘urban’ and urbanisation parameters need to be revisited to enable policy decisions grounded in reality. In the coming decades, resource allocations, development programmes and infrastructural preferences will shape Pakistan’s future. That this future is embedded in a new global urbanisation conjuncture, and associated anthropogenic effects, necessitates recasting census methodologies to better equip us with data reflecting ground realities.

Noman Ahmed is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.

Nausheen H. Anwar is associate professor, Department of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts, IBA, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, September 13th, 2017

Managing Karachi
Noman Ahmed Updated July 21, 2017

THE Supreme Court of Pakistan recently directed Sindh’s chief secretary to ensure Karachi’s cleanliness following the impact of the recent rains on urban infrastructure. Many older neighbourhoods, public spaces and markets are still submerged. Visits to Malir, Landhi, Korangi, Orangi, Baldia and Shah Faisal Colony show a dismal picture of the absence of urban management in the city.

Only recently, the provincial and local administrations announced new budgets with various proposed ‘packages’ for Karachi. But experiences from cities across the globe demonstrate that managing public works, infrastructure and emergencies is an ongoing exercise that cannot be glamorised in the form of so-called packages and ribbon-cutting photo ops. Cities’ administrations manage these affairs through trained municipal staff that labour round the clock, and possess the capacity to spring into action when natural or man-made disasters strike.

Karachi inherited capable urban management institutions. The city had a municipality as early as 1852 that looked after sanitation, health and routine urban management functions. The commissioner system was a colonial legacy that remained even after independence. The commissioners were responsible for maintaining law and order, with the police force under their control, and also controlled land revenue collection
and general administration and development works. In cases of emergencies and disasters, they acted as focal persons.

The Public Works Department, port authorities, industrial estates, utility agencies and local land management authorities were other types of institutions that ran the city as per evolving challenges. There are several reasons why their cumulative efforts (assuming there are any) fail to manage the city.

City woes can only be redressed through collective management.

The city is an integrated space; it cannot function or be managed in compartments. There is a growing disconnect between various tiers of government, citizens and non-governmental stakeholders. Each official wishes to take credit for functions he/she has only marginally performed. The Sindh government craves accolades for rehabilitating some of Karachi’s streets while ignoring most; the city’s mayor goes on meet-and-greet tours but fails to mobilise the municipal workforce; the chief of the water utility ‘inspects’ sites where water is stolen from but won’t propose a permanent solution.

While urban management problems are complex, some headway can be made through basic actions. One action, conspicuous by its absence, is for local and provincial functionaries to sit at the same table, review analyses provided by their technical staff and devise solutions through collaborative efforts. The provincial government must develop this consultation platform for managing Karachi. Urban problems need to be inventoried and mapped to articulate the scale and nature of these issues.

A series of maps and profiles must be prepared and made public to inform about the dimensions of streets, natural drains, riverbanks and thresholds for legal construction, spaces and alignments from where water and sewerage lines are passing, conduit networks for power and gas, inlet points for letting the rainwater pass into designated drains and directions of storm-water flow.

Boundaries and locations where construction is prohibited — including parks, greenbelts and road-shoulder spaces — must be demarcated and made public.

The KMC, KWSB and other civic agencies must build the capacity of their maintenance and repair workshops to address the issues through departmental actions. For example, a road repair programme can be initiated by surveying their current status and then preparing an outline of actions, expenditures and schedules. Small- and medium-scale repairs must be managed though departmental teams while only major repairs should be contracted out.

Vehicles will soon surpass the roads’ carrying capacity; regulatory checks must be applied as a key management prerequisite. We must learn from Hanoi, which recently banned motorcycles within city limits until 2030 to ease congestion.
Karachi needs several other management and maintenance initiatives without delay. For interim storage and final disposal of municipal solid waste, sanitary landfill sites along the city’s eastern, western and southern edges are a key requirement. The planning and design of these facilities has been done many times; KMC would do well to dust off those dossiers and update the technical requirements according to present waste trails.

Swift completion of the Green Line Bus Transit, encouraging more public buses on major arteries, revitalisation of circular railways, conservation and complete cleaning of Malir and Lyari rivers to their original widths and depths and demarcation of urban boundaries to shore up service delivery are all urgently needed.

Published in Dawn, July 21st, 2017

Unplanned Karachi
Noman Ahmed Updated June 11, 2017

ON May 25, the Sindh Building Control Authority which also holds the reins of the master plan department for Karachi, banned the construction of buildings beyond ground plus two storeys. The action was to comply with a Supreme Court order related to water and sanitation issues in the province. This may appear a partially useful step for taming the mushrooming of tall buildings across Karachi, but such matters are normally dealt with by city master plans and zoning guidelines enforced by a competent, autonomous planning agency.


Karachi is divided into multiple jurisdictions controlled by a jumble of local, provincial and federal agencies, including the military. Responsibility for infrastructure and provision of services is divided among several bodies. A unified vision and development plan is important. No plan can be implemented if a planning agency is not administratively, technically and financially strong. Such an agency also needs sufficient clout to enforce its writ on the basis of technical expertise and jurisdictional validity. It must act as a filter to examine all the proposals.

A jumble of agencies manage a jumble of challenges.
Unfortunately, Karachi has become a playground for all kinds of real-estate investors. One reason is arbitrary land-appernition procedures. Every big city possesses a land-use strategy and a corresponding plan for implementation. Land is a finite social asset and should be used in an extremely careful manner. In the case of Karachi, this universal principle is grossly violated.

Decision-makers in the government and the agencies are also partners in a nefarious enterprise. The ongoing allocation of land for real estate along major highways and roads will cause undue pressures on an already fragile infrastructure.

For instance, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) has control, ownership and jurisdiction of road-shoulder spaces in many localities. But its writ is invisible as one finds these spaces encroached upon, subdivided and usurped in connivance with law-enforcement functionaries. If this practice is not controlled, the city will have no land provision for upgrading road transport corridors. For fair play to prevail, government agencies must be directed to publicly declare land assets.

Karachi faces a grave crisis when it comes to the provision of infrastructure, management and sustenance. One finds many high-profile projects in different phases of implementation; no holistic approach is evident.

The city lacks basic services including water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, public transport, electricity and social amenities. No decent public transport network exists. At present, a few thousand large buses, mini buses and coaches are available to shoulder a massive load of more than 24 million passenger trips a day.

In most large urban regions, a working mass transit system is created for this type of load. Plans for the Karachi Circular Railways may have been a step in this direction. Many studies have suggested the immediate revival of the KCR but work towards this goal has always hit snags for one reason or the other.

In large cities, where commuting distances are extensive and the passenger volume is large, the value of mass transit modes cannot be underrated. Good planning practices are based on the careful evaluation of ongoing trends. A sound planning framework aims to promote positive trends and control negative ones.

Many trends are visible in Karachi, such as the availability and investment of overseas capital in real-estate enterprises, the commodification of land assets, the emergence of the Sindh local government department as the real entity with power and control of funds, and the declining jurisdiction and capacity of KMC and the Karachi Development Authority.

Then, there is the unchecked rise in vehicle ownership as concerns for vehicle-road space ratio are shoved aside. Besides, citizens must contend with the inaccessibility of housing options for the poor, low- and middle-income groups, the systematic destruction of ecological assets, and falling standards in solid-waste management, sewage and storm-water disposal. These trends must be professionally examined.
Citizens suffer in the absence of proper service standards and confusing procedures. Whether in the acquisition of a water connection or the approval of building permits, written procedures are either grossly inadequate or absent. Public-service counters, smartphone-based municipal apps and digital portals must be opened. Sectoral or area performance must be studied to devise new systems. But the main remedy lies in fixing the institutions that are responsible for managing the city.

*The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, June 11th, 2017*

---

**Cheating culture**

*Noman Ahmed Updated May 16, 2017*

As the Secondary School Certificate and later the Higher Secondary School Certificate examinations began in different parts of Sindh in March and April this year, media reports and complaints about widespread incidents of cheating began to pour in.

It was disappointing to note that in several locations in Hyderabad, Larkana, Mirpurkhas, Sukkur and other cities, students were using unfair means to answer examination questions. In the suburban locations of Karachi, routine complaints of the late supply of examination material and the shady role of invigilators cast a shadow over the transparency and conduct of the exams.

The chief minister had issued strict orders to the relevant authorities to curb the use of unfair means, but apparently no heed was paid to his directives. When orders from even the chief minister are given short shrift, is it any wonder that the performance of students, including those enrolled in professional degree programmes, remains grossly deficient?

The prevailing culture of cheating is not the failure of educational institutions or examination boards alone. It shows the breakdown of social and moral values in society itself. There have been several instances where relatives of examinees have been seen facilitating the supply of cheating material — evidently, without any feeling of remorse.
The credibility of our exam system must be restored.

For a number of people, then, obtaining a certificate showing a high score is the only goal — no matter if it is fraudulently attained. The seeds of corruption are thus sown in young minds. Is it any surprise, then, that when children grow up, they end up promoting the same type of malpractices? And so the cycle is perpetuated.

The examinations are the final stage of an integrated system of education. If the curriculum is not delivered to the students on time, if there is little progress on ensuring proper completion of the syllabus by teachers, if periodic assessments of how much a student has learned are not carried out, and if corrective measures are not taken to plug the gaps in knowledge, the candidates will not be able to enter the examination hall with confidence in their own abilities.

Education-related actions are often marred by scandals. From flaws in the recruitment of teachers to the late printing of textbooks, from the existence of ghost schools to absconding teachers, the list of aberrations is long. Despite countless projects to improve the situation, donor-funded programmes and ‘corrective’ actions, education in Pakistan rests on very weak foundations. The combination of the educational establishment, teachers, politicians and local activists is mainly responsible for the defeat of merit and fair play.

There are several reasons for the unreliable performance of examination boards and their affiliates. Among them is the poor quality of human resource development. In the end, those students who can afford it opt for a different education system, taking exams through international boards. They inevitably have more job opportunities; sadly, in the process, society is unnecessarily divided on account of unequal educational opportunities.

Reputed universities and institutions devise stringent measures to double-check and re-examine those who seek to be enrolled through admission tests and interviews. It is not uncommon to find that students possessing 75 per cent marks or more, but who are products of a slack system, are not even able to obtain pass marks when it comes to university entrance examinations. In desperation, many of them will turn to other avenues of ‘opportunity’, including scams such as fake degrees.

One step to stop this decline is to entirely separate examinations functions from the management of the education boards. An independent body of academics and education managers should be created to conduct examinations under conditions of
strict vigilance and monitoring. The support of law-enforcement agencies, including the civil armed forces, may be sought to prevent cheating during exams. Similarly, the assessment of exam papers handed in must be done with at least two examiners assigned to check each answer book. A pilot project should be initiated in one location of the province to undertake this.

It should be noted that if the credibility of our examination system is restored, it is likely to have far-reaching results. Pressure will be exerted by students and their families on teachers and school managements to teach properly and perform their duties. A rise in the level of competence in the education sector will boost human resource development, and contribute to a reduction in corrupt practices.

No government that claims to be the ‘real’ representative of the people can shirk from its responsibilities. If students are to rely on their own skills in the examination hall, our broken system of education must be mended without delay.

Published in Dawn, May 16th, 2017

---

**High-rise tide**

Noman Ahmed | Updated April 23, 2017

AFTER reports emerged of the illegal demolition of the Sybil D’Abreo House (part of the protected Jufelhurst School complex in Karachi’s Soldier Bazaar), and after strong condemnation from civil society, the entire government machinery (including the Sindh chief minister) sprang into action. Orders for various departmental probes and administrative actions were issued, and the Sindh government approved Rs30 million for the restoration of the 86-year-old complex.

It should be noted, however, that the Jufelhurst incident marks an ongoing pattern. There are reasons to believe that the perpetrators of such actions in Karachi and in Sindh have the tacit backing of political and bureaucratic elites.

The damage done to the Jehangir Kothari Parade and Pavilion, Shri Ratneshwar Mahadev Temple and Bagh Ibn-i-Qasim in 2014 during the construction of the underpasses/flyover in Clifton is one example. A ‘benevolent’ developer, constructing Pakistan’s tallest building in this area, has invested to ease present and
future traffic through this infrastructural adjustment. Another example is the periodic demolition of Shikarpur’s historic havelis over the past few years. Clearing the land for new construction, and selling the carved woodwork and antiques, are two core motives behind this unethical activity. It is common knowledge that the supply chain for such items effectively leads to Karachi’s markets, where elites with a penchant for vandalised artefacts proudly display them in their homes.

_Sindh’s heritage is being systemically pillaged._

Currently, heritage management is undertaken through the legal and administrative frameworks laid down in the Sindh Cultural Preservation Act, 1994, and the principal agency responsible for this is the Sindh Culture Department. In 1997, a list was drawn up in which 454 properties were notified as protected, but some years later it was realised that a new survey had to be conducted as many buildings were reportedly destroyed.

The Karachi Heritage Re-Survey Project was launched in 2005 with a scientific criterion for listing heritage that was devised and approved by the Sindh Heritage Advisory Committee, a forum constituted by the 1994 law. An extensive survey was conducted by trained professionals to verify the status of already listed buildings as well as to identify and recommend other buildings for heritage status. Based upon their input, the government has added more than 1,200 buildings and sites in Karachi to the list, and the work is still ongoing, given the vast and scattered heritage treasures across the city.

Similar listings have been made elsewhere in the province. But the exercise is challenging due to limited access available to surveyors and logistical difficulties in preparing the inventories. The objective of including buildings in the heritage list is to help protect the structures, extend technical assistance for their preservation and restoration, and enhance their functional and visual utility.

However, property owners generally view this listing as an uncalled for punishment by the government. These structures exist on high value lands with lucrative prospects if and when they are removed and replaced with a high-rise building. Restricting the use of space merely for heritage retention is viewed as being against market trends.
There are many government policies that promote high-density high-rise development in locations where heritage properties exist. The ‘Commercialisation of Roads and Streets Policy’, introduced by the erstwhile city district government of Karachi, allowed the construction of mixed use high-rise buildings on major roads and streets. Initially six streets were notified for this change — the present number is over 40, and quietly increasing. The Sindh High Density Board Act, 2010 enabled the change of density measures for individual plots. Obviously, heritage properties face enormous real estate pressure due to the flexible provisions of this law.

Locations such as I.I. Chundrigar Road may lose many of their prized heritage buildings under this rising tide of high-rise construction. In many cases, new developments completely overshadow the view and precincts of precious historic complexes. A mundane parking plaza and commercial space that is being constructed next to Empress Market shall overshadow the latter’s edifice from public view. Elevated bus rapid transit corridors are likely to eclipse the visual axis to Jinnah’s Mausoleum, perhaps the metropolis’s most significant site.

Safeguarding heritage requires multiple prerequisites, foremost of which is political commitment. It is important that the Sindh government honour heritage sites listed by its own department and create procedures whereby incentives are generated for the property owners. Relaxation in taxation, extension of free technical support in design and restoration, and availability of low mark-up restoration assistance loans are some options.

Published in Dawn, April 23rd, 2017

Governance through judiciary
Noman Ahmed Updated April 03, 2017

LAST WEEK, the Supreme Court ordered that only Qingqi rickshaws produced by government-approved manufacturers shall operate on roads. Not long ago, the SC passed an important verdict on water, sanitation and environmental conditions in cities in Sindh. It directed respective government authorities to abide by the various directives included in the verdict.
The top court has emerged as a monitor and judicial observer on matters traditionally dealt with by the executive but which have a direct bearing on the welfare of common people. The SC’s actions relate to issues such as breaches in public safety, inflation, violation of zoning and building by-laws, traffic congestion, prices of medicine, issues related to missing persons, organ transplantation, etc.

It is commonly observed that the executive at the provincial and federal levels has shown a steady decline in delivering services to the people. As per routine, the responsibility of the executive is to plan, deliver and manage the provision of mandatory goods and services to the public at large. Needless to say, while the judiciary can take stock of the situation and direct the relevant organs of the executive, it cannot acquire the role of the executive itself.

In desperation, the downtrodden and oppressed consider the SC and subordinate courts as the last providers of relief in almost every domain of public life. Much of the rot in the service delivery apparatus is by design, not by default. The government in Sindh has let loose such forces that they have contributed to the total retardation of respective administrative and regulatory bodies. The SC recently took Sindh land authorities to task for their illegal allotment of land in Karachi’s Gulshan-e-Iqbal area on which a builder had constructed a residential complex, whose occupants are now at risk of losing their homes.

Where the government either shirks its responsibility or prefers to facilitate vested interests, the pressure to act increases on the courts.

Regulation, monitoring and control of construction practices are an important area of public management. Social justice and the rights of all stakeholders are safeguarded if the buildings and structures are in alignment with prescribed plans, rules and zoning guidelines.

In reality, however, avaricious interest groups — with active support of the various agencies and tiers of government — facilitate the illegal development of buildings and structures. Acting on petitions and even exercising suo moto jurisdiction, the superior courts have taken action on several occasions, apparently to set technically and legally correct precedents for the relevant building control authorities to follow.
Sadly, the reverse has continued to happen. The Makro Habib case in Karachi is an example. In its landmark judgement a few years ago on this important case, the SC ordered the demolition of the superstore that was illegally constructed on a playground in Karachi’s Lines area. That decision is yet to be acted upon. Moreover, many other such violations have sprung up in the same and other neighbourhoods of the city.

It is neither the responsibility nor the mandate of the courts to micromanage affairs related to buildings and structures in cities and towns. However, in a situation where the government either shirks its responsibility or prefers to facilitate vested interests, the pressure to act increases on the courts.

The political will to correct what ails the executive machinery is simply non-existent. In many cases, the political leadership’s interests coincide with that of corrupt officers/functionaries. The few honest officers who do not comply with inappropriate orders often have to face the music. Recently, the inspector general of Sindh police was sent on ‘forced leave’ by the province’s political bosses; and it was only a stay order by the Sindh High Court that allowed him to resume his job. This Friday, the Sindh government again surrendered his services to the centre. A contempt of court notice has been filed and is to be heard today. The message from unscrupulous political quarters is clear: toe the line without questioning legality and merit. The result is a breakdown of service structure, demoralisation amongst honest cadres and an overall collapse in institutional capacities.

The officer cadres used to be the executive’s backbone. An extraordinarily rigorous procedure was in place to fill these slots with men and women driven by a desire to serve. It was their superior abilities that enabled the bureaucrats of yore to carry out very challenging assignments. There was in those days a clear distinction between the political leadership and the bureaucracy. The judiciary used to work closely with the bureaucracy to fix matters typically afflicting society. The political process used to allow for such coexistence to a reasonable extent. The objective was to ensure an uninterrupted facilitation of people’s rights. The effectiveness of the staff/officers was due the attention they gave their respective tasks, rather than to pleasing their superiors. But a deep (and probably irreversible) rot has set in as a result of political interference, and it has eroded the capacity and moral fibre of working bureaucracies.

The public sector has to be revived through a carefully designed approach. Bolstering and revitalisation of constitutional fora, such as parliamentary standing committees,
for monitoring the performance of public institutions is a crucial step. These bodies must be given adequate teeth to help implement corrective actions and reforms. Considerable improvement can be achieved by securing the mandate of the civil and municipal services and by empowering their cadres. If insulated from undue political interference, many officers are still driven by a sense of service.

Published in Dawn, April 3rd, 2017

**Out of step**  
Noman Ahmed Updated February 14, 2017

AT best, the current redevelopment of University Road in Karachi is an enormous inconvenience; at worst, it is a death trap. On Feb 9, a speeding minibus overturned on several university students, killing three. Then, another university student was killed attempting to alight from a bus.

The lack of a dependable alternative route during construction is the core reason for the hazards so many pedestrians face. Our society’s contempt for walking folk is a common trait. Every morning, one can see frightened schoolchildren holding their parents’ hands waiting to cross the city’s busy thoroughfares. With no speed limit regimes worth the name, drivers have a field day accelerating well beyond safety limits, the ultimate brunt of which is borne by the pedestrians.

Our road spaces are overloaded with vehicles, especially during the morning and evening peak hours, exerting enormous pressure on the available right of way to facilitate their movement. Motorcyclists will often drive on footpaths, leaving no room for pedestrians. Given that most of Pakistan’s urban areas are located in warm weather zones, for pedestrians to walk long distances to avail themselves of an overhead-crossing — assuming one exists — is unlikely.

Many so-called improvements have made these roads difficult to cross. Road-wide widening schemes, routinely undertaken to create more room for car movement, often block possibilities for pedestrian crossings by creating physical barriers; the
construction of barriers and sandbag barricades in the name of security completely disrupts pedestrian movement; and all the while vehicle speeds remain alarmingly high.

---

*Our roads reflect apathy towards pedestrians.*

At the heart of our driving is a narcissistic, me-first attitude. Compounding this, many drivers in our large urban centres hail from Pakistan’s hinterlands and have only a rudimentary knowledge of how to drive, and little to no knowledge of traffic rules and road safety. Lawless driving is routinely displayed by drivers of public transport and goods transport vehicles, oil and water tankers, and even government and police vehicles. One frequently observes underage drivers speeding along the roads. Many pedestrians have been seriously injured, in some cases have even lost their lives, due to unruly driving. The traffic police, whenever spotted, remain silent observers even if pedestrians’ lives are endangered.

While our prime minister enjoys cutting ribbons for new transport infrastructure projects across the country, he has yet to inaugurate a project to facilitate safe pedestrian movement. Civic agencies read the minds of their rulers very well. Wherever vehicle conflicts are found, these agencies develop grade separated movement corridors. In contrast, no attention is given to the problems faced by pedestrians.

There are some core issues that affect the safe survival of millions of pedestrians. These include the absence of traffic management on interchanges to allow pedestrians to safely cross roads, rampant, unchecked parking of vehicles and other encroachments on footpaths, motorcycles being driven on footpaths, and excavations and road-widening schemes without regard for pedestrians.

Besides, there is the absence of covered bus stops and walkways for protection from the elements and hazardous installations (including pieces of advertisement hoardings, electricity pylons and poles across footpaths). Pedestrian bridges only serve a small cross section of users; they are totally unusable for people with disabilities, the elderly and small children. To add insult to injury, it is deplorable that pedestrians are not even protected by the law.
Hit-and-run accidents have increased tremendously in our cities; the weakest of pedestrians are usually the victims. Many of our metropolises’ major streets have surveillance cameras with meticulous documentation capacity, but little or no benefit is drawn from evidence collected from them to prevent traffic accidents or prosecute those who cause them. Often, the death of a pedestrian results in protests due to people’s anger. Some examples of unrest in the aftermath of traffic-related deaths in Karachi include that of Bushra Zaidi in 1986, Madeeha Sami in 2005 and the students in Gulshan-i-Iqbal recently.

Those who cannot afford cars and motorcycles are also human. While motorists are arguably people with a relatively stable socio-economic status, pedestrians include a mixed cross section of society dominated by low-income groups. Steps to protect them must be taken without delay.

Creating compulsory statutes to ensure pedestrian walking spaces along all major transport corridors is the foremost priority. Traffic police, city wardens and volunteers must be designated along pedestrian-sensitive zones on a regular basis. Traffic education programmes, with a focus on safe driving and road usage, must be initiated. And those who end up snuffing out innocent lives should be brought to justice. Unless errant drivers, especially those who habitually cause accidents, are punished, attitudes won’t change.

Published in Dawn February 14th, 2017

Corrupt ways
Noman AhmedUpdated January 24, 2017

NO news bulletin is complete without a comprehensive update on the Panama Leaks case in the Supreme Court. The form of corruption being deliberated can be categorised as ‘financial corruption’. But this is not the only form of corruption. Other forms include individuals and institutions shirking their responsibilities, taking unfair decisions regarding the running of state affairs, deviating from governance norms, etc.

For instance, for over two weeks, a judicial inquiry commission comprising a Sindh High Court judge has been investigating the causes behind the poor quality of water
being supplied and the poor sanitation and environmental conditions in the province. It is examining the roles and responsibilities of over two dozen public agencies. Had these agencies functioned according to laid-down responsibilities, such a commission may not have been formed. But the evidence of malpractice and inaction is too glaring to be avoided. Note, for instance, the heaps upon heaps of garbage in every nook and corner of Karachi and other cities in Sindh, the thousands of people rushing to hospitals due to water-borne ailments and the unchecked rise in enterprises generating pollution.

Karachi is also plagued with the construction of a rising number of high-rises everywhere. Legal instruments such as the Sindh High Density Board Act, 2010, permit the utilisation of land and properties for unplanned densification. Meanwhile, a former chief of the Sindh Building Control Authority is reported to have transferred billions of rupees abroad during the past few years. As per press reports, NAB is investigating multiple corruption complaints against him.

---

*Nothing moves without greasing palms.*

---

Initiatives in builder-generated real estate have carved out options in investment for the super rich without yielding a single square yard to millions of the urban poor in this unfortunate metropolis.

The perils of corruption swell when laws, statutes, rules and regulations are not followed. A worse scenario is the selective enforcement of legal provisions. Our society provides countless examples of laws being applied differently to different sets of people. A poor hari can expect the worst even on the mild accusation of a crime by a member of the landed elite. Conversely, the relative of a wadera can escape punishment even after committing the most heinous of crimes. Remember the Shahzeb Khan case?

The reasons for this state of affairs are several. Legal provisions are kept as a tool for hegemony and enhancement of the clout of the already powerful — not for the dispensation of justice. The rule of law invariably requires a change of attitude among the elite. In other words, rules and laws simply have to be followed by individuals of all ranks. But going by the current trend, this appears a remote possibility.
Another related issue is the popular perception of corruption. A few decades ago, the average person considered corruption an unpardonable vice, something which had to be instantly eradicated. He or she would stay away from those who had dubious sources of incomes or lived beyond their financial status. It appears that society at large is greatly confused regarding its own position on corruption. The infiltration of corrupt practices into society has distorted the distinction between the clean and corrupt to a sizable extent.

Bribery is defined as a standard form of corruption. Over a period of time, it has acquired very sophisticated forms. As per a report by the World Bank, 88.2 per cent of the firms operating in Pakistan are believed to have paid a bribe of some kind to win a government contract. In previous years, one would find a nervous-looking visitor handing over a notebook or diary containing a few currency notes to an official. The whole operation had to be covert.

But times have changed. Bribery in many domains has become a standard exercise. Rates, modes of transaction, delivery, receipt and accumulation are familiar practices. And the finesse with which this form of crime is committed is such that one cannot catch the culprit. The existence of a high-volume informal economy, the culture of cash transactions, absence of documentation of assets and wealth are a few of the main causes. Whether it is a matter of registering an FIR or acquiring a trade licence, nothing can move without greasing the palms of those concerned. In some cases, bribery deals are contracted outside the country. High-value gifts also comprise this category.

As said earlier, corruption cannot be eradicated without a change of attitude in society. The prevailing high-consumption lifestyle and ostentatious living will have to be swapped with simple, frugal practices. Examples have to be set at the top for a trickle-down impact. If our rulers continue to be the embodiment of lavish living, the lower cadres shall continue to strive for the same using fair and unfair means.

Published in Dawn January 24th, 2017
IT was sadly ironic that on Dec 27, 2016, while the political leadership of Sindh was busy taking a dig at their political rivals, the Supreme Court’s Karachi Registry was constituting a judicial commission to investigate the poor state of drinking water in Pakistan’s largest city. The two-judge bench, headed by Justice Amir Hani Muslim, asked the Sindh High Court chief justice to nominate a serving high court judge to head the commission.

It is common knowledge that the quality and level of service related to water and sanitation in Sindh cities, including Karachi, has declined drastically. At the same time, there have also been World Bank-led consultations on water and related infrastructural matters under way since the past few weeks.

Some of the core problems include: acute shortage at the bulk supply level; increase in water theft and leakages; institutional shortcomings due to unsatisfactory performance by the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB); financial handicaps faced by the water utility; an exponential rise in the operations of water tankers (especially during the peak of summer); aging and decrepit pipeline network; lack of a comprehensive maintenance and network rehabilitation plan for older neighbourhoods; and the inability of KWSB to add more fresh water connections in suburbs and elsewhere.

Karachi increases by 0.6 million people annually, but the water supply does not scale up correspondingly.

However, ground realities have to be addressed with the right depth and perspective, which is often missed in some of these deliberations.

About half of Karachi’s population resides in Orangi, Baldia, Qasba, Korangi and Landhi. The water supply situation at the retail level is one of the worst in these localities. People living here have no option but to purchase expensive water through tankers after setting aside other essential priorities in spending. This diminishes the possibility of escaping from the poverty spiral. Options for access to water include erratic supply (where pipelines exist), collusion with area gangs who puncture water
mains for commercial sales, boring and the use of semi-brackish water and purchasing tanker loads.

Karachi adds more than 0.6 million people to its tally every year, but the bulk water supply does not scale up correspondingly. For the past many years, the supply has been static at 550m gallons per day (mgd) against a standing demand of 1.1 billion mgd. Less than one-third of the consumers pay the water bill, even though it is charged at an extremely low tariff. The biggest defaulters of KWSB include federal and provincial governments; they owe the utility over Rs22bn.

The culture of non-payment has now trickled down to the level of the ordinary consumer. A study by this writer revealed that many folks considered urban piped water a gift of nature that does not need any monetary compensation! Sometime ago, the KWSB managing director was reported to have complained that 95pc of over 200,000 mosques and imambargahs in the city do not pay their bills.

On the other hand, the water tanker operators are able to recover much of the revenue for the over 50,000 tanker trips that are estimated to take place every single day. Most of these transactions are informal and cash based in nature, the proceeds of which are believed to be shared amongst the many layers of influential stakeholders.

The water supply is also facilitated through illegal hydrants developed by informal entrepreneurs. In this scenario, the quality of water is below the desirable level that would be suitable for consumption. Where water lines and supply do manage to work in concert, it is only after illegally installing suction pumps. Very limited action on this is taken by the concerned authorities despite the gravity of the situation. The bottled water business is another beneficiary of the breakdown of the water supply in the huge city. A multimillion-rupee enterprise, it thrives without any regulatory control.

The reform agenda for the water supply in the city must be prepared according to a realistic perspective. The KWSB board may be reconstituted in order to make it practical and relevant with respect to providing policy guidance to the utility. The addition of relevant stakeholders such as civil society organisations linked to water and sanitation, prominent professionals, representatives of trade bodies and developers may also be considered a part of this exercise. The recovery of bills may be considered as packaged services for targeted outsourcing. That could help raise the much-needed operational revenue for the board.
KWSB must make efforts to help acquire a brand name and status so that competent engineers and management professionals are encouraged to join it, which would bolster its human resource. A multipronged strategy must be worked out to invite interns — comprising technicians, engineering and management students — to the water and sewerage board. The latter’s consumer relations must be upgraded, in which the creation of a robust complaint redressal mechanism is essential.

This unit should be geographically decentralised in order to address the range of operational grievances filed by respective consumers. Policy decisions related to tariff and operational privileges of tanker operators must be worked out so as to be more structured rather than ad hoc and laissez faire as they appear to be at present.

KWSB must negotiate with the bulk consumers, including the government agencies, to work out the schedule repayment of pending dues. The water board may consider preparing a business plan to fully utilise the options of water and sanitation related and other possibilities for revenue generation. The powers that be must note that Karachi, with a dysfunctional water supply, will not be able to shoulder strategic responsibilities in the wake of the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project.

*Published in Dawn, December 30th, 2016*

---

**Rule by contract**

Noman Ahmed Updated December 11, 2016

RECENTLY, an opposition leader in the Sindh Assembly strongly criticised the provincial government for the alleged transfer of parks’ management to multinational firms. He thought this task could have been handled by the relevant local government department.

But it is unfair to blame the Sindh government alone for attempting to contract out essential services, considering this is a decades-old trend that is rapidly consolidating in all the provinces and the centre. Whether cleaning drains, repairing infrastructure, tending to green belts, initiating ordinary bus services or managing tertiary care hospitals, efforts are made to contract the work out. Work that was once done by departments is now given to contractors, despite thousands still on their payrolls.
After surrendering to the dictates of donor agencies, the governments buckled and agreed to reduce public-sector controls and increase private-sector participation. Downsizing poorly performing departments, enhancing the role of private-sector enterprises, privatising financially bleeding corporations, and outsourcing key services and privileged areas of work were some key conditionalities that emerged from the prescriptions of international financial institutions.

*Private-sector activities must be monitored.*

While democratic dispensations always wanted to extend direct benefits and subsidies to their respective vote banks and extended constituencies, this arm-twisting eventually created obstacles to such populist practices. It was generally believed that the private sector would be more cost-effective and efficient for various development, maintenance and governance tasks. However, this has not always been the case.

Since devolution, money supplied to the provinces has increased considerably. Governments began contracting bundles of tasks out to private enterprises in order to draw performance credit from gimmicks. The Lahore BRT was built for a hefty Rs30 billion, with huge input from private-sector consultants and contractors at the construction and operation stages. Since its inauguration in February 2013, it has incurred a subsidy burden of over Rs1.5bn.

Despite tall claims of improving transport, many locations still suffer from poor-quality and high-cost commutes. The BRT benefited contractors and consultants, and perhaps the government, but not the millions of Lahoris away from its alignment. In locations where law and order conditions are not conducive for ordinary operators, many military outfits bag choice contracts.

The rulers-consultants-contractors nexus functions through an interesting equation. Several of the ruling elite either own consulting or contracting enterprises or possess business links with them. Influential consultants identify areas of interventions which can be transformed into contracted projects. Thus, most essential public functions are processed into cleverly crafted projects. Whether de-silting irrigation canals, or development and transport planning, contractual arrangements supersede routine departmental oversights, which were the norm two decades ago.
Amusingly, two master plans for Karachi were made by KDA during the 1970s and 1980s. For a much larger city in the 1990s, a consortium of private firms was, instead, awarded this crucial task. One now finds that planning is packaged and floated as a procurement exercise.

Pakistan Railways, which inherited and developed many manufacturing capabilities, prefers to import locomotives from a friendly country, many of which are routinely found defective! The assumption, that contracting essential functions out reduces administrative costs and manpower, is proven wrong.

It is common sense that private-sector activities must be routinely monitored by regulatory bodies.

For instance, Article 9 of the Constitution assures life and liberty to all citizens. Access to safe drinking water is an essential need in this respect. Given that the supply of public drinking water is completely unreliable, there is a mushroom growth of private bottled-water suppliers and other types of vendors. Many are engaged in illegal practices such as stealing water from municipal networks. No urban or regional regulatory authority exists to regulate the costs and prices, or even health standards. While large-scale transport projects abound in almost every major city, regulatory authorities are either absent or created as an afterthought, without ensuring equilibrium among stakeholders.

One must learn from the capitalist West, from where private contracting traditions have been imported. Strict, impartial regulators and potent consumer protection mechanisms safeguard the rights of citizens in many industrially advanced countries. Much importance is assigned to the quality of service, public interest and value for money — especially around public resources. Certain functions, such as monitoring, evaluation, planning, development control and setting maintenance priorities are still done by departments. The pyramids along the Nile may not have lasted had they been constructed by contractors.

*Published in Dawn December 11th, 2016*
ON Nov 13, the military and civilian leaderships of Pakistan appeared on the same page during the operationalisation ceremony of Gwadar port and testing of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor’s western route. An impressive array of development components related to road transportation, railways, port airport development (in Gwadar), energy and warehousing constitute the revealed dimensions of the corridor initiative. No doubt many more will follow.

Barring some dissenting voices, political forces and provincial administrations have generally welcomed CPEC and are working to connect with it to reap greater benefits for themselves and, perhaps, their people. However, there seems to be little effort vis-à-vis the general preparedness of the planning and implementation apparatus at the national, provincial and local levels to connect Pakistani people — especially the proletariat, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, traders and the like — with the project.

While the corridors of movement and connectivity are discussed with much rigour and energy, the territorial and spatial impacts of CPEC are not being considered. Whether urban, sub-urban and logistic-based settlements shall be able to reconcile and adjust to these physical developments remains an unaddressed concern.

An immediate outcome of corridor-based developments is a rapid rise in land values along the arteries of movement in suburban and rural settings. Land and real-estate enterprises tend to cartelise to acquire land along strategic locations. Development of high-end neighbourhoods along the Super Highway between Karachi and Hyderabad is one example. All along the western and eastern routes, ruthless investment sharks are likely to expropriate land from existing owners. As a consequence, the working classes here will be pushed out and marginalised. Capitalists may also elbow out indigenous livelihoods in many parts of the alignments and corridors. Subsistence fishermen in Gwadar were concerned about the closure of the old fish harbour and shifting of the people to a new site. Farmers in Gilgit-Baltistan fear possible loss of cultivable land to non-agricultural uses for CPEC. Consultations with stakeholders can help evolve solutions to many such issues.

Working classes and indigenous livelihoods along the CPEC route are at risk of being marginalised.

The Gwadar-Kashgar route is to pass through Turbat, Panjgur, Besima, Surab, Kalat, Mastung, Quetta, Qilla Saifullah, Zhob, D.I. Khan, Mianwali, Balkasar, Hasan Abdal, Abbottabad and Gilgit. Once the work begins, speculators are certain to descend and begin acquiring strategic land and locations. This would adversely impact the many downtrodden in these areas. Also, these cities and settlements do not possess adequate warehousing or service delivery capacity to facilitate high-end trade. Basic urban infrastructure in these locations — Quetta and Gwadar included — is very deficient.
Clean drinking water, sewerage and waste collection, modern livable housing, healthcare and educational facilities are either non-existent or primitive. In the aftermath of three recent terrorist attacks in Balochistan, the wounded had to be shifted to hospitals in Karachi. Ordinary residents in these areas will be deeply disappointed if CPEC fails to bring a positive change in their daily lives.

A key concern raised by some political groups is the possible in-migration of working-class people from KP, Punjab and Sindh to Balochistan. The prevailing demographics in Turbat, Panjgur, Gwadar and Kalat show a low-population density. The existing population does not possess the necessary skill sets and diversity of occupational requirements essential to sustain a mega enterprise as demanding as CPEC. Hence the fear of becoming marginalised in the wake of newly arriving workers and investors is not unfounded. But intelligent and politically appropriate handling of this challenge can create an environment for healthy coexistence.

Strategic grant of amnesty to misguided Baloch youth, targeted subsidies in the form of skill development and employment, synergising commercial partnerships between locals and incoming investors are some options. These steps should be taken from a political platform with the establishment’s tacit support. If a stable Baloch middle class and local entrepreneurs evolve due to CPEC, it would be a huge service to the underdeveloped province.

It is well known that the first trading convoy was facilitated by the establishment as a test case, with extraordinary security and backup. Later, the dictates of the free market will prevail along CPEC routes. Business enterprises and transporters will decide the route and the port. With the Karachi-Peshawar Motorway moving towards completion and Karachi-Lahore railroad section getting revitalised, the importance of Karachi will become paramount again. Cities and settlements in the south and centre of Sindh — especially along the corridors of movement — will become re-strategised.

Hubs of business, warehousing and services will be needed all along the axial routes. Many branch routes will be required to connect the main CPEC corridors with existing towns, cities and upcoming energy projects. Enormous coordination will be required between the federal and Sindh governments.

Also, if Sindh wishes to benefit comprehensively from CPEC, it shall have to analyse how new centres of growth and investment could be generated in the province’s north to benefit the Hyderabad-Nawabshah-Sukkur loop and adjoining zones. Without self-managed cities, the fruits of development may remain elusive to the vast proletariat in Sindh’s secondary cities.

Many prerequisites are needed in CPEC’s planning, development and implementation. The Planning Commission must initiate a national spatial planning exercise to scientifically adjust CPEC and related activities in the country’s urban and regional geography. This plan, along with physical and operational details of logistics and services, may identify direct and indirect impacts of the proposed developments.
Environmental damage and impact on livelihoods and indigenous modes of production must be minimised to make CPEC a sustainable and realistic intervention.

Proper institutional arrangements must be put in place to plan and execute CPEC-related development. A regulatory platform should be created where the physical development decisions and project proposals can be examined without fear or favour to any individual or group. The government may consider creating a CPEC land and transport authority to comprehensively plan and manage the corridor and allied locations and functions. Lessons can be drawn from the TEN-T programme across the European Union which is managed by an exclusively created Innovation and Networks Executive Agency.

Published in Dawn November 22nd, 2016

Micromanaging Karachi
Noman Ahmed Updated November 08, 2016

SOME days ago, the Sindh minister for local government inked a deal awarding the rights of solid-waste management in Karachi’s District South to a Chinese outfit. The deal is valued at Rs2 billion. The Sindh Solid Waste Management Board Act 2014 provided the minister the administrative privilege of outsourcing this vital municipal function.

In fact, the province has assumed many responsibilities related to municipal controls, regulations and management during the recent past. For example, the Sindh Building Control Authority not only oversees building construction and zoning matters in Karachi and the rest of the province, it is also given the task of planning for the city. Water and sanitation are looked after by a provincially constituted board under the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board Act 1996. Even the elected Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and six district municipal corporations have to perform their limited functions within the tightly carved-out administrative space under the Sindh Local Government Act 2013.

This position shows that political forces that dominate the provincial administration and local institutions, respectively, are locked in an administrative combat of
mistrust and suspicion. Each faction is quick to outfox the other, when the political privilege comes their respective way.

An efficient administrative arrangement with the blessings of the centre, province and city is required.

As per the requirement of populist politics, tiers of government weigh interventions on the scale of public appreciation. It is no secret that visible symbols of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ are important for gaining popularity among the masses. The government of Sindh and local institutions, therefore, compete to grab the credit for planning and developing these in a pronounced manner.

Flyovers, underpasses, arterial roads, new building complexes and elevated causeways are a few examples which seem to account for the performance of a regime. And these components of physical development require very high capital expenditure, more so in the prevailing contractual modes under which such structures are executed.

The passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment and outcomes of the National Finance Commission awards have extended enough funds to the province to undertake large-scale mega projects. Therefore, the government of Sindh deems it appropriate and politically viable to monopolise the development works in Karachi and elsewhere in the province.

‘Super’ developers, realtors, invisible investors and agents of the establishment have evolved working relationships to get their multibillion-rupee enterprises moving. In the prevailing political scenario, the bargaining clout of local institutions — especially in connection with budgetary allocations — is very limited. With the mayor of Karachi in jail, the vacuum of leadership becomes further protracted.

The political relationship between Karachi and the province has experienced many ebbs and flows. After 1947, Karachi was declared a capital territory under the control of the central government. This move greatly irked the political elite of Sindh, many of whom protested openly. Despite the shifting of the national capital to Islamabad and the headquarters of West Pakistan to Lahore under the erstwhile One Unit scheme, Karachi remained the commercial, industrial and business hub of the country during the 1960s and beyond.
Karachiites opposed the dictatorial policies of the Ayub Khan regime and voted against him during the 1965 presidential elections. The city was a centre point of opposition parties including the Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan during the 1970s. The PPP, the dominant political force in Sindh, was not able to win majority seats in Karachi in any election since 1970 till today. Some believe that it is a major cause of the city’s woes.

Interestingly, military dictators gave greater powers and resources for development work in the city than did elected governments. Local governments were also regularly constituted through adult franchise in military regimes and given sufficient powers and mandates. The provincial governments would immediately wrestle back the powers, privileges and resource control once the period of dictatorship ended. Karachi and many other cities in Sindh have been suffering from this administrative paradox since 2008.

It is clear that the present provincial government is not willing to devolve any power, resource share or responsibility that could make local institutions visible in city affairs. Perhaps taking inspiration from Punjab, the Sindh administration intends to run the city by awarding development and management contracts to the private sector. With no powers or initiatives left at their disposal, the elected local governments can only cut a sorry figure — turning in negligible performances — by the time their tenure ends. While this may appear a wise political strategy for a specific political camp, it is not in the interest of the city or its dwellers in any way.

Rundown streets; overflowing drains; nonperforming water supply networks; haphazardly densifying neighbourhoods; dilapidated katchi abadis; increasing traffic congestion due to the rising numbers of cars and motorbikes; unplanned sprawls along suburban fringes; and the ever-increasing mounds of garbage are some indicators that the present administrative arrangement is not delivering. An efficient and capable administrative arrangement with the political blessings of the centre, province and the city is required.

But a political solution to this administrative malady is not simple, given the status and significance of Karachi in the national and provincial context. It is an undeniable reality that Karachi is an anomaly in Sindh’s political and administrative affairs. For instance, the city accounts for 44 per cent of the population of the province with 25pc representation in the provincial assembly. Moreover, the provincial mandate of managing law and order seems to have slipped into the hands of the establishment.
The city, with its evolving amorphous urban limits, has slowly transformed into a sprawling conurbation of settlements. New institutional arrangements must be worked out through a consultative process between all the stakeholders. Karachi is too important a city to be left to the vagaries of inaction.

*Published in Dawn November 8th, 2016*

---

**Where the poor live**  
Noman Ahmed Updated October 20, 2016

ON Oct 13, Sindh’s chief minister directed the Sindh Katchi Abadis Authority (SKAA) and senior officials to prepare a plan to upgrade 100 informal settlements to the level of townships. A presentation was given to the chief minister by the concerned officials regarding the existing state of katchi abadis. While the decision to rehabilitate these neglected settlements is commendable, many issues need to be addressed in an objective manner.

There are multiple perceptions about such settlements. Some quarters believe that katchi abadis are scars on our urban face, and must be demolished and replaced by ‘neat’ and ‘orderly’ structures. Urban Sindh’s local political elite consider them as vehicles for promoting in-migrations to cities, particularly from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas.

Realtors view katchi abadis as potential gold mines and lobby for allowing high-density high-rise developments on these strategic locations. The reality, however, belies such visions. A plethora of empirical, independent works of research suggests that katchi abadis are a response to the inability of state institutions to supply low-income housing.

*Upgrading settlements is a process, not a project.*

---

In 1947, when millions of new citizens from across the subcontinent opted for urban locations, jhuggis were allowed in open tracts. Since government rehabilitation schemes did not keep pace with the burgeoning refugee population in search of basic housing, many such settlements rapidly expanded. Soon thereafter, economic
compulsions forced millions towards the cities’ industries in search of employment. Left helpless by the state, they were forced to help themselves (albeit unsystematically).

Due to low costs, locations such as the banks of the Lyari and Malir rivers, and the edges of Gujjar Nullah and other drains became prime spots for the poor to settle in. Initial attempts by the government to bulldoze the settlements were soon abandoned. With time, they became more technically sophisticated. Learning from planned settlements, katchi abadis adopted the pattern of grid iron rectilinear layouts. Many government functionaries developed clandestine links with this process and derived hefty rents.

Pakistan’s cities, especially Karachi, have many useful lessons to offer for issues of informal settlements in general and low-income housing in particular. The Orangi Pilot Project’s (OPP) work is a case in point. Well-known social scientist, Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, and architects Arif Hasan, Perween Rahman and Saleem Alimuddin observed that people in katchi abadis were already building their abodes and investing in services.

They needed technical, social and administrative guidance to produce effective outcomes. By conducting action research on solutions developed by the people and acting as a catalyst, OPP guided technically sound and economically valid development.

When lane- and street-level services were developed, the people (with OPP’s assistance) lobbied government agencies to connect their lane-level infrastructure with trunk-scale services. The work — driven by community participation, funding and materials — sustained without fail; repairs and maintenance were also community-led. This model is still replicated in many places in Pakistan and the developing world, although without much fanfare or glamour.

Similarly, the concept of incremental housing development for low-income communities has been an internationally acclaimed best practice since the 1980s. After learning that land supply for housing results in speculative ventures, social scientist and bureaucrat Tasneem Ahmed Siddiqui and his team introduced the targeting of urban poor before sanctioning allotment documents. Mobilisation and social support were constantly provided. This approach was made a part of the 2001 national housing policy.
It must be remembered that katchi abadis will continue to grow and multiply if urban housing options for the teeming millions are not devised. Upgrading these settlements is a process, not a project. New kinds of transformations are taking place in the abadis. With rising urbanisation rates and the high cost of planned and formal housing in cities, this phenomenon is likely to intensify in the coming years.

Informally developed high-rises replacing low-rise housing are becoming increasingly visible in settlements close to Karachi’s centre. Water tankers (a common mode of service delivery) are becoming increasingly costly, as are electricity and gas supplies. Whereas some might believe that the poor enjoy free services, the reality is that they pay many times more than residents of planned neighbourhoods. Given the informal nature of these transactions, however, there is little formal evidence to substantiate this claim.

SKAA can learn from the available resources, staff and leadership of OPP, Saiban (that promotes incremental housing) and similar organisations. The authority should formulate short- and medium-term plans with community involvement at all levels of planning and implementation. This is the only approach that has delivered credible results in our katchi abadis.

Published in Dawn, October 20th, 2016

Fractured city
Noman AhmedUpdated October 02, 2016

Karachi is mired in multiple complexities. While one city, the existence of many land development and management agencies with overlapping functions and jurisdictions causes administrative complications. Post-Partition, neighbourhoods falling in the municipal category were mostly developed and allotted by the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) until it merged with the (now defunct) City District Government in 2001. Defence Housing Authority (DHA) continues to acquire land from the provincial board of revenue and carves out plots for designated allottees.

The Lyari and Malir development authorities and the reincarnated KDA also develop land for similar purposes. Karachi Port Trust and Port Qasim Authority manage ports and develop and manage lands in their respective territories. Pakistan Railways and
Sindh Industrial and Trading Estate develop lands for operational and general urban purposes.

Presently, urban locations falling in the municipal area are jointly managed by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and six district municipal corporations in Malir, Korangi, Central, South, East and West districts. For the same responsibilities, the city possesses six cantonment boards: Malir, Korangi, Karachi, Clifton, Manora and Faisal.

Karachi suffers from tensions over jurisdiction.

Each functions through its own statutes and administrative hierarchies that leave little room for coordinated efforts in urban planning, development and management. Karachi’s mayors are often vocal about this when they express helplessness at not being able to exercise authority over basic urban services. Some may remember that mayor Abdul Sattar Afghani was sacked by the provincial government in 1987 when he marched from KMC’s head office to Sindh Secretariat, demanding the city’s rightful share of property and motor vehicle taxes.

Not much has changed in the past 40 years. City affairs are closely controlled by different organs of the government. After Musharraf’s regime’s nine-year interlude, the provincial tutelage reigns supreme. Since the 18th Amendment, the Sindh government now possesses more financial space and exercises tighter control in the city’s running. The peculiar political equation of Karachi must be examined objectively. The city administration and provincial government have rarely shared the same outlook.

In 1970, the Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan won a majority. In 1977, an opposition coalition under the Pakistan National Alliance, or PNA, won all but two seats. And since 1988, the city has been the MQM’s stronghold. Provincial governments have been dominated by the PPP or, in some cases, the political affiliates of establishment groups. By exercising legal and administrative authority, the government continued to tilt the balance of power and decision-making in its favour.

For instance, under World Bank advice, the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board was created in an amendment to the Local Government Ordinance in 1983, and chaired
by Karachi’s mayor. In 1996, the Sindh government brought a new act that transferred control from the mayor to the provincial administration. The Karachi (later Sindh) Building Control Authority functions as a provincially controlled agency. KDA has always been controlled by the provincial government with the Karachi commissioner acting as chairman, and now the minister of local government.

However, the creation of the Lyari and Malir development authorities in 1993-94 gave exclusive powers of land allotment and allocation in peri-urban territory of the city. The military establishment exercised exclusive jurisdiction in its residential estates through DHA and cantonment boards. The provision of essential services fell into the Sindh government’s hands. The situation is more complex today with the arrival of ‘super-developers’ of land and real estate, who influence the process of infrastructure development and land allocation in accordance to their commercial interests. Citizens and city suffer when administrative tensions cause a breakdown of services.

Development plans prepared in 1974, 1990-91 and 2007 have offered useful solutions to the complexities of urban management. These solutions are still valid, albeit with some adjustments.

To begin with, a formula for managing Karachi as one urban entity must be created with political consensus. The establishment and the centre must participate in this process, given the city’s extraordinary importance in national affairs. A Karachi planning agency must be created as the main forum for analysing the city’s development and management issues, and recommending proposals for future sustenance. Legal cover must be accorded to this arrangement as suggested in the city’s master plans. All agencies, departments and stakeholders must be represented on the governing body. Financial allocations for municipal agencies must be free from the political levers of the Sindh government. These reforms are as vital for the city as the ongoing Karachi operation.

The writer is chairman, Department of Architecture & Planning, NED University, Karachi.

Published in Dawn, October 2nd, 2016
After the mayoral polls
Noman Ahmed Updated September 03, 2016

IT took eight months after December 2015 to complete the electoral process of local governments in Sindh. At last, cities and other urban and territorial jurisdictions, including Karachi, have elected mayors and councillors.

The political climate and general socio-political condition of the metropolis are such that even the smallest change tends to ignite some hope. Despite the fact that it is the provincial government that has acquired many of the municipal powers through various laws and administrative arrangements during the past eight years, people have reason to be optimistic.

The mayor is rightly considered the custodian of the city, irrespective of legal or administrative constraints. The current political fracas in Karachi notwithstanding, there is enormous opportunity in this pivotal role for which deep knowledge of municipal administration is vital.

Despite legal and other constraints, there is much the mayor can do to make Karachi liveable again.

The municipal administration is responsible for managing city spaces, infrastructure, systems and assets. Cities in the subcontinent used to be governed by very progressive statutes and capable municipal administrations. Madras (now Chennai) had the honour of being the oldest municipality among Commonwealth nations outside the United Kingdom. The municipality structure was inaugurated in 1688, while municipal functions in Calcutta (now Kolkata) began in 1763. Providing drinking water, undertaking conservancy and construction work, and maintaining roads as well as drains were some of the core functions performed.

The origins of Karachi’s municipality go back to the 19th century. It began as the Karachi Conservancy Board in 1846 to combat a cholera epidemic and then became a municipality in 1852-53. Over time, its functions, responsibilities and outreach increased as the demand for services and improved lifestyles grew.
Conceptually, cities belong to citizens who live, own and operate enterprises and acquire dwellings by way of ownership, tenancy, inheritance or other means. They fulfil their responsibilities by paying property tax and other levies to generate revenue for the management of their city. By applying the fundamental principle of participatory democracy, they elect representatives to decide matters on their behalf and to prioritise development and maintenance work.

Thus common issues such as the provision of adequate and affordable housing; means of public mobility, water and sanitation, power and fuel, recreational venues, places of worship and assembly are provided in line with the needs of the society. That is, when cities need improved healthcare and solid waste management, they do not get motorways or metro buses in response. Similarly, when the majority of people require access to housing, the answer does not lie in increasing the number of law-enforcement personnel. When every citizen who exists in the city counts, decisions cannot be taken to cater to the wealthy few.

For the scientific management of cities and the hinterland, a potent and binding regime of urban and regional planning is key. The present and future protection of public interest, a careful and scientific assessment of current development and management trends, factoring in the concerns of all stakeholders, identification of present and potential revenue options, and the creation of a guided mechanism of decision-making based on correct information and analysis are some of the tasks normally associated with the institution of planning.

From 1921 to 2007, Karachi benefited from various planning inputs that offered many useful solutions to the city’s problems. Many obstacles were successfully overcome due to interventions emanating from these plans. For example, the Karachi Development Plan, 1974-85, streamlined the macro form of the city, provided implementable options for bulk water supply, housing for low-income groups, and for keeping environmental assets secure.

The next plan for the period 1986-2000 warned against the menace of uncontrolled urban sprawl and suggested the infill of existing neighbourhoods and the consolidation of schemes that were already there. Both these plans recommended the creation of a legally and administratively empowered planning agency to continue this exercise without interruption.

The current political scenario demands that the new city leadership take on the management challenge and carry out its responsibilities purposefully and in a dispassionate manner. Instead of locking horns with the provincial and federal
governments and other agencies that control a sizable spread of Karachi, the mayor and his affiliates must outline the attainable tasks — and there is a lot that can be done even if there are constraints on the exercise of powers.

For example, the strange Sindh Solid Waste Management Board Act 2014 seems to have made garbage disposal a provincial prerogative — this is especially unfortunate when the poor performance of the provincial administration is no secret.

But by building political bridges, this and many other tasks could be done in a spirit of collaboration rather than competition. City affairs are being influenced by trade associations and stakeholder bodies of various scale and profile. The Association of Builders and Developers, wholesalers, retailers, education service providers, healthcare providers, transporters, tanker operators, market committees, residents’ organisations, cooperative societies and the like constitute potential lobbies whose genuine issues may become part of the agenda of municipal bodies.

By way of appropriate consultations, a people-centric priority list can be formulated to pull back Karachi from the brink of municipal collapse. In addition, the city urgently needs a broad-based review of the ongoing bus rapid transit project and the far-reaching impact of land use, losses to retailing businesses, inconvenience to residents along the route, and uncertainty about integration with other modes of transport.

The mayor can use his representative status to reconcile the process and outcome of this high-cost project for the advantage of remote and dense neighbourhoods. Revival of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and its reorganisation on the basis of efficiency and financial viability is another pending task.

While the challenges seem to be infinite, all can fall in place if the initial steps are rational.

*The writer is professor and chairman, department of architecture and planning, NED University Karachi.*

*Published in Dawn, September 3rd, 2016*