

# The Business

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# The mess that is Karachi



RAFIA ZAKARIA

This is a horror story. A global pandemic rages outside. The newspapers are emblazoned with death counts, with reports of the suffering, of ever-dwindling resources at hospitals trying to tend to patients. Then there is the heat, rising up to 41 degrees Centigrade, making life and living in the open as arduous as can possibly be.

Even if nothing else were happening, these are difficult days in Pakistan including Karachi. Suppose after making peace with all these challenges posed by the pandemic and the power outages and heat and the water shortage, the administration of the city of Karachi decides to impose even more hardships. Take the example of residents living near the Tipu Sultan Road area in Karachi. The off-road known as Modern Housing Society has long been a subject of neglect. At the corner, facing main Tipu Sultan Road, a plot of empty unclaimed land has been routinely permitted to devolve into a rubbish dump. The lack of zoning and planning to accommodate the burgeoning

commercial establishments on main Tipu Sultan Road (where an open drain runs through the median) have only made life worse and worse and still worse.

And yet, as the residents of Modern Housing Society discovered last week, it was possible that things could get even worse. In the middle of summer, during a global pandemic and with all sorts of other uncertainties looming, they would face even more. Early last week, a truck of employees of the Karachi Municipal Corporation landed on the road. Under the pretext of installing a new sewer pipe, they broke the pavements that had been built by local residents; they uprooted trees and they demolished half of the road. Sewage that

zone, in which the attackers were not any foreign enemy but the very men working to serve Karachi's hapless population. More sewage seeped into the areas around the houses. Because the threat of Covid-19 is not deemed enough to make the lives of Karachiites miserable, the threat of walking through sewage was added to their travails. Most interestingly, on this third day, when the devastation had left everyone utterly desperate, the KMC team that had done the digging disappeared. The inhabitants of Modern Housing Society were thrust into a pre-modern existence, living in sewage and without electricity.

When K-Electric was contacted to address the power problem, they hedged by saying that this was not

ally work to make a city work would wonder, 'shouldn't they have thought about the cost of the project before they began the project?' Not so a person who lives in Karachi. If you live in Karachi, you know that this ploy is just another way by which city workers extort money from those they have cursed with a hapless life. Can a man or woman standing in sewage ask questions? No, absolutely not, and KMC knows this. The worst-affected residents had to beg for KMC to install the pipe 'as a favour'. Favours, you will know by now, require money and so KMC had to be paid by the residents to get the workers to the site and install the pipe.

The saga of torture continues even now. While the pipe is installed, the road remains dug up, almost completely impassable; the sewage water is still accumulated in places. In the meantime, Mayor Wasim Akhtar, who seems unaware of this sort of cruel extortion and torture scheme carried out on innocent and desperate Karachi residents, informed everyone recently that the federal government's failure to allocate money to Karachi means that KMC will not be able to avert floods during the upcoming monsoon season. One wonders if the mayor is willing to ask those under him why they are digging up city streets and leaving them in that state if they do not have the funds. The sewage line serving Modern Housing Society had no reported problems. It was, it seems, as it always is, extortion and bribery season.

The neglect that Karachi, a city that provides the majority percentage of the country's revenue, faces is an old story. What is new is that imposing cruelties on ordinary and innocent citizens continues even during a global pandemic. In this kind of case, which occurs in innumerable portions of the city, the problem is not just neglect but wilful cruelty and intentional destruction to inflict hardship on all.

## A genuine demand

BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal has announced his party's Central Executive Committee decision to end alliance with the government, accusing it of having "non-serious attitude" towards Baluchistan's problems. While recalling that soon after the general election, the BNP and the PTI had signed a six-point agreement but the government did not pay attention to any of the issues, including the missing persons and developmental projects. With just four MNAs the BNP has a small presence in Parliament and, unlike the government's coalition partners its members have not held any ministerial position. The development, therefore, is not going to make any change in the political landscape in the Centre. But it should worry the government and others concerned for what the move means in the wider context of the federation's relations with Baluchistan. The key question agitating the minds of people in Baluchistan as also in other parts of the country is that of missing people. Mengal placed two lists containing the names of 'disappeared' persons before the house: one containing the names of 18 people who had been recovered, and the other of 500 people, he said, had gone missing since August 2018 when his party signed the alliance agreement with the PTI.

Minister for Information and Broadcasting Shibli Faraz, nonetheless, offered the explanation to journalists that the list being too long it was difficult to verify and trace all, and that some of the people were later found to have left their areas of their own volition. Whatever the truth, the issue must be resolved in a satisfactory manner. As regards the falling out of the BNP-M, the government has been trying to downplay it whilst a "political team" held talks with the estranged ally but of no avail. There is a long history of mistrust between the province and the centre. At the root of it all is a feeling, quite justified, of being meted out a step-motherly treatment. The best mitigating strategy under the circumstances is to have a frank dialogue with all, including the 'angry Baloch youth'.

In fact, Mengal seemed to have a valid point when he raised this question, "why a Baluchistan peace conference could not be convened similar to the conference held for the Afghanistan peace process?" Indeed, if Pakistan can facilitate talks between the Taliban and the US and among various Afghan factions as well, it should have no qualms about talking to its own people. The powers that be ought to pay attention to what almost all Baloch parties have been saying for long: empower the political leadership to hold a meaningful intra-Baloch dialogue.

ROB URIE

As protests over police violence continue around the nation, cause and effect are being defined through the political goals of those with official voices.

Protesters were calm until the choice to be calm was no longer an option. For decades, rising corporate and state repression have merged with declining economic circumstances to produce a claustrophobia of the soul for the 'lesser' ninety or so percent of us. The so-called land-of-the-free has the largest police-prison industrial complex in the world to assure that those who tire of quiet desperation remain docile and compliant no matter the provocation.

The morality tales being peddled are of small battles in larger struggles. Official power is always and everywhere invisible or benign. The police are proclaimed to be self-generated; volunteer heroes who serve the public by acting against the deserving poor for the benefit of the rich and their agents. The thin blue line is what keeps bank accounts unmolested – except by bankers, and renters paying the rent. The serial crises of capitalism are facts of nature while opposition to capitalism

## Necessity of rebellion

is the whim of malcontents whose poetic aversion to the property of others is the productivity zapping folly of the coddled and indigent. It's no secret who is writing this script.

This isn't to suggest that condemnation of the protesters and protests is the 'official' position – not yet at any rate. The woke wokeness of the woke has the enemies of everything good and holy for the past four decades shouting that racism is bad, without having quite so much to say about redistributing political and economic power to offset its lesser inclinations. Democrats are in the unenviable position of promoting Joe 'Super-Predator' Biden, a key architect of mass incarceration, the militarization of the police, immunity for killer cops and writer of key portions of both the 1994 Crime Bill and the Patriot Act, as the solution to his own life's work. Furthermore, the thesis that revolutionaries cause revolutions confuses cause with effect. This is undoubtedly an unpopular and occasionally dubious read of history. However, as it relates to current circumstances, incredulity is on the side of why rebellion took so

long? As it happens, capitalism has done what it does, it raised incomes and wealth quite extravagantly for about one percent of the population, raised them significantly for the next 9%, and then went on vacation for four decades. To the question of who gets to clean up the mess it left behind; I boldly predict that it won't be the rich. As de-romanticized as this revolutionary-by-necessity thesis is, and as unflattering to its actors it might seem, revolution is the assertion of life against its graduated demise. The portrayal of protesters as the poor and unwashed ruining a good thing for everyone else is a step or two ahead of the institutionalization of key accomplishments. A sure sign that counter-revolutionary forces are at work is the broad reiteration of core social justice principles. Oligarchs and corporate titans have had a good run. If by no other means than capacity, it is they who created and fertilized the seeds of revolt.

The state of play is that political and economic power has been concentrated to the point where the interests of the rich are all that politicians know. Kente cloth and

Kaepernick kneels – symbolic gestures that keep various constituencies mollified in times when power is more widely distributed, are but insult added to injury when the rich and powerful have it all in their own pockets. Congressional Democrats are but office managers stumbling forward with forced smiles to 'explain' how the ninth pay cut in a year will benefit workers. Oligarchs and executives aren't giving anything up, so the politicians have nothing to offer. More dangerous and debilitating by design is the effort to direct protesters and protests into official channels.

The Democratic Party has long been known as 'the graveyard of social movements,' while Republicans quite like the occasional seig heil as long as the interests of capital are kept in clear focus. This symmetry in asymmetry – with Ds, the left losses, with Rs, the right wins, has a lot to do with resources.

Capitalism commodifies power – it creates and distributes its political currency as currency. Competing political schemes either earn this currency through service to it or they don't compete, hence the term 'revolution.'

Excerpted from: 'The Necessity of Rebellion'.  
Courtesy: Counterpunch.org

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was in the line was permitted to seep onto the road and was left there.

Then, the next day, digging was resumed and the electricity lines supplying one side of the street suffered damage. That entire side of the street lost power. It is terrible enough to suffer the constant tortures of the power outages imposed by K-Electric, as they push one into the constant anticipation of when they're going to end; it is even worse to endure those that have no end at all. This would be the case of this particular power outage, delivered courtesy of KMC, which threw up its hands and said it was not their fault. Of course, it is never ever their fault. The third day, the entire street resembled a war

their fault and hence not even their job. Things proceeded as they do in Pakistan, with residents having to beg K-Electric to 'do a favour' and fix the line. Favours cost money and so it was with this favour. On day four, the road remained dug up but one of the workers who was responsible for having dug it up came around to survey the misery of the residents forced to live around open sewage. When one resident flagged him down, he was prepared with an answer. He had run out of workers, because there was no budget to finish the job and actually install the pipe, which had been the reason for the entire road having been dug up. Now, some who live in places where municipal corporations actu-

## Public holders have to follow accountability and transparency

KANWAR MUHAMMAD DILSHAD

Strictly speaking in Islam, the Holy Quran says that people will be questioned and judged on the day of judgement in accordance with the authority and responsibility they had in terms of their worldly position in the society. This means the responsibility they had towards people as heads of state and department, as judges, as doctors, lawyers, businessmen etc., practically wherever in whatever capacity you are responsible for the rights and wellbeing of the people in any position of authority. The concept of privileges in our religion is more than crystal clear. Any privilege makes you more answerable and more punishable for any breach of normal laws. There is no privilege in Islam to any one on the basis of his position to shy away from the process of accountability. On the contrary accountability is to be more strict and transparent for public office holders, and the privileged people. The Holy Quran says that oh the wives of the prophet, you have to be higher in all good deeds than other women, you will have double the punishment for any omissions, this is the price of privilege.

Some where in our history, the concept of privilege changed or was changed and reversed by the powerful. The concept of privilege was that people of authority will be more transparent, the people had a privilege to see through their lives and actions and hold them accountable, there could be no veils and walls around them to allow them to hide behind, to avoid accountability for their actions and no escape for any misadventures. This right was robbed from the people and on the contrary, layers of protection were created around them to let them hide their misdeeds. They could now take refuge behind "privileges" on account of the offices, titles, positions and authority they enjoyed, which lead to the crime of usurping the rights of people in the first place. This vicious circle could not be broken by the common people, those who are actually robbed. The stage was thus set for more perfect robberies with no threats to the robbers. This robbery is against human liberty.

The social dimension is that such societies deteriorate and degenerate, never to be able to progress and compete with their contemporaries. People get opportunities to do good work. Most of the times for their own benefit, sometimes for others and occasionally really commendable work which may have a much bigger social, economic impact at a larger scale. The last category of opportunities present to practically all holders of public offices, obviously as their actions affect



the lives of thousands and millions of people. If they seize these opportunities, they become immortal in the records of human history. Oblivion and often blame is the destiny of those who fail to respond, oblivion being a more merciful destiny than a permanent remembrance as corrupt, incompetent, or cruel inhuman abusers of the public offices they once held. Very proudly, enjoying the self or system-conferred "privileges", which in reality are a sheer abuse of authority or power vested in their positions for protecting the people they were responsible for, while holding the public office. Nature provides opportunities to people time and again to undo their wrongs. One such opportunity has come way of the judges of superior judiciary of Pakistan.

The occasion is the hearing against a fellow judge for assets in excess of resources. This is biggest enemy of humanity in developing countries. They have an opportunity to become immortal in judicial history as well as in eyes of the Lord. They have in their power and capacity to deal with it strictly in terms of any normal case. The judge in question should have resigned and offered himself for interrogation on day one. The judges hearing the proceedings should leave aside all bias and expect the holder of the sacred public office to be more accountable than the public. The benefit of doubt even should not go to the defendant. This perhaps will set the stage for hopefully some real justice in our country ultimately. This could be the iconic beginning of a culture devoid of privileges of the members of Parliament, Ministers, Heads of State, and so on and so forth. We may start looking like though, lesser but part of the human race. I wish who have "Justice" as integral part of their names, even after they leave this world, make people believe in and revere the principles of justice, by seeing it done before their eyes. This may one day lead to people in power realising that what they think is absolutely legal is not only but actually Haram.

—The writer is former Federal Secretary Election Commission of Pakistan and currently Chairman National

## Letters to the Editor

### Practical steps

This refers to the news report 'OIC states asked to raise Kashmir issue with India' (June 23). It has been reported elsewhere in the media that during 1962 China-India war, China had suggested to Pakistan to take advantage of Indian vulnerability and to attack and occupy Indian-held Kashmir. However, Ayub Khan missed the opportunity by consulting his masters in the US who advised against it. And now, with both countries being nuclear-armed, a full-fledged war between India and Pakistan is inconceivable because of the utter devastation it would cause in both countries.

At the same time, it is unlikely that India will offer Kashmir to us on a plate. Moreover, Kashmir's resistance, without substantial external help – which is unlikely – will only invite added repression. That only leaves the diplomatic option, and on this front Pakistan has done all it could but

has failed to make any meaningful success except of course getting supporting statements from some leaders and institutions, including the OIC, which are of little practical value. Moreover, in order to secure release of thousands of Pakistani civilians and soldiers taken prisoner by India in 1971, Pakistan had agreed to make Kashmir a bilateral issue to be solved through negotiations between India and Pakistan or at a forum to which both countries agreed, and nearly the whole world considers it a bilateral issue. And while our leaders make tall claims about drawing the world's attention to the Kashmir issue, the ugly reality was well demonstrated at the recent election for non-permanent seats at the UN Security Council at which India won by securing 184 seats out of the total 192, far above the required two-third majority of 128 seats. It is definitely time for our leaders to come out of their make-believe world in respect of the Kashmir issue, take account of ground realities and work on finding realistic solutions for the region,

including relations with India, in consultation with China.

S R H Hashmi  
KARACHI

### Cut costs

This refers to the letter 'Making the cut' by Arif Majeed. The writer has suggested game-changing ideas to cut costs and inject more resources into the ailing economy. The budget is a typical run-of-the-mill type of document, though not as irrelevant as inferred by the writer. The government can bring about a turn-around of the state of the economy. By using modern technology and new methods of doing work, the unnecessary expenditure on overstaffing can be drastically cut to strengthen the economy.

Dr Najeeb A Khan