

Karachi needs a master plan - II

cities & regions

Atiq ul Hassan

13/1/04 *The F Post*

In 1980s, another military ruler Zia ul Haque helped in flourishing Mohajir Quomi Movement (MQM) under the leadership of Altaf Hussain in Karachi to crush Pakistan Peoples Party and the Sindhi nationalist groups in Sindh. During more a decade era of Altaf Hussain in Karachi, everyday agitation, strikes and devastating ethnic violence again destroyed almost every institution of Karachi. The industry collapsed. The industries were moved to other parts of Pakistan by industrialists. Unemployment reached to its peak. Every day closure of educational institutes also obliterated the education in Karachi.

In 1990, bloody army operations in Karachi against MQM by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif governments transformed Karachi into a battle field. Many thousand young people lost their lives during that black era of Karachi. The people of Karachi who were known as, an educated community were changed into a community of gun-culture. Open firings, lootings, kidnapping and indiscriminate killing were the everyday activities in Karachi. In addition to the loss of many hundreds people an entire generation helplessly out of education, jobs and businesses.

The current ruler of Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf in fact belongs to this unfortunate city. So, one expects that President Musharraf would understand and would be aware of all sorts of ignorance, misconducts and problems this city has seen in the last 4 decades.

I never blame the people of Karachi. It does not matter which race or culture they belong to, what language they speak or how long they have been living in Karachi or which part of the world they came from to Karachi as history tells us that the people of Karachi used to be very generous, friendly and highly civilised. They had been living harmoniously even with non-Muslims like Parsis, Bahais, Chinese, Hindus and Buddhists for a long time.

No government ever showed interest in fulfilling the genuine and increasing needs of this city. Being a commercial and industrial land, Karachi was required a master plan for another 50 years since it became a part of Pakistan. The best transport system, communication, roads, water, electricity and environment control were the main areas where long-term projects were required to be launched.

The root cause of today's frequent violence, frustrations and anger among the people of Karachi is the lack of basic facilities in this mega city. The city is expanding without

and anger among the people of Karachi is the lack of basic facilities in this mega city. The city is expanding without any planning and direction. Mismanagement, administrative injustices, shortage of water & electricity, pollution, open rubbish depositories and lack of public transport are the basic reasons which have changed the attitude of the Karachi residents. And these are the problems which have been cashed by the political gurus for their own vested interest.

Sadly, new and new residential schemes are announced and built without any consideration of increasing existing demands in the basic infrastructure. There may hardly be any area in Karachi where the residents could get uninterrupted water, power and efficient sewerage system.

During my last visit to Karachi in last November in regard to the launch of my new book, I heard the President Musharraf announced Rs.29 billion for the construction of roads and flyovers.

No doubt, better roads and flyovers are the needs of today's increasing volume of the traffic. Nevertheless, can anyone imagine without enough power and efficient sewerage & cleaning system any new or existing roads can be maintained efficiently.

In fact, I saw the construction work was going on major roads and few flyovers were under construction. Ready-made palm trees were also planted on the roundabouts. One should generally appreciate the efforts of the administration and I also don't have any intention to criticise just for the sake of criticism. However, one must also realise that things never pay if you do not do it in a systematic and prioritised manner.

I also noticed that either underneath of every fly-over or at the corners or on the side of the roads there were open rubbish storage allocated by public. I asked one person with the intention to stop him from dumping the rubbish he was dumping underneath the Nipa Chourangi fly-over.

He very defiantly resisted and replied, 'where should we throw our garbage, you provide us the garbage bins we could be happy to put in there., the government prohibits us not to throw the rubbish on the roads but the council never bother to provide the people rubbish bins like in most of the other cities. They want to follow other countries in building flyovers and wide roads but they never bother to provide better system of cleaning. we know there is need of flyover now in Karachi but there are also other things which are more important and must be done before building roads and flyovers, and so on'. I did not have any answer to this person for his frustrated arguments.

In fact, I saw the construction work was going on, major roads and few flyovers were under construction. Ready-made palm trees were also planted on the roundabouts. One should generally appreciate the efforts of the administration and I also don't have any intention to criticise just for the sake of criticism. However, one must also realise that things never pay if you do not do it in a systematic and prioritised manner

which are far more important for the people.

Karachi has been ruled either by Jamat-e-Islami or MQM in the last few decades. Both are now the part of the administration of Karachi with the present government. At present, the Mayor (or Nazim) belongs to Jamat-e-Islami while the Governor of Sindh is from MQM with provincial government is a share power of MQM and PML. In the past, these parties always blamed the government on the problems of Karachi, now who should these political factions blame to?

Now the point is; is President Musharraf really sincere with Karachi's problems and the development packages he announced are the genuine intention to help Karachi and not political carrots to gain the support of those who are controlling this city. If the answer is 'yes' then President Musharraf must also know that Karachi needs an implementation of a master plan in different areas at the same time keeping in consideration not only the needs of the present time but at least for the next 20 to 30 years.

Water, Power, Sanitary, Sewerage, Roads, Public transport and Pollution control are the immediate areas to be worked on. And of course, corruption-free and threat-free administration and enforceable law & order are also essential parameters to implement any project successfully.

The Writer is a Sydney-based journalist and editor Tribune International Australia.
