

# The buzzz

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*Festival  
Nation  
for 2-05*

Lahore is alive! The entire place is abuzz! Lights, cars, beautifully decorated stores and people, lots of people, really fashionably attired. You cannot believe my happiness at driving from Lahore Airport through the Cantonment over Sherpao Bridge and turning into the Main Boulevard from Jail Road. It was a sensational feeling. Something that I felt we had lost.

Something that was a common experience in Karachi forty years ago and no longer is even an iota of. Lahore is now Pakistan's face to the World. It is totally depictive of us as a nation, a people. Full of life, awesome energy and the desire to live life to the fullest. The credit must go to its inhabitants, those that love that city so much. And to those that govern it. Because they have made it what it is today.

You know what? It all boils down to ownership. There is not a single Lahori who will not rise in defense of Lahore or shout its virtues from every platform available to them. Those that leave there cannot wait to get back. Yes the natural terrain is beautiful, it is green, it has very significant characteristics, it has history and culture but to this must be added the zeal and commitment with which every one living there ensures that "Zinda Dilana Lahore" remains a unique factor on Pakistan's horizon. Lahore has been fortunate in that a series of highly committed individuals have, over the recent years, governed the Punjab and have showered their attention on its capitol. They left no stone unturned.

General Jilani gave it the Parks, recreation areas and developed the aesthetics. Shahbaz Sharif came and revolutionised the roads, utilities, the lights and the expanse of the city. He worked almost round-the-clock with an untiring team and completed complex projects in the shortest possible time, not allowing impediments to stand in his way. The post October 12<sup>th</sup> government continued the effort to build upon that momentum successfully. And the present Chief Minister, Chaudhry Pervaiz Ellahi, is stated to be committed to accelerating the process and taking it to new heights. Things are definitely happening in the Punjab and more so in Lahore. One must stand back and acknowledge this with great pride.

The festive atmosphere is of the highest quality. This is not to say that Lahore, even at the inception of Pakistan, was ever lacking. But it is more pronounced now because, unlike then, Karachi is no longer a festive place or the "city of lights" as it was known then. Certainly, from talking to the residents of the city, they are totally unaware of what is happening in Karachi or the actual tension in every day life prevailing there, except for what the TV channels may carry. There is an abundance of places to eat covering every possible aspect from simple to up market, from basic Punjabi food to the most elegant western bistros. The best automobiles in Pakistan are seen there and also the best dressed among the elite. Lahore really has become a cosmopolitan now but its core never changes.

Unlike other modern cities it has not lost its inherent culture. The wonderful part is that it while culture is retained, it is giving birth to a whole new

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generation of human resources, architects, designers, movie producers, actors and actresses, entrepreneurs and even the best party planners that have added richly to the Lahore experience.

This last weekend Lahore played host to the Standard Chartered Bank Marathon thus adding to the festival fervor there. This highlighted the ownership factor that I talked of earlier. The question was not who did, but who did not turn out to participate in this event from the city's residents or even those with ties who travelled distances to be there. Among the elite who joined the 15000 participants were ministers, parliamentarians past and present, diplomats, the Chairman NAB, DG IB and others. The event was graced by 60 world renowned athletes and medal winners from all over the world who had travelled for the event giving the event international recognition and international coverage to Pakistan. Sixteen nationalities were represented. Not a single hotel room was available in the city. Lahore had turned out at its best on the occasion as can always be expected of it. And even more is to come this weekend as Basant will be celebrated with traditional fanfare and flavor.

The Marathon served to project the real Pakistan to the entire world; a Pakistan that is liberal, tolerant, energetic and fun loving. Plus it highlighted the ability to handle and run a world-class event at the highest possible standards successfully provided the will is there and the government support is unequivocal. The logistics required to organise and manage such an event are not easily harnessed without total commitment. In this particular case thorough research was conducted for the best possible resources after the concept to promote the marathon was approved by the Chief Minister eleven months ago. The objectives of holding this event were also clearly defined. To project the soft face of Pakistan, stage an international event that would put Lahore on the international sporting map, to showcase the beautiful city not just a stadium and to involve as much as possible the inhabitants of the city whether as participants or spectators were the key factors. Of course, it was also decided right at the inception that the idea was not a 'one-off' but to be made an annual event.

By taking a personal interest, giving clear cut directions that the Chairman of the CM's Task Force on Lahore, a young Karachi based entrepreneur if you will, will be calling all the shots the CM ensured that

the execution would be carried out to the "T" and in turn this inspired the implementation team to select institutions with experience in such events such as Standard Chartered Bank who are responsible for organising these in Hong Kong, Singapore, Mumbai and Nairobi. Add to their experience is the credibility and money they bring to the party. For purposes of thoroughly professional execution, the same team that runs the London Marathon was recruited to manage the event. The entire event was financed through a million dollars that was raised through private sponsors and the media partners and sponsors were carefully selected and given category exclusivity.

You had to see it to, finally after years of darkness, realise the impact that an event of this magnitude had could have on one's soul. It was beautiful to see the security detail present but in a subtle manner, no weapons in sight. To see the CM in an open car travelling the city streets welcoming the participants and most of all to see women dressed as they pleased and participating with full zest and fervour. There were foreign women in shorts and vests and Pakistani women too. But alongside them sharing their exuberance were women in Burqas running as fast they could in the race and for once not for their lives. Finally Tank tops made the Lahore streets! And do you know what? Not a single disruptive incident took place throughout the course which ran through highly populated areas of the city. Is this not something to rejoice? I take my hat off to all those responsible for making this event such an enormous success for Pakistan and for Lahore.

Karachi is in the throes of another chaotic event at this point in time. As Expo 2005 visits us, along with it and the visiting local and international dignitaries comes the severe hardships that burden the citizens of the city. Ill equipped to handle these events in terms of human and geo-physical resources the entire city falls into turmoil. With vast areas of land around the city, why the exhibition center has not been moved to a more conducive spot is a question that remains unanswered. Hopefully someone somewhere will make this happen sooner rather than later.

When one looks around at the quality of government and total lack of ownership that one suffers here in this province and the premier city of Pakistan, Karachi, one can only hope and pray as one yearns to see Karachi, once again, what it was when we grew up here. There was peace, there was happiness, there was entertainment. You could ask for it and it was all here. And suddenly it disappeared with one rash action. A city so alive that it was awake all night suddenly slumped into darkness. After July 1977 it was a fading reflection and after Ghaus Ali Shah's brilliant creation in 1983 it became a captive of the worst kind of oppression possible. So while the resurrection of Karachi may not take place in my lifetime, mark my words, it will sooner or later. Until then let us as Pakistanis all celebrate our jewel in the crown, Lahore and thank God for it.

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