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Houses & Building
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Homes under a cloud (Photo)



After the scorching heat of June, monsoon is awaited by all. Unfortunately, where the rain brings relief to the people, it can also cause devastation and loss of life.

Collapse of roofs and walls due to monsoon rains is becoming more common with each year. This leads to increasing number of deaths and serious injuries. Despite the awareness that monsoon rains are going to cause many problems, no practical measures

living

are ever taken for the safety and safeguard of dangerous houses or their residents in advance.

No repair work has been carried out on the buildings that were declared dangerous by the city government last year, despite the fact that the authorities, as well as the residents of these buildings, are aware that these dilapidated buildings are in no condition to withstand the monsoon rains.

According to an estimate, there are more than 1,200 buildings in Lahore, mostly in the walled city and its surrounding areas, which have been declared dangerous by the government. These houses are a serious threat to the lives of those inhabiting them and those living in the neighbouring houses.

However, the buildings declared dangerous by the District City Government in areas such as the walled city, Mughalpur, Baghbanpura, Mozang, Tehra, Islampura, Sanatnagar, Ramgarh and Old Anarkali etc. are still inhabited and no repair work has been carried out.

A few such houses were demolished in the walled city by the Town Planning Department but their number is insignificant. Around 90 per cent of such buildings and houses in the city are still inhabited.

The city government's Town Planning Department, now divided into six towns, has served notices on the occupants of these buildings, directing them to vacate their houses immediately, but to no avail. The city government doesn't have any specific plans to demolish these dangerous structures nor are the owners of such buildings planning to repair the damaged portions.

What is the criteria for declaring buildings dangerous? Muzamil Ishtiaq, a Town Planning official said: "Our department listed the dilapidated houses after conducting a survey of these localities. We evaluate the structural weaknesses of the buildings from its age. It's a very tough and risky job because the occupants seldom allow us in to analyse the suspected buildings."

"Under the provision of ordinance 2001, the department has a right to demolish buildings it has declared dangerous. Even



Majority of the dilapidated buildings are in the walled city posing a serious threat to the lives of those inhabiting them and those living in the neighbouring houses. Photos: Rahat Dar

then it is hard for us to demolish such buildings. Nobody is willing to vacate their houses and seem ready to risk a collapse than move to safer buildings," he added.

"However, sometimes we are forced to take emergency steps when our department finds out or the neighbours report to us that a particular building is near collapse. In such cases, we take the help of police to vacate the house or take other preventive measures to avoid a possible disaster, especially during monsoon."

On the other hand, the residents of these dilapidated buildings have their own stories to tell.

Ilyas Mahmood, a resident of one such building in Sanatnagar, said: "If the department is so concerned about our problems and wants to save our lives, why doesn't it help us financially to repair our houses. I am a gardener and it is hard for me to even afford food for my family. How do they expect me to have money for repairs? Although as the monsoon is expected soon, I worry about my children's safety each time I look at the condition of my house. But there is nothing I can do except leave it on God."

Mohammad Kashif urf Kaka, another resident living inside Akbari Gate, said: "I am the only bread earner in my family and I

have six children. It is hard for me to even pay my utility bills. Repair work is out of question. No doubt we are aware of the dangerous condition of our house, but we are helpless because we don't have any other place to go to and cannot afford to rent a house."

There is hope that the situation may change soon. The government is considering a proposal to pay around 30 to 40 per cent of the repair costs for the really damaged houses. Let us see if this promise is carried out. It remains to be seen if the promise will materialise and if did, how many of the residents will be able to afford the remaining costs.

