

# The fate of dilapidation

**Hundreds of residential and commercial buildings are declared dilapidated and dangerous every year by the authorities but no remedial steps have ever been taken. The accidents of collapsing different parts of these buildings claim precious lives of poor who are but forced to dwell there due to certain known and unknown reasons, Yasir Yasin visits Teej Building and Bengali Building to know the facts.**

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**W**hile we sleep safely at night secure in our world, there is another world taking place, a more dangerous world where we do not know what is going to happen the very next minute. A world going on right under our noses. It is taking place in empty warehouses and forgotten buildings. And this world has been known to destroy many lives.

A rooftop collapses and a family is trampled to death. A mother loses a son, a sister loses a brother, and a daughter loses a father — both hope and despair is written large on the faces of those who survive. On one hand, they are furious — some crying aloud, asking why they did not die alongside husbands or wives or children, many are simply mute and dazed.

Towns and colonies all over Lahore have a wide range of variations in the living standards and quality of life. These variations can be put down to many factors and issues about the residents and location. Every town is individual and unique, however, a pattern in the contrast of living conditions can be seen. This variation in the living conditions can be put down to the residents in the area.

Looking at the economical, social, and environmental criteria, it is clear to see why people are living in the conditions that they do. Overall, the major influence to the living standards of a person is the amount of money that they earn. This then affects the area in which they can afford to live in, and so there living standards. However, I think that is the people that live in the area that affect the living standards there. You can regenerate an area as much as you want, but the people who live there do so how they want to.

Many lives are lost every year because of building collapses. McLeod Road, Old Anarkali, Mazong, Islampura, the Walled City and Garhi Shahu are the areas where such houses and buildings are commonly found. Cracks are prominent on the walls and roofs of such buildings but neither the residents nor the corporation is ready to take action about it. People have hopes, but nobody knows how they will be able to rebuild their homes or provide their basic needs while they have been thrown onto the streets or have taken refuge with relatives. Government machinery, as usual, falls short of providing speedy relief.

Teej and Bengali buildings on Lytton Road are examples of the reminiscence and trance on the part of the authorities. Every now and then some balcony or shade or staircase breaks down but the residents are not willing to move out. We believe that dilapidated and ruinous buildings in Lahore can be saved and loss of human life can be prevented if a persistent effort is made to bring about awareness among the owners and occupants by educating them sufficiently. But that is not the truth — it's not that the people living in these buildings want to live here or they are not aware of the circumstances they might have to face but it is just that they do not have the resources.

There are more than 20 families living in these two buildings. With an average rate of income around Rs 2000-3000/-, with each family consisting of more than 5 members, in some cases there are more than 12 family members.

Several complaints have been made to the

renovation or vacation of the building is Lahore Development Authority's (LDA) responsibility and they do not take it seriously. They have many policies but none is for the poor.

Lahore Development Authority was created in 1975 under the Lahore Development Authority Act 1975 to establish a comprehensive system of Metropolitan Planning and Development in order to improve the quality of life in the Metropolitan Area of Lahore, establish an integrated Metropolitan and Regional Development approach and a continuing process of Planning and Development, to ensure optimum utilization of resources, economical and effective utilization of land and to evolve policies and programmes relating to the improvement of the Environment of Housing Industrial Development.

I ask the authorities at LDA and MCL as if they are only for the developing the rich? Under the Archeology Act 1975, more than 70 years old buildings are declared dangerous. But it is very sad to know that these policies are only formalities, no strict actions are taken.

Many such buildings require immediate bulldozing as the delay can claim more lives. According to the citizens, the authorities are least sincere and halfhearted attempts are made in this respect. Most of the effected are not sound financially so privately they cannot get their homes repaired. Leaving a place also costs much so they are bound to dwell in the same shabby, clumsy and venturous houses till some miracle takes place.

All buildings or structures which are structurally unsafe or not provided with adequate egress, or are otherwise dangerous to human life, or which in relation to existing use constitute a hazard to safety or health, or public welfare, by reason of inadequate maintenance, dilapidation, obsolescence, fire hazard, disaster damage, or abandonment should be dealt respectively.

"Our dreams are shattered. We do not know when we will have a house to call our own," said a sobbing Surayia (who has been living here for the last 40 years)

"You tell me where should we go along with our families, you people come here every year and scratch our wounds," said M Aliyas a resident since 50 years.

"It is very easy for you to say but practically it's impossible, what do you think don't we have dreams, nothing is more important for a person than his life but we have no other way out," said Abdul. "Two years back the front portion of the building collapsed and my 3 year old grandson was crushed to death, but I am still living here, where as I do not want to but have no other option except to sit and wait for my turn."

The Government introduces new law schemes every year but the poor cannot think of getting them and by chance if they then they cannot pay the heavy markup.

**My dreams are often set in a slowly decaying cellar. I always wake up feeling bad about life when this happens. What does this dream mean? — D J. Gloucester**

The rainy season has arrived and still so



members.

Several complaints have been made to the Cooperation staff of this area but the absence of compensation funds is an obstacle in their way.

Almost 1,500 houses in Lahore have been declared dilapidated by the MCL and orders have been passed to vacate or least repair them. But the Metropolitan Cooperation does nothing more than to mark the dangerous buildings with red ink and then list them as another dilapidated place. The actual

The rainy season has arrived and still so dangerous buildings are waiting for authorities to take pity on them. All authorities are held answerable for the conditions of these buildings but the officials and the engineers there are never available for clarification. Neither authorities nor the people are ready to accept their responsibilities. It is the question to you as to who is responsible!

It is about time we should check the worsening conditions. Life cannot be put at risk.

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