**[Decorating Karachi](https://www.dawn.com/news/1790836/decorating-karachi)**

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IN a recent meeting, Sindh’s caretaker chief minister expressed his resolve to ‘beautify’ Karachi. Addressing bureaucrats, heads of civic agencies and architects, he spoke about the poor state of the entrance to the city from the airport. It is important to note that the so-called beautification has come about on many occasions with almost negligible results. Despite spending hundreds of millions of rupees, no enhancement in the aesthetics of the urban built environment could be achieved. These attempts should be reviewed in an objective and dispassionate manner before moving ahead with interventions also likely to meet with failure.

During Farooq Sattar’s tenure as mayor, the Karachi Beautification Committee, comprising municipal managers, civil society members and architects, was created. One of its tasks was to conduct design competitions for traffic roundabouts — thematic and general monuments were to be crafted for an artistic environment. As a result, dozens of structures were built, but with the exception of a few such as Allah Wali Chowrangi at the Tariq Road and Shahrah-i-Quaideen intersection, most were eyesores wrapped in concrete and steel. A conspicuous flaw was the absence of trees and foliage. Experts say Karachi was nicer without them. In contrast, the simple yet pleasing New M.A. Jinnah Road roundabout is worth emulating; lined with appropriately spaced palm trees it’s a precious piece of urban landscaping.

Another attempt was made during Niamatullah Khan’s term. Many municipal agencies were merged to form the now defunct City District Government Karachi. Parks and playgrounds in various localities were among CDGK’s feats: some 300 parks were renovated, 24 model parks were developed in different neighbourhoods, including Gulshan-i-Iqbal, North Nazimabad, F.B. Area, Metroville-I and Nazimabad, and older large-scale parks, such as the Safari Park and Zoological Gardens, were restored considerably.

Positive land-use conversion of the old Sabzi Mandi into a park with executive assistance from military authorities was a step in the right direction. I.I. Chundrigar Road was also revamped by a committee led by the State Bank governor, but the move made little impact due to limited support from powerful stakeholders for this crucial artery.

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More recently, in July 2023, a face-lift of Sharea Faisal was announced; with a hefty budget of Rs195.71m, the project aims to improve facilities for pedestrians, landscaping and installation of artistic works along the Metropole Hotel-Jinnah terminal corridor. A wall is being constructed at Moria Khan Goth and another Gaza-like façade is under consideration. Perhaps, the wall’s purpose is to ‘hide’ the mundane and provide a pleasing impression to those entering Karachi from the airport.

Meanwhile, locals are struggling to convey to city authorities that the wall will ruin business and retail activities as it will sever the visual connection between shops and customers. One hopes that good sense prevails and a tree-clad metallic fence is installed at this junction. Also, numerous overhead pedestrian bridges are in a shambles and the absence of railings and balustrades makes them perilous for users. Concerned agencies must repair them before an accident occurs.

Another variety of bizarre structures built in the name of beautification are the mighty gate complexes found at the entrances of gated communities, defence establishments, universities and educational institutions. Cheap copies of existing monuments in distorted proportions abound; for instance, Bab-i-Khyber is possible in Karachi instead of KP. A dubious real estate development along the M-9 Motorway is mar­ked by a giant gated complex created to display the financial strength and political clout of the developer.

If our chief minister cares for Karachi, he should expedite the process of preparing the Greater Karachi Region Plan 2047. The process began during the previous government but is facing snags. It must be an appropriate plan that can tackle the aesthetic challenges and offer a range of solutions, incorporate the feedback of beneficiaries and affectees of all development works, and be a binding statute.

An empowered and independent urban planning agency should be established to implement it as the present situation of Karachi’s management is proof of essential prerequisites being a long way away. These challenges are not insurmountable with the induction of competent planners, architects, engineers, demographers, sociologists, cartographers, IT specialists, field surveyors and others in the proposed agency. The capacity to take on these assignments can be shored up.

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