**Uniform planning and expanding Karachi**

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Any metropolis features neat sidewalks, clean pavements, planned housing, and efficient installation of utility infrastructure. Once known for all of these, Karachi is no longer a comfortable city to be in. Our focus on preventive measures has been absent, putting us into constant firefighting mode with no long-term strategies in place.

Over the last few decades, we have lost our green spaces to illegal construction and encroachments, depriving citizens of comfortable public recreation spaces. At the same time, our city is growing faster than the system of checks and balances. As a result, streetlight poles and utility power infrastructure are also being covered in cobwebs of wires belonging to private internet and tv cable operators. Our streets have become littered with potholes after rains, with dirty water everywhere making it difficult to walk. In this off-putting and unsafe environment, we find children roaming dangerously close to electricity infrastructure and open gutters on roads, and youngsters working at makeshift shops underneath tangled cables. The chaotic mayhem of wiring combined with kundas (illegal connections) is an eyesore. Karachi’s striking colonial architecture is now largely hidden or mottled by these cables. We are unable to preserve the beautiful old architecture and heritage of our city because of billboards and cables which block the façade, and shops that demolish the old interior to make room for their wares. These encroachments are often illegally placed and get in the way of utility services. Sewerage lines will choke when multi-story constructions are made in plots designated for smaller purposes. Extending vertically may also bring these constructions dangerously close to power lines posing an ongoing threat to the life and livelihood of the same vendors and shop owners. Unfortunately, it appears that the public and concerned authorities are nonchalant toward such dire situations which are extremely worrisome.

[PMD predicts dry weather in most parts of country](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Sep-2022/pmd-predicts-dry-weather-in-most-parts-of-country)

In this context, developers and builders need to follow the law during their construction, and for the building authorities to also keep a strict check on the development of the city to ensure that it is safe and sustainable for its citizens.

In extreme cases encroachment also blocks access to roads, increasing the challenge for utilities to provide their services safely and conduct maintenance or restore faults. Power companies across the country including Karachi regularly remove illegal wiring and create awareness through campaigns about the dangers of kundas. All encroachments on electric poles damage the infrastructure, jeopardise the integrity of the electricity system, affect the service provision, and most importantly bypass electrical safety mechanisms, thus creating public safety hazards. In recent times, a leading cause of many unfortunate incidents has been identified as internet and TV cables as they violate safety protocols and procedures.

Urban encroachment also correlates with the perception of crime in an area and impacts the value of the property as well. Nobody would want to pay a premium price for a house or shop in an area where garbage collects at every corner, the roads are narrow because of illegal construction, gutters overflow because the construction overwhelms their drainage capacity, and the constant presence of unsafe wiring poses a hazard. Moreover, garbage dumping is a breeding ground for more diseases in a city that is already riddled with its fair share of challenges. As citizens, we don’t realise that prioritising our environment above personal gains will result in higher returns for everyone. We continue to turn a blind eye to the integrity of our own lives in pursuit of economic prosperity.

[Pakistan reports 43 coronavirus cases, three deaths in 24 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Sep-2022/pakistan-reports-43-coronavirus-cases-three-deaths-in-24-hours)

While we expect our authorities and city stakeholders to take an active interest and ensure that our cities thrive, it is imperative that we also look at our behaviour, which may indirectly be contributing to the problem. Great cities are built on the back of strong civic sense and proper governance. While Karachi is expanding at a rapid rate, there may still be an opportunity to intervene and slow the decline, if not reverse it. With small steps today, perhaps our future generations can make strides in Karachi which has regained its glory as the city of lights and prosperity.